

It is a very rare occasion to actually hear a voice of somebody representing the part of the Web dealing with music distribution "on the fringe of the law". That may be so for many reasons including the "shadiness" of an enterprise itself. But it is also the case that many mp3 bloggers are indifferent to the problems the music industry faces today - they just don't have much to say. In this new section RBM interviews the founder of captaincrawl, a popular music blog aggregator. Chris definitely has something to say. He speaks about his project, music piracy, overpriced records and the state and future of the industry as he sees it. Chris believes that unlike "dinosaurs and school books" that "should always be free" music can and should be paid for - it's just the matter of working out a new customer-friendly business model. In the distant future of 2020 he predicts better music pricing rendering piracy to the pastime of a few: "like marihuana smoking: forbidden, but it seems to be okay while under control."

Introduce yourself. What do you do in "real" life?

Hello, I'm a 28 year old guy named Chris and I'm running the world's biggest (and maybe the only one) music blog index captaincrawl.com. Currently I'm living in Berlin, Germany and working on my Master/Diploma in economics and journalism; in earlier times I was working at a lot of media companies and web agencies to pay the rent.

I'm not a web developer or something like that and I've always hated programming, but as I needed a possibility to search my favourite 100 blogs I read some tutorials about databases and server set-ups. You know what happened. Beside that I'm a typical music junkie: turntable, vinyl, masses of mp3s, a damn good taste in music (yah!) and some of the best clubs in the world right next to my hood. When everybody's at a party for beer & girls, I'm there for the artist. And beer & girls.

Why did you start captaincrawl? What expectations did you have and what did you envision it to become?

In early 2008 I was tired of not finding what I was searching for when using google, despite it was there! I don't know why google still sucks at this point, but even today you cannot find most blog entries there, maybe due to copyright filters!?!? My main interest was mp3 files, sure, this is the essence of music blogs; myspace, youtube and last.fm are good utilities for hearing some music but they have a major problem: they don't let you download anything (unless you know how to do it) ! And they do it like their lawyers told them.

Music blogs are different: Usually made by people in their free time, people with a great taste in music, people who don't care about copyright laws. People who have their very own methods of discovering music, bloggers don't put online things they just saw on MTV! That's some kind of underground, some kind of (very huge) off-scene. I mean months (years!) before NME, GROOVE or even MTV start hyping something you can hear it on the blogs! Some of them have more readers than

professional, printed music magazines! Say it like it is: The Music Blogosphere is a serious thing. And there was no real connection, no crawler, no index, except sites like hypem, elbows and totallyfuzzy (which i really love and respect), but they don't let you search anything.

So I created CC - from scratch, without any knowledge about linux or xml feeds. 4 months of coffee break work later there was a working version and I got very positive reactions from friends, so I made it public (with that totally stupid domain captaincrawl.com, I really cannot say how this name came up). By the end of 2008 CC was getting more and more attention in the blogging scene and today it's a very famous and useful tool, used by several hundreds of thousands of people every month. Due to the fact it is - and always will be - a project in the grey area of copyright, there is only a very low income from the ads that hardly can pay the server costs, so CC will never be a commercial thing. But hopefully a loved one.

Can you describe an average captaincrawl visitor?

The most interesting (and secure) fact might be the awesome good taste in music of CC's users. As you can see in the "Top Queries of 2009"-Page [you can find the link at the bottom within the result pages] the top 100 are the complete opposite of the real Top 100 Music Charts. I think music blogs in general are a thing of quality and taste while bad super-mainstream music seems to be an Emule/Bearshare/Limewire thing (or whatever is cool today, I have no idea about classic filesharing). Shitty music spreads in totally different ways and I'm sure it's users are completely different people. This goes too far for such a little interview, but music taste is very equal to social status, social behaviour and even income (good taste does not mean good income by the way). It's a creepy (or good?) phenomenon you can judge people by their music taste. But back to our subject: If we compare CC's most searched terms [live at the page right now] with those from the piratebay [Ludachris, Alicia Keys, Rihanna, Ke\$ha, Usher, Lady Gaga, ...] and isohunt [lil wayne, beyonce, david guetta, ...] we can clearly see a massive disparity. By the way I'm still surprised there was no Britney or David Guetta in the 1000 most searched terms of 2009. Unfortunately there are no real stats about CC's users, but I can say typical (music) bloggers - and blog readers - are in their 20ies, however this goes up to 60. I've never seen music bloggers below the age of 19. That's strange as most regular blogs are run by underage girls (!).

