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NTT DoCoMo To Offer Mobile Music Downloads

By William Auckerman | October 08, 1999

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Japan's [NTT DoCoMo](#) has announced that next year it will introduce a music distribution service over its PHS (personal handyphone system) mobile phone network.

The planned multi-channel MMD (Mobile Media Distribution) Service will enable PHS users to download music at 64K bps for playback on compatible personal audio players, such as [Sony's](#) new Memory Stick Walkman.

"The MMD Service will allow users to gain access to songs, concert schedules and other music-related information anywhere and at any time, by downloading them from record companies, music publishing houses and other content holders," said NTT DoCoMo.

The company has signed agreements with Sony, [BM Japan](#), and [Matsushita Communication Industrial](#) to begin joint testing of the MMD Service platform in April 2000.



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In November, NTT DoCoMo and Matsushita reportedly will form a joint venture company with the aim of launching commercial operation of the MMD Service as early as summer 2000.

Details of the joint venture, including its name and date of incorporation, are still under discussion.

PHS phones to be used for the service will utilize either Sony's MagicGate Memory Stick (smaller than a piece of chewing gum) or an SD (Secure Digital) Memory Card (about the size of a postage stamp).

After downloading audio data, the user will be able to detach the miniature memory device and insert it into a compatible mobile music player — such as the Memory Stick Walkman, which Sony is set to begin selling year-end, or an SD Memory Card-equipped player such as the one Matsushita has said it will introduce next spring.

The MMD service will support two distribution technologies: IBM's EMMS (Electronic Music Management System) in combination with Sony's ATRAC3 sound compression and OpenMG copyright protection technologies, and the EMD (Electronic Media Distribution) secure system being developed jointly by Matsushita, AT&T, BMG Entertainment, and Universal Music Group.

In preparation for next year's field trials, NTT DoCoMo will hold a series of monthly MMD Service Workshops for potential content providers.

"This will be a forum to discuss various ways in which mobile communication devices, whose penetration rate currently exceeds 40 percent of the domestic market, can be used to expand and revitalize public demand for music," the company said.

Nearly 20 Japanese record companies, including [Pony Canyon](#), [Sony Music Entertainment](#), [Toshiba-EMI](#), and [Warner Music Japan](#), are expected to participate in this month's first workshop.

Content providers for the spring service trials will be selected based on workshop discussions.

NTT DoCoMo said it will also study the possibility of extending MMD Service to the W-CDMA cellular phone system that it plans to launch in Japan in spring 2001.

In announcing the Memory Stick Walkman, Kunii Ando, president of Sony Personal IT Network, commented: "You always carry your cell phone with you. It would be convenient if you could use it to listen to music."

His remark suggests that development of a combination cell phone/audio player unit may be the next step in making music mobile.

