

Using the Internet for...

Music



Using the Internet for **Music**

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Lifesteps offers you a range of online and printed guides. Written by staff from Irish public libraries, each guide contains easy to follow, step by step explanations of how to use the Internet to achieve a specific goal or 'life step'.

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For updates, news on the project and for a full listing of all the guides, log on to www.lifesteps.ie

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Introduction

This guide will advise you on the things that you need to access music on the web, including your **hardware** and **software** requirements and your Internet connection. It will provide you with a step by step guide to downloading your favourite songs and pieces of music.

Digital Music

Music is recorded in a digital form on compact disks (CDs) and DVDs. This means that the music tracks, or songs, are created and stored as computer-readable files, essentially similar to word processing files, **web pages** and other forms of computer information. What this means is that, in common with other files, music can be transmitted over the **Internet** and downloaded from Web servers to your PC. In addition, these files can be written (or 'burnt') to CDs, and played in a CD player, hi-fi or portable stereo.

File Formats: MP3 etc.

Music files exist in a range of **file** formats. These include MP3, WMA, AAC, RA and many more. The most commonly used are MP3 (by far the most common) and WMA (Windows Media Audio). MP3s can be played by an increasing number of hi-fi, car radio, walkman and other devices. Apple and Microsoft have their own proprietary audio formats, as have smaller companies such as Real Audio.

A large number of sites on the **Web** provide access to music files which you can download, listen to and write to CD. Some of these sites do not respect the copyright of the artists and record companies responsible for the music; however, there are also many sites where you can legally download music (sometimes after payment).

Music Sites on the Net

In common with other types of **website**, very little comes for free on music sites and most good sites will be either selling something or advertising in the margins. The following sites are a sample of the multitude of sites available. For more website addresses please visit our website at www.lifesteps.ie

Copyright and Legalities

There are thousands of music sites on the Web and unfortunately not all of them are legal. However, Digital Rights Management (DRM) software has been developed to prevent audio piracy. Legal purchase supplies a certificate attached to the audiofile. This certificate basically acts as a licence to play.

If you use windows software, to access audiofiles that are DRM protected you will need **Windows Media Player (WMP) Version 9** to play Windows Media Audio (WMA) files.

Apple Mac has created **iTunes** for Apple's **iPod**, which is another type of media player, but they also have developed **iTunes for Windows**. iTunes has a built-in licence to play, and when you subscribe to iTunes all the legalities of downloading etc are already taken care of. iTunes are MP3s. MP3 is just another format for digital music files. MP3s are universally compatible, which means they can be played on any media player that supports them. AAC is a continuation of MP3s, a newer version.

Sites that sell music downloads include Napster, MyCokeMusic, Wanadoo, iTunes, MSN MusicClub, Tiscali, Wippit and Eircom.net's Music Club. Almost all of these sites are limited to Windows Media Audio (WMA) files. Wippit is Mac, Linux and Windows compatible. iTunes is an Apple product, and uses MP3 files. All of the sites listed above operate in much the same way, supplying much the same product. Five of the sites buy their music from the same company, OD2.com

Payment Methods

Some sites, including Mycokemusic and MSN allow you to pay by text messaging, but the most common form of payment is by credit card or subscription. Most sites show a security symbol, usually a padlock, on the bottom of the page. If in doubt, click on properties on the purchase page (where you are being asked for your credit card details) and the encryption details are displayed.

Need to Know

When you search the web, be specific about what it is that you are looking for. Searching is actually easier than browsing, because you can limit your search from the start. If you do this it will limit your results to relevant sites.

A list of sites is provided, but sites change and new sites develop so you will find good sites as you develop your own searches.

This guide assumes that you have a basic knowledge of how to access the Internet, and if not, have a look at the Internet Basics guide.

For more information about making payments over the Internet, read the Shopping Online guide.