Do you have any other projects besides captaincrawl? In our email correspondence you mentioned an "artist/label/blogger/user-copyright-bashment-project". That sounds very intriguing.

Nope, CC is the only project I run or I'm involved in. I don't even have a music blog. But I'm planning two documentary projects that should bring artists, mp3 bloggers, labels and users together to discuss that downloading thing. In this case bashment has no negative meaning, it's more like a round table thing, you know, people are (illegally) downloading pieces of music from artists they like (and whose gigs they go to), so it's not an A vs. B thing, it's more complex. The opinion of artists and labels might be very very interesting, and we should hear them! Like you said in the beginning: "there are real people behind any effort".

My other project will be an economical view on the music scene, a nice mix of stats & graphics and interviews with artists & labels about their financial situation. I'm really astonished nobody ever

talked about money in detail when it comes to music. I mean, it's important to know how labels work, how artists get paid (if they are paid) and how a tour is paid. I've heard of well-known bands that move from town to town in their own totally fucked up car, I've seen totally fucked up unknown bands moving around in \$100.000 tour busses. Some very famous artists do their music beside a real job, some 3rd class bands can live on their cd sales / tour fees.

I would love to get a deeper view on that! It might be some kind of ... hmmm strange to hear that from a guy who makes illegal downloads a little bit easier, but I think mp3 blogs in general and illegal downloads of full retail albums in particular have a wide variety of positive AND negative effects on an artist's/label's financial situation.

Do you see yourself as a criminal element ruining the future of the music?

Absolutely NOT ! I have created CC to give a possibility to search music blogs. Surely it's used to find single mp3s, remixes and full retail albums, let's say this like it is. But that's not just a bad thing! Free AND illegal downloads are a part of a new way of consuming and discovering music. It's nearly impossible to say what's illegal and what's not. Just have a look at hypem.com, a fantastic site that rips single mp3s out of blogs. Technically this site is a massive violation of copyright - but they are highly respected by artists, labels and bloggers. And for example, they made Crystal Castles [and thousands of other artists] big by playing their songs. I believe with full retail releases it's trickier, but still kind of similar. Let's say it with these two statements:

1. Downloading a release is pure promotion. It gives you the possibility to get into that artist. Today people are downloading much more music than they could ever buy (or even hear), so downloading a release is not equal to stealing it, somebody who downloads album X of artist Y will probably BUY their next release, go to that artist's concerts etc.
2. Until today there's been no attractive alternative way get an mp3 release than buying it for 15 € / 20 \$ or getting it for free via rapidshare. *As this is an extremely hot subject we will get into that later...*

Sure, without the internet this whole music thing would probably run like 1990. And even if they were no blogs, no emules, no rapidshares: people would share like hell on their own private networks. Even totally unnerdy 16 year old girls are sharing via skype or sticks. We're all just formed by our technical environment. If we lived in 1970 you would take all my vinyls and rip them to tape cassettes. Sharing was always there. Internetz has just lifted it to a higher level.

Please comment on the current state of the record industry as you see it. Is music piracy killing the music as a whole or just the record labels' business model?

Labels are dying and the entire world is downloading from rapidshare, that's for sure! Just have a look at the most visited pages on earth. But these dying labels are usually old-skool-labels, like Snoop's or that Beastie Boys label. I mean, these guys are millionaires, and now they are complaining about \$100.000 debts!? WTF?

On the other hand new labels like dim mak, kitsune, ed banger or disque primeur [wow, they are all connected ... and they are all from paris.... sorry i'm such a nurave kid] are successful, gain profit and have wonderful, well-known high quality artists. But they are making the same mistakes again: their

releases are too expensive!

