

11-1-2007

# One Song Leads to Another: Pandora Internet Radio

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## Recommended Citation

Shane, Jackie. "One Song Leads to Another: Pandora Internet Radio." *Cyberskeptic's Guide to Internet Research* 11, 10 (2007).  
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Cite as: *One Song Leads to Another: Pandora Internet Radio, The Cyberskeptic's Guide to Internet Research*, 11 (10), Nov/Dec 2006, p. 6.

One Song Leads to Another: at Pandora.com

The scent of a song

How do you describe the essence of music? It is fairly easy to entice our *visual* senses. The best way to describe a painting online is to post a copy of the painting. Words have limitations as we come to realize while reading a musical review of a rock band in a local entertainment weekly, however. How does one decide the worthiness of music based on a text-based review? Enter the Internet. In the world of sensuality the web falls short when describing the scent of a perfume or the softness of a fabric against your skin, but it does a tremendous job of describing music, and it does that by simply playing the music for you. The online version of *Rolling Stones Magazine* for example, links from words to a sample of music, and further to a way to purchase the album or song online.

Certainly the web can promote music in ways that print media cannot, but exploring a genre one artist at a time can be laborious. Millions of songs are successfully stored on the Internet in a variety of formats, but how do you decide what to listen to? How do you know what you don't know? How do you discover new artists given your own personal taste?

If your ears liked this...

There is Amazon's "customers-who-bought-this-liked-that" approach. This approach certainly helps, but it still markets one song or book at a time. For streaming music you can find hundreds of radio stations that continually play music by genre, but you are subjected to a human disk jockey who hasn't a clue what you as the listener want to hear and the sound quality is often lacking. If you are willing to pay for satellite radio, you will most likely discover a station entertaining enough, but it is not free, and you still play a passive role as the listener. Enter Pandora.com. Pandora asks you for your favorite artists or songs and streams continual music to you personally, by understanding where your taste falls into the *Music Genome*.

The Music Genome Project

The purpose of the Music Genome Project is to capture the essence of music at the most fundamental level, and Pandora aims to be "the most comprehensive analysis of music ever." When you first visit Pandora, the site will ask you to type your favorite artist or song. An algorithm then creates a radio station with similar selections based on the attributes of your original selection. Though the listener now has an endless stream of similar songs from both popular and unknown independent artists, such a radio station could eventually get dull, so Pandora enables the listener to give a thumbs up or down to

each song and to add several artists and songs. The algorithm continually senses the musical preferences of the listener with each click. The result is exposure to a wonderful array of artists and songs that one never would have discovered otherwise.

Pandora regularly scouts musical talent. “Musicians are lazy,” says Tim Westergren, the creator of Pandora, so occasionally he and his co-workers travel around the country to “shake the tree.” Past and future trips are documented on their site, should you like to meet them on the road some day. In promoting an abundance of independent artists Westergren hopes that Pandora will give rise to a musician’s middle class. Currently artists experience either feast or famine. Pandora could provide mass exposure to the *long tail*, or those low frequency purchases that can cumulatively outweigh those of even the biggest blockbusters. By encouraging obscure artists to submit their music to the MGP, Pandora bolsters their popularity.

### Squeezebox

An interesting aspect of Pandora is that it eliminates the need for a workstation altogether. By purchasing the *Squeezebox*, this small electronic device plays songs any place that has a wireless connection. A remote control directs the thumbs-up or thumbs-down rating. Much like an iPod one can strategically place speakers in various rooms around the house and simply transport the Squeezebox to signal to the speakers. The only glitch is that you still need to be connected to the Internet and that you will need to subscribe to Pandora since advertisement is not an option with the Squeezebox. Though Squeezebox advertises on the Pandora site, they share no financial relationship with Pandora other than some shared software development.

Stay tuned for part II: an inside look behind the scenes at Pandora.com.