Need to Have

Hardware

To listen to music and voice recordings on the Internet, and to download sound from the web without interruption, you require an **Internet connection**. Because of the large file sizes associated with online music, a broadband or high-speed Internet connection is ideal. However, online music can be enjoyed using a standard telephone line, with patience. Most songs range between 2 and 4 MegaBytes, so it will take 10 to 15 minutes unless you have a high-speed Internet connection.

Broadband is available from all of the major telecommunications companies. It pays to shop around and see which company has the best deal and often there will be a special offer on connecting with broadband.

You need a **soundcard**. This usually comes with your PC when you purchase it, and you need some **speakers** or **headphones** attached to your PC.

You should also consider having a **compact disc rewriter** (burner) if you are seriously thinking about building a personal music collection. When you are buying a PC you should include it as a hardware requirement. If you have a PC already you can buy one and install it. Ensure that the CD burner is capable of recognising WMA files and MP3 files and AAC files.

Software

You will, along the way, download some **plug ins** (small computer programmes that adapt your PC for downloading from individual sites and listening to music). The most common ones are **Windows Media Player** and **Real player**. To listen to some radio stations you will need the media player that the site uses. When you click on an audio site it will prompt you to download a media player if the media player you are using is not the one they use. You have to decide whether you want to download that plug in.

Please bear in mind that the download and installation of software from the Internet must only be carried out if you are certain that the supplier is reputable. It is quite common for downloaded software to include viruses and other security breaches. Particular care is needed when dealing with illegal or questionable music sites.

Step-by-Step Guide: How to Download a Track

To provide you with a step-by-step guide to selecting and downloading music, we chose Eircom.net's Music Club. There may be slight variations in the sites but they all operate in roughly the same way and offer the same type of service and product.

Eircom.net's Music Club requires Windows '98, ME, 2000 or XP. It will not work on Windows NT or Windows '95 or Apple Macs.

You need Windows Media Player Version 9 for the DRM software. This can be downloaded from the Internet without any difficulty.

With Eircom you can pay as you go by using your credit card, you can buy credits in advance, and the other option is a monthly subscription. The more credits you purchase at one time, the cheaper the cost.

Go to the address bar on your Internet home page and type in <http://www.eircom.net>



Click on music in the list of options on the left hand side of the page. Click on Buy Credits and the price options come up with the payment method. Take your time to check the prices. At the moment the only method of payment is by credit card but this may change.

Keep in mind as you purchase your credits, that you have three products to choose from, at very different costs.

Purchase Options

You can **stream** a song, which means that the song will play once (like a juke box). This costs one credit. If you want to play it again, you pay again.

A **temporary download** costs 10 credits. This means that the song will be downloaded to your PC but **it cannot be copied** or burnt onto another CD and will be **valid only for the duration of your subscription or for one year from the date of rental if you pay as you go**.

Permanent downloads cost approximately 139 credits depending on the length of the song. These **can be transferred to CD or other portable players** including MP3 players.

Remember your three downloading options: streaming, temporary downloads to your PC, and permanent downloads that can be burnt onto a portable device.

You have selected your music choice and download choice. Click on your download option. This example uses permanent download.

A screen saying “please wait while your media is delivered...” is followed by a dialogue box warning that “some files can harm your computer. If the file information below looks suspicious do not open or save this file”. When you look at the file details they should be the title of the album followed by the song title with some source details. Do not open. Click on save. Your desktop will open and ask you to “Save As...”.

The dialogue box will tell you how long the download will take, what it is saving and where it is saving from. When the download is complete you close the box. You will find the WMA file on your desktop. You can put all of your downloaded songs into one folder or just save them on your desktop.

Some sites will give a choice of media downloads: MP3, WMA or AAC. Select the one that is supported by your media player.