My statement: The music industry, especially all these indie labels have killed themselves.

Just because they haven't realized €18 / \$24 is way too much for a simple cd with 14 tracks. Labels know this - that's why they release Singles. But same problem here: €6 for ONE (!) track and two remixes I never hear again? I mean, this is how the entire music industry ran all the time (even all of these smaller labels do it like that)! Markets change. Technology changes. And prices change!!! At the end of the 18th century people were destroying machines (and killing machine operators by the way) because they thought machines would take away all work, all earnings. In fact machines have brought prosperity and jobs like never before. Same shit 200 years later: these bad "computers" that will kill us all! Every modern job needs one now. What I wanna say is: *If the environment is changing you have to change a little bit, too.*

In this case people have the possibility to buy a CD (which they probably haven't even heard at that point of time) for €18 (!!!) or get it for free from the internet. In most cases there's a 2/3-of-that-price-way via mp3 dealers like beatport or itunes. But let's take a random example:

BLOODY BEETROOTS. Current Longplayer ROMBORAMA is €17,99 / \$24 (!) all over Europe as CD release. Beatport gives away the MP3 release for €14,99 / \$20.

Dear music industry, what the fuck is wrong with you?

I mean, who goes into a store and pays that much for a CD? I'm also wondering why an mp3 release is still so expensive. Somebody who knows there's rapidshare, emule and soulseek should really think about giving potential customers a price that's attractive! DIM MAK [their label] has NO REAL COSTS when selling mp3s, so why are they so resistant to price experiments? Personally, I want that release! I would buy the vinyl for €4,99 or the mp3 release for €3 (well, €2 would be okay, too). I really believe a lot of people reading this would agree. Buying music is not like buying food, you don't need that; you do it for you and for the artist.

We have two possibilities:

1. Buying a release for €18/15 or \$24/20 [artist, label and following industry get money]
2. Illegally downloading it for €0 / \$ [artist, label and following industry don't get any money]

Surely an illegal download is a much more attractive way to get this release. There's no real alternative between these two. If there would be a €3 / \$4 mp3 release (we are still talking about a full album) we could move this interview to a whole new direction - but there is nothing like that. To come back to your question: I think - no... I know that you can sell everything if the price is right and the ways to get it are attractive. Really! The argument "but the rapidshare download is free!" is totally valid but we're talking about illegal downloads! You get a product plus a feeling of giving money to an artist AND doing the right thing.

Sooner or later there will be nice alternatives to illegal downloads, I think record labels will have to drop prices massiely - but this will result in enormous sales! [at least one major label seems to have realized that - ed.] Just imagine, really just let us experiment with this: a full release directly from the artists website for €1 / \$1,50 ... sounds a little bit shitty, but I think if 500 people per day would download this (which is realistic) that's €500 per day or 15.000 € per month... well... sounds nice for a 2 man group, right!? By the way, this is just for mp3 sales!!! - vinyl, cds, booking not counted. And this

is a killer argument for digital releases: there are no further costs for selling mp3s! If you sell 300 or 3.000.000 ... costs stay same (bandwidth costs are so low we really can skip this)! Due to very good booking in Europe our test band could gain another €500 per day for live gigs. But I don't know booking prices so let's skip that. People working at labels need jobs too, I think labels with direct label-to-consumer-shops need handling, booking, scouting etc too. So hopefully labels will think about reorganizing their prices. If they don't, selling music might become a dead end. The current situation is sick.

By the way in 2007 or 2008 I guess one of the biggest German indie labels made an off-sale (i don't know why, they still exist and are very successful), something like selling everything we have in stock for a very low price. Guess what: people bought every damn item within hours. These prices were extremely low, but it shows how the game could run.

Production prices for a professional CD being lower than €0.30 it could be realistic to sell a longplayer for €3.

By the way, Mercedes-Benz is constructing cars in China for \$1000 and nobody complains about it buying them in the UK or the US for \$100.000. This is so sick, but the music industry could learn from this. Sounds harsh, but if CD / vinyl production costs are still too high, damn, then let's do it in Eastern Europe or Asia. SonyBMG is doing it like that. Most indie labels don't! This leads to another serious, moral problem: would we give this work to local companies or press CDs in China?

