

Rhapsody to challenge Apple's iTunes with MP3 download service

Rhapsody has launched a download service that is compatible with iPods

"Digital music seller Rhapsody is launching a £25million marketing assault on Apple's iTunes, offering songs online and via partners including Yahoo and Verizon Wireless, the company said today. The songs will be sold in MP3 format, which means users of the Rhapsody service will be able to play them on iPods.

Before now Rhapsody had focused on a subscription service, allowing unlimited song streaming for £7 a month, rather than selling downloads. But Rhapsody Vice President Neil Smith said the fact the service has not been compatible with Apple Inc's top-selling iPod digital player has limited Rhapsody's reach. 'We're no longer competing with the iPod,' Smith said. 'We're embracing it.'

Rhapsody will be available on mobile phones via the Verizon Wireless VCAST Music service. Buyers of a song over-the-air directly from phones also will be able to download that song to their computer. Rhapsody executives describe the strategy as 'Music Without Limits.' They said it would be backed by a marketing blitz worth up to £25million in media space over the next year.

Early this year iTunes became the biggest music retailer in the United States. It has sold more than 5 billion songs since it launched in 2003. Its success has been due partly to a perfect interface between iTunes and the iPod, said analyst David Card of Jupiter Research.

The new digital MP3 stores have been made possible because the four major record groups - Universal Music Group, Sony BMG, Warner Music Group and EMI Group - last year started allowing retailers to sell music without digital rights management software to prevent illegal sharing of music.

The screenshot shows the Rhapsody MP3 Store interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search for MP3s" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar are navigation tabs: "Rhapsody MP3 Home", "My Downloads", and "About Rhapsody MP3". A green banner below the tabs reads "Save more when you buy albums. Most albums \$9.99 - build your collection now". The main content area is for the artist "Duffy", with a sub-header "MP3 All downloads compatible with iPods". On the left, there is a small image of Duffy and a bio snippet: "When the Amos and Andy's father cued up a VHS tape with archaic episodes of the Brit music showcase program Ready Steady Go!, the grainy performances of the Beatles and Stones left an indelible impression. By...". Below this is a "Similar Artists" section listing "Angie Stone", "The O'Jays", "Aaliyah", "Estelle", "Charlotte Somerville", "Lily Allen", and "Joss Stone". The main section is titled "Albums" and features a "Main Releases" tab. A "Rockferry (2004)" album is highlighted with a price of "\$1.99" and an "Add to Cart" button. Below the album section is a "Tracks" section with a table listing tracks for sale:

Play	Track	Album	Price
	1. Delayed Devotion (3:57)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	2. Distant Breather (5:05)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	3. Hanging On Too Long (4:58)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	4. I'm Scared (3:09)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	5. Mercy (4:40)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	6. Mercy (Remix featuring The Game) (4:50)	Mercy	\$0.99 Add to Cart
	7. Rockferry (4:12)	Rockferry	\$0.99 Add to Cart