

## Document 1 - Individually Tailored Streaming Means We Are Now All Living in Our Own Bubble of Sound

You may not be interested in audio streaming, but audio streaming is interested in you. Right now we are in the middle of a radical reordering of how we listen to music and to words. So, even if you still rely on stacks of CDs for your musical fix, and you haven't figured out where the podcasts live on your phone, music and podcast apps are inexorably eating into the services you grew up with and will ultimately replace all but a tiny remnant of them.

This transformation is usually seen through the lens of business or technology coverage, or from the perspective of those who are losing out, most notably the musicians who find the publishing and performance royalties which previously sustained them have eroded away to almost nothing. Such developments are very significant, of course, but there's been less attention paid to how actual listening, whether as an individual and or as a collective experience, is also changing. One immediately observable effect is atomisation, with listeners gravitating towards the niche and away from the mainstream. After all, why endure an hour of radio programming when you don't care about half the stuff they're covering? In disruptive technology jargon, the process is known as "unbundling"; listeners no longer have to play by the old rules, where they had to buy into a whole package to get the bits they actually wanted.

Perhaps so, the old bundles are dying. But what's replacing them, and how is it changing our behaviour? All around us, traditional media are being replaced by individually tailored niches. It's surely no coincidence that, in audio, this atomisation is accompanied by a surge in the popularity of headphones. The individual listening experience becomes more personal and intimate. At the moment, at least, people seem to prefer podcasts and music that make them feel as if they're alone in the room with the performers. But as we all turn back to our individual listening devices, is it worth considering whether it's really such a good idea in our day-to-day lives to be so inwardly focused, so cut off from others and the world at large?

Hugh Linehan, *Irish Times*, 26 October 2019


## Document 2 - How Spotify Has Changed the Way We Listen to Music

From vinyls to cassettes to mp3 players, the way we access music is constantly changing. Today, instant music streaming services like Spotify now dominate how we discover new music. So how has Spotify changed our listening habits? How did it become such a powerful tastemaker? Thanks to the machine learning technology behind it, Spotify is able to analyse user data, including listening behaviours that may change during different times of the day. This then feeds into creating new Spotify playlist ideas for specific times where users can discover more music. Like an 'Acoustic Calm' or 'Nature Sounds' playlist for before you go to bed. By analysing a song's loudness, tempo, and duration, amongst other things, Spotify can understand complex features users like, and improve its recommendations.

As non-mainstream music becomes more widely available on Spotify, and the number of playlists dedicated to independent artists increase, listeners are becoming more flexible with their listening habits. Eventually this curiosity for new music presents live performance opportunities to artists and we see independent artists going on world tours or festivals, reuniting with fans from around the world. Spotify alone generated \$40m+ in ticket sales in 2017 and it also acts a platform for artists to promote their merchandise on the 'Merch Bar' and lets fans know if they have a concert in their city.

With the rise of digital streaming services, the music market has once again gained a foothold after years of financial instability due to piracy, but it still has a long way to go to catch up with the physical music era. With Spotify, for only £9.99, you get access to ad-free listening of millions of songs. Meanwhile Spotify pays artists \$0.00038 per play. So as a band you'd be making decent enough money if you managed to get around a billion plays in total in a year. Such an unbalanced royalties system is often why Spotify is criticised.

Although music streaming services allow artists to stay more independent, they have a lot more competition and pressure to stay trendy, and on top of their game. However, while some more successful artists argue that Spotify is ruining the music industry by undervaluing creators, independent artists often

speak of it as a game-changer that has allowed them to reach an audience. As Brooklyn-based, singer Vérité says, 'Spotify won't build your career, nor is that its responsibility. It provides a platform for discovery. It will link your

listeners to your merchandise and concerts'. But the majority of the listeners choose to listen to mainstream music instead of buying records. This cycle forces the artist to tour for longer and release EP after EP.

The pressure to be discovered on Spotify playlists is also changing the way artists write music. *The Guardian's* Sam Wolfson argues, 'There are lots of small ways Spotify has changed the way music is made. The intros of songs have become shorter to stop listeners skipping a track with a slow buildup. Albums have got longer simply because listening to a 20-track album generates twice as much revenue as listening to a 10-track one.' Artists have also found it lucrative to adapt their songs to different playlists to get more streams.

Although there is hope that Spotify will continue to encourage diverse music listening habits and allow musicians to find new fans, the platform should be open to more discussion with musicians on how it can empower them and their creativity. Spotify has changed listening habits forever. There has to be a way for that to benefit both fans and artists.

Yuna Yonak, *www.audioxide.com*, 11 February 2019

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### **Document 3 - Why Streaming Is a Good Thing for the Music Industry**

Streaming is how most of us get our music now. Three-quarters of the recorded music industry's revenue in 2018 came from music streaming. Although there continues to be a lot of talk about it killing the music industry and the measly royalties artists get paid from it, industry professionals should give streaming services more credit. Streaming has helped people listen to more music than ever before, it is now easier for smaller and independent artists to get their music heard, and it has largely eliminated music piracy. All of these reasons point to why streaming is beneficial for the music industry, even if it has not been able to bring us back to the music industry's heyday of the late 1990s yet, with respect to revenue.

People are listening to more artists than ever before because of streaming services and their prevalence. There are over 30,000,000 songs ready to play on Spotify alone. In the same vein, music streaming also makes it easier for us to discover lesser known artists because anyone can put music onto streaming platforms. Distributing music online is much less complicated and requires fewer resources than distributing physical products. This means that independent artists are able to get their music on a platform, even without a label. This helps to level the playing field of the music industry since it takes power away from the major labels. Artists used to need labels because labels could distribute huge quantities of physical products, but in the age of the Internet, this is changing. It is easy to put an artist's music out on Spotify, meaning that smaller creators and independent artists are able to get their music on there easily.

Possibly the most interesting thing about streaming is how it has largely eliminated music piracy which ran rampant in the early 2000s and cost the industry so much money since people began refusing to buy records. Fortunately, streaming has helped build the industry back up again, and eliminates the need for people to pirate music which undoubtedly benefits the music industry as a whole.

Of course, as with any new technology, there are downsides. Streaming may make a lot of revenue for the industry, but only a small fraction of that money actually gets to the artist. Streaming royalties are low for artists compared to what they used to be, and that is why legacy artists and superstars speak out about it, believing that streaming and the small royalties are not fair to artists. These artists may have a point. With the current way that the revenue is split, the royalty checks of the artists do not look like what they did in the 1990s. There is also the issue that streaming cannot support as robust a recording industry as back in the heyday, because people are simply not going to spend as much on music as they used to in the 1990s, especially not now that you can get a per-month subscription to all the music in the world for only \$10 a month.

All in all, with all the bad press about streaming, it is important to remember that the music industry and its players should give streaming more credit than it gets for the benefits it brings to them

Ailey Butler, *Backstage Pass*, University of the Pacific, 2019