But let's come back to prices: The €0.99-per-track model is a step in the right direction, but it's unattractive! Low quality music sells like that [people only want that catchy one track they heard on the radio], but most people want more from that particular artist. I want the full pack!

(By the way: It's not directly related to your initial question, it's similar with all these movie streaming / movie download sites: there are more people watching LOST on an illegal low-quality stream on megaupload than on TV. Let's analyze this: why are they doing this? Maybe just because it's possible. And because TV stations totally failed at giving a simple alternative way to this! I mean, why are the stations not showing their shows for free on their websites - with regular commercials in it! I would watch! And the situation would be perfect for everybody: channels gain money with regular commercials, users get a high-quality program, illegal streaming sites wouldn't be necessary anymore - except for watching OLDER or VERY NEW stuff that's not accessible in your country. But channels should work on that too. If 4 million Germans are watching English episodes of LOST six months before it will start in Germany - well, then these channels should react to that! And not by blocking streaming sites ! They should buy English pre-sync episodes and give these 4 million "customers" a high quality stream with commercials. It could be so easy.)

Do you see today's music as a form of art or as a commodity?

Epic question. I think both - with a very thin line in between and a very very strange "weight of quality". Let's put it this way: when I had a look at the German Top 100 Chart I was shocked: I mean I am a hardcore music nerd, but I have never heard of most of these "artists". These are the top selling CDs/Vinyl/MP3s in the entire country, but who the fuck is "Lena Meyer-Landrut" (currently #1, #3 and #4 (!!!) in Germany)? I am deeply ashamed to realize most people don't have ANY taste in music, they just buy what they see on TV - totally regardless of quality. The top selling German artists in the last few years were SCOOTER, TOKIO HOTEL and some TV casting show winners. Holy! Scooter are a pure definition of lowest quality shit music. But they are the most successful German long-term act. Really!

These guys are an industry, a mainstream industry. They are constructed, even if they don't know it, to gain money from a very special social group. They have no idea about music, even if they think they are great musicians. They are products.

On the other side there are masses of highest quality artists that never reach a mass audience - and they will never pay for their apartments playing their music. Between these two extreme poles there's a wide field of lower-to-mid-to-upper quality music that gets more or less mainstream media attention, let's take FRANZ FERDINAND, INTERPOL, MADONNA and CRYSTAL CASTLES: these guys make art, they are art, they are real musicians. As I think all people reading this have a quite good taste in music we can skip that industry part and have a look at this: in today's world everything has to be productive - and everything has a certain price. I mean Interpol have to pay the rent, for food, living, you know, they have kids, cars, all these things, musicians are real people too. Every venue or club have to pay the rent, for light and workers, every label has a smaller or bigger office and people working there. Artists have to pay for their studios, their computers and their drum machines. Okay, making music is a free time activity, not a real job, but above a certain level you have to quit your job and live on sales / gig wages. Everybody knows that. We live in a highly commercial world, but that's not just bad, even as you have to pay for everything. I think some things like dinosaurs and school books should always be free, but that won't work with music. An artist cannot really exist without a properly working infrastructure around him. Even if you are dj-ing for free and releasing your tracks for free on the web, there will be some point in your life when you would feel you don't want to do this for free forever. You know what I wanna say. Effort & Reward.

So, here comes my answer: (Real) music is art. But as there are costs and real people behind every little track, every gig and every photo shooting we should always keep in mind we reward artists for their efforts and we have to pay for music and gigs from time to time to keep this system running.

How do you envision the future of the record/music industry?

Maybe we can sum it up like that: It will be like today, but with lower prices and a much bigger focus on web sales. There will always be bigger labels, smaller labels, dead labels, CDs, Vinyl, MP3s and rapidshare. Even if labels lower their prices there will be file sharing, private and public. But that's not bad, it's like marihuana smoking: forbidden, but it seems to be okay while under control. And I really really believe micropayments will become much more popular. A paypal browser plugin that lets you buy things/mp3s for very very small amounts of money with a single click. A cash icon next to a play button. That's 2020, baby. And music will ALWAYS be an unstable, unsecure business. It's not coal, it's not milk: even if there wouldn't be any filesharing anymore you would never have a guarantee you'll be able to sell your tracks or get booked.

