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## 15 Years After Napster: How the Music Service Changed the Industry

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/15-years-after-napster-how-the-music-service-changed-the-industry>

**ALEX SUSKIND**

**06.06.14**

Fifteen years ago, two teenagers revolutionized the way we share and listen to music. At the time, Shawn Fanning and Sean Parker were just amateur developers with a simple idea: an online platform where users could easily swap songs, no strings attached. They called it Napster.

The service, which launched on June 1, 1999, soon spread like a virus, infecting every music nut with a computer and a dial-up connection. By March of 2000, Napster had 20 million users. Several months later, it was more than three times that. By then, the company and its wunderkind creators had been targeted by the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) and its suite of attorneys, along with several global superstars like Metallica and Dr. Dre. To the music labels, Fanning and Parker were completely upending a system that had been in place for decades, toying with a carefully crafted mechanism that allowed the artist, the manager, and any middlemen a certain percentage of each record sold. To the musicians, the

Napster co-founders were outright thieves, providing an avenue to steal music without paying a dime for it. Depending on what side of the aisle you fell on, if you worked in the industry or if you were just a regular old music fan, Parker and Fanning were either the villains or the heroes.

I was 12 years old when Napster launched, and, at the time, I thought it was the greatest invention in the history of the universe. *You mean I can download a prank phone call from a group called the Jerky Boys and that one song by Jamiroquai I don't know the name of and not have to pay money for it? Sure!* For someone unfamiliar with copyright laws and the convoluted maze of the music industry, it was like finding buried treasure over and over again. **No longer would my friends and I have to spend most of our allowance just to hear one song on one album, no longer would we have to beg our parents to drive us to Tower Records,** no longer would we have to futz with those impossibly difficult stickers attached to the outside of CDs that made you want to throw the entire thing against a wall.

Of course, the dream didn't last. Due to the RIAA's lawsuit, Napster ended up shutting down in July 2001, its creators eventually forced to pay millions of dollars to artists and copyright holders. Since then, Napster has gone through several iterations. The service still exists today, however, it's a hollowed shell of its former self—part of the music subscription service known as Rhapsody.

**Hundreds of download programs have come and gone since 1999 (Limewire, Kazaa, BitTorrent, to name a few). Napster deserves credit not just for being the first, but for revolutionizing a new frontier in music consumption. Even today, its legacy and its effect on the industry are still very much in play.**