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# Old vs. New Approaches

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## **Old vs. New Approaches**

By Christina Estes-Wynne

Technology is constantly changing part of our society and within the music industry, this is no different. Tapes replaced vinyl, CDs replaced tapes, MP3 replaced CDs and onwards until the streaming technology of this age. As new technologies pop up, every one draws claims that it's the end of the industry and we won't ever recover. However, the industry has always adapted and that is what we will continue to do.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, when MP3 became the newest and most efficient way of sharing music, the industry had to adjust and find new revenue streams since people were not as keen to buy CDs when they could just get their music for free. Big names and record labels in the industry tried to stop the spread of MP3 by punishing these people and companies like Napster who were sharing their illegal downloads over the Internet. But because their efforts didn't stop this new wave of technology, the industry was forced to adapt to MP3 by finding a way to make them profitable. They did this by developing technology, MP3 players and iPods that allowed consumers to buy MP3 and have music on the go. This trend has and will continue with every new thing that comes into play, because if the industry is going to survive, it has to change.

But one downfall of the technology is that as more of it is created, the easier it becomes for even newer technologies to be created, causing the industry to have to be in a quickening state of evolution. Artists, and labels even more so, have to find new ways to not only compete with each other but with the ever-fluctuating industry in order to keep making revenue and keep making music. When MP3 came out in 1995, labels and artist thought that it would result in the end of the industry because there was a major decrease in the sale of CDs, which forced the

change from the traditional recorded music industry business model. And as the 90's continued into the 2000's and early 2010's, we saw the industry go from an album focused to a single focused business model. The impact of this was that even today almost 20 years later the sale of not only CDs but music in general is not anywhere near its 1999 peak, since it's very rare that the average consumer wants to spend money on music.

In 2004, *Billboard* writer Samantha Chang offered an opinion on that era's dramatic decline in record sales stating, "Charles Darwin would be proud. Today's harsh music climate is certainly putting his survival-of-the-fittest theory to the test."<sup>1</sup> This quote has become even more relevant today with the impact of streaming on traditional music sales. But the strongest musicians have adapted, or are willing to adapt to what comes their way. In an interview with recording artist and songwriter Ne-Yo from Econsultancy, he stated that without the ability of music sharing that was around in 2004-2007 while he was up and coming, he wouldn't have become as successful as he did. He said that as an artist he was willing to give away his music for free in order to reach new fans, build a stronger audience and reward his most loyal fans.<sup>2</sup>

New technologies present both advantages and disadvantages. The creation of more advanced tech means that laws have to be adjusted to help keep every piece of intellectual property safe; updating copyright law is one way that we have to make sure the industry evolves with the times. And other such safety nets have been created as well as time continues, mainly with the creation of more laws to establish ground rules when new tech comes into play. For example, with the 2016 EMI vs MP3Tunes case, laws were established that these services can't

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<sup>1</sup> Chang, Samantha. *Billboard*. March 6, 2004

<sup>2</sup> Morris, Ian. *Forbes*. November 17, 2014 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ianmorris/2014/11/17/technology-is-destroying-the-music-industry-which-is-great-for-the-next-taylor-swift/#4049adea236b> October 29, 2017

allow themselves to be "willfully blind"<sup>3</sup> when it comes to what users are doing that could be classified as copyright infringement.

Even with these changes, some still say that the industry is doomed to fail because of all these new technologies. These people mainly consist of names who have been in the industry for decades, such as The Who's Roger Daltrey and legendary producer Quincy Jones, and miss the old days where they just had to pump out records in order to make money. Record labels are especially worried about becoming obsolete in the long run, which would cause many highly influential industry leaders and companies to lose all of their influence. Record labels have always been the "middle man" between the artist and their audience, and the middle man is slowly becoming less necessary.<sup>4</sup> Labels used to be the producers, the talent finders, the place where every artist wanted to reach to be successful. But now artists can produce their own music, talent can be found everywhere online and many artists don't see the benefit of having a label on their side. Take for instance, one of today's biggest names, Chance the Rapper, who skyrocketed to fame and popularity without having a label attached to his name; and he plans to keep it that way for as long as he can.

What's important to remember is that this new technology doesn't have to mean the end of record labels, let alone the end of the music industry. Indie record labels are still very popular, mainly because of the amount of creative freedom and rights ownership that they allow musicians compared to traditional labels. Labels can adapt by being ahead of the curve and instead of rejecting new tech, find ways to make it work for them, or even create it themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> Cullins, Ashley. *The Hollywood Reporter*. December 28, 2016 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/riaa-exec-2017-will-be-a-critical-year-music-law-q-a-959080>

<sup>4</sup> Morris, Ian. *Forbes*. November 17, 2014 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ianmorris/2014/11/17/technology-is-destroying-the-music-industry-which-is-great-for-the-next-taylor-swift/#4049adea236b> October 29, 2017

For example, since social media is such a valued marketing avenue, labels can invest their money to help fund social media plans to reach a greater sized audience. Or doing something like Spotify pre-order, where you have to “follow” an artist or a company to get access to their newest album the second it hits Spotify. Managers might also incorporate music into more media with licensing, or find different ways to engage your audience at tour stops so that more people want to go, etc.

The end of the music industry is not something anyone wants to think about, but it also isn't something that is coming up anytime soon. Labels, artists, consumers and technology all have to work together if the music industry is to thrive, even if that means leaving the past behind.

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