

Burners' Bummer

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Ben Freedland did two things that his fellow college students have been doing routinely for the past several years: First, he bought a new music CD by campus fave the Dave Matthews Band, then he tried to upload it onto his Apple iPod.

But something was wrong. When Freedland, 20, first inserted the "Stand Up" disc into his laptop in preparation for transferring it to his iPod, "it took over my computer," he said.

The screen went blank, then a copyright agreement popped up. The music wasn't going anywhere. Freedland could play the CD on his laptop, but he couldn't transfer it, and he couldn't copy it to share the mellow grooves with friends or family.

Freedland deemed the CD "worthless."

The Duke University student had had his first run-in with a technology that record companies are using to limit the number of times users can burn, or make extra copies of, CDs. The new content-protected disc, which is not yet compatible with the iPod, is the recording industry's latest strategy to curb the illegal spread of music. This time, the crackdown is on the CD purchased at your local music shop -- the last bastion consumers held in freely sharing legally bought music.

It's one thing for record companies to file suit against people who share music files illegally on the Internet, or to pursue criminal charges against those who make pirated copies of CDs and sell them on street corners. But this is different. Generations have grown up with the notion that if you buy an album at the store, the songs are yours to show off to your friends.

Such behavior is being blamed by the industry for a dramatic drop in sales of CDs and other forms of recorded music. Over the past five years, shipments of music to retailers have dropped by 21 percent, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

"There is no question that piracy -- in its various, ugly forms -- is the primary reason for that decline," said Mitch Bainwol, chairman and chief executive officer of the association, in a written statement. "In the face of such devastating and ongoing harm, it is appropriate that record companies find ways to facilitate the continued investment in new art."

So in a move that risks alienating a dwindling customer base, the major record labels are tightening up restrictions on CDs.

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