Do you pay for the music and if so, in which formats

Yes, I pay a lot of money for music! But like everybody else (I know) most money goes directly to concerts / club gigs. And a very little part is spent on vinyl - or sometimes mp3s (if there's no vinyl release). By the way I haven't bought a CD in the last 10 years.

How do you pick what to listen to?

I think it's exactly like this, in that order:

1. I read a lot of music blogs, usually without any particular aim, just checking around while waiting for the coffee machine ... 3hrs later I've downloaded 500 MB of fantastic new stuff, heard 20 new tracks and planned to go to 4 events (I am a live / club junkie). And forgot to get the coffee.
2. (Printed) music magazines. I feel so ashamed for being part of the blogosphere - which slowly kills classic print products. I love to read all these professional interviews, gossip talks and highly aesthetic photographs.

But printed music magazines have a serious problem: they don't have a play button!

This will kill them. I mean, a fantastic review of a fantastic band is - in today's culture - quite shitty, if printed on paper. The same review on a webpage including a simple stream - that's it! Even though it's much less fancy to "read" on a laptop. But I'm losing the point...

3. Friends (the ones with a good taste in music ;) . Usually it's not the "have you heard of THEM ?" (like 10 years ago), it's more like "dude, do you have another 2 GB on your stick? You fucking have to hear THIS !". It's a quite good example of how the Generation Internet is using music.

3. (Real) radio stations. Unfortunately most radio stations suck, but at night they come out: while nearly all German radio stations suck at daytime, their night program is a wonderful pool of fantastic music played by fantastic music junkies. By the way I have to say THIS: the entire BRITISH radio scene is completely different from everything I've ever heard in Europe and the USA.

If you want to hear some good music turn on the BBC. You can stream it live from anywhere in the world. I'm wondering what British people think when they listen to non-British radio stations...

Recommend a band you recently discovered.

Hm.... you got me! I definitely cannot give you a next-big-thing answer, but as this is a great possibility to promote awesome tunes, I'll give you this:

The Black Pandas [not Black Pandas, not The Black Panda (seems to be a famous band name)].

A fantastic acid-synth-punk-electro-screamo-acid-acid-acid project I discovered somewhere in the blogosphere; you should check out "Hungarian Nights" (and "Amsterdam"): a diamond of a trashy 4-to-the-floor danceable crystal castles like track that would perfectly fit in a neon glitter indie rave. Until today - even after their European tour - they haven't had more than 4000 hits on myspace. And just 3 (!) songs. I wish they would spend more time in the studio. This could become great. By the way there's a weird story behind it: When they should play here in Berlin nobody, really nobody was there (except me). Empty club. So they didn't play. Strange situation, but I guess these guys will become big in the next time ;)

<http://www.myspace.com/theblackpandas>

Krause Duo (& Flowin Immo)

A fantastic collaboration of two minimal djs and a very well-known German rapper. My first contact to this was a 60min live set made at 4am in the morning on (the epic) melt festival 2005. he's rapping without any lyrics, just drunken nonsense phrases that fit the beat and the atmosphere perfectly. Strange, but some kind of WOW. they have some other gorgeous live sets and 2 or 3 killer releases. I was always wondering why minimal and mcs is a totally unknown combination. hmm...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtL9RzBX3AI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rCBV1YztI>

<http://www.daskrauseduo.de/> [all sets for free]

<http://soundcloud.com/daskrauseduo> [even more sets for free]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7MSrGbbu6Q> [there are 3 more parts of this]

Dapayk & (Eva) Padberg feat. Caro - Island (Noze Remix)

[you can find this epic track on Black Beauty Remixes Part 2]

Epic. One of the most wonderful tracks in my entire collection. Seems to be older, but as I love Noze (guys you have to see them live) I need to make that thing public. Everybody should have a vinyl release of this.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEECEkyzHHM>