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AT&T's a2b music Joins the Online Stampede

By Barry Willis • Posted: Mar 29, 1998

Telecommunications giant American Telephone and Telegraph announced March 16 that it too, now, has technology for digital music delivery. AT&T's system, called a2b music, is based on MPEG Advanced Audio Coding.

According to an AT&T press release, a2b music's audio compression technology delivers the "best-sounding music currently available through digital distribution." Highly rated by independent audio institutes including BBC Research, Canada's Communications Research Center, and NHK Science and Technical Research Labs, MPEG AAC was jointly developed by AT&T Labs, Dolby Labs, the Fraunhofer Institute, Lucent Technologies, Sony, and others. The International Standards Organization (ISO) has designated AAC as the next-generation MPEG standard, to supersede MP3.

While Liquid Audio claims to be the first Internet company to focus on the needs of the music industry, a2b music claims to be the world's first to implement AAC technology for downloading and purchasing music over the Internet. AAC reduces the download time for a 3-minute song from 21 minutes to 9 minutes using a 28.8kbs modem. (Implied, but not stated, is that downloads approach real-time using 56.6k or faster modems.) a2b music claims its platform is also secure, protecting distributors, artists, and consumers from electronic theft.

BMG Entertainment has endorsed a2b music, and is running promotions of free downloads of songs by groups like The Verve Pipe and SWV as a way of creating interest in the groups' albums. "The response has been very good and we are very pleased with the results," said BMG Entertainment senior vice president of marketing Kevin Conroy.

The basic technology behind the a2b platform is used for the 17,500-selection "ultimate jukebox" in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.

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