To Save Tracks to a Portable device

To burn the songs/tracks onto CD, click on your CD Creator (which you should have already installed). Older versions may not recognise WMA (Windows Media Audio) files. Once you have installed your CD burner you can simply click on “drag to disk” which will open your CD burner. Then drag the track or tracks you want to copy to the disk displayed on your desktop. You will know the track is being burnt because the disk starts to turn. It should not take long, well under a minute per song.

The procedure sounds quite easy but it is not. It is worthwhile taking the time to **read the onscreen tutorial on how to use your CD rewriter software.**

Remember to use a CD-R disk and not a rewriteable CD. The rewriteable CD will not play on all home stereo CD players.

You can download MP3s and you can play them on your PC using the RealPlayer plug-in, the Windows Media Player, or Apple iTunes, as well as a range of other free software.

To play MP3s otherwise you will need an MP3 player. There are lots of them on the market and www.mp3.com gives a good description of the different types available.

Glossary

- File:** A collection of computer information stored on a hard disk (or CD or floppy) and accessed when the user needs it. For example, a letter typed with a word processor and saved on the hard disk is in the form of a file. So is a song, in MP3 format, or a web page.
- Hardware:** Those parts of a computer you can see and touch, such as the screen, the hard disk, the mouse, etc.
- Internet:** A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.
- Plug ins:** Small computer programs that adapt your PC for downloading from individual sites and, in this instance, listening to music.
- Software:** Those parts of a computer that tell it what to do when you touch the hardware, and also what to show on screen. Software is made up of computer programs.
- Web page:** A web page is a computer file which typically includes text, pictures, links and perhaps forms.
- Website:** A web site is a collection of web pages which displays information on a particular topic. Common types of web sites include company web sites (information about the company), online shops (where you buy goods and services and pay by credit card) and personal web sites (where individuals share their interests). A web site may consist of just one page of information, but will usually contain several pages, all linked together. All the pages in a web site usually share the same 'domain' name. For example, all the pages in the large online shop 'Amazon' have an address (URL) that starts with www.amazon.com.
- Web:** Also called the WWW or the World Wide Web. A service that sends information over the internet from web server programs to web browser programs. The browser then displays this information to the user on his computer screen.

Links

www.irish-music.net



Gives information on traditional instruments and makers, music festivals and schools and links to other Irish music sites including Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

www.oddmusic.com

This is a site about odd music and odd instruments and it is interesting in itself.

www.classical.net

This site is informative and educational. It gives you a guide to building your classical collection, reviews CDs and books and it has good links to other classical sites. There are some music clips on this site but not a lot.

www.alltabs.com

This is a free source of music tablatures, sheet music and MIDI soundfiles.

www.musicroom.com

This site looks well laid out and search options include sheet music, tuition books, music software and music accessories. You can search by product, title, song, composer, artist and so on. Prices are quoted in Euro.

www.mp3.com

This site allows you to search for different artists and genres as well as giving information on the different technical terms you come across in searching for music downloads. It is informative and it explains a lot of the technical terms that you come across.

www.od2.com

This is the music provider for Eircom's Music Club, Mycokemusic.com, Wanadoo, Tiscali and others. Although it has over 400,000 tracks to choose from it does not have some big names, like for example the Eagles, Paul Brady, the Beatles.

www.eircom.net/music

The Eircom.net Music Club lets you sign up, buy credits (minimum purchase €3, which gets you 300 streamed songs, or one to three permanent downloads that can be burnt to CD) and listen to, download and save music to CD.

Sites change all the time. Some get better and better with age and others vanish. You will no doubt find other sites in the course of your surfing and searching.

Final Notes

Selling music online will no doubt change the face of the music industry. You can customise your own CDs and MP3s. We will shortly be able to walk into a music store and have a compilation made to measure. With wireless technology people can download songs onto their mobile phones.

However, not all recorded music is available online. Lyrics may belong to one artist or company and the music rights to another and digital rights management agreement may be hard to reach. You will not find all your favourites on the net but there is enough music there to keep you occupied and the cost is fairly competitive.