

Review: New Web music services offer tons of tunes

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In this photo made Aug. 3, 2010, two mobile phones are seen in San Francisco. If you want to hear whatever you want, whenever you want it, your best bet is a Web-based subscription music service. Two new ones are hoping to capture your attention and your dollars: Rdio, which was created by the founders of popular Internet phone service Skype, seen on the screen on the phone on the left, and MOG, which comes from the team behind a music blog of the same name. Both let you listen to an unlimited amount of high-quality tunes online and on your smart phone for \$10 per month, and also let you connect to like-minded listeners, a tempting proposition, but still kind of pricey considering the appeal of some free alternatives. (AP Photo/Ben Margot)

(AP) -- If you're itching to hear whatever you want, whenever you want, without breaking the bank on songs from Apple's iTunes store, your best bet is an online subscription music service.

Two new ones are hoping to capture your attention and dollars: Rdio, which was created by the founders of [Internet phone service Skype](#), and MOG, from the [music](#) blog network of the same name. For \$10 per month each, the two let you listen to an unlimited number of high-quality tunes on the Web and on your smart phone, download songs to your phone for offline listening (though you won't be able to listen to them if you cancel service) and connect with like-minded music lovers.

On the surface, they sound tempting, and after spending some time with Rdio and MOG, I could see myself opening up my wallet to MOG each month. Still, if you're not a music junkie, this kind of service is a tough sell in the age of digital freebies: Internet radio service Pandora won't always let me hear exactly what I want, but it also won't charge me \$10 every four weeks.

First, I tried out Rdio (pronounced "ar-dee-oh"), which has been available by invitation since June and was opened up on Tuesday to anyone who wants to subscribe.

Rdio smartly offers two membership options: You can pay \$5 per month to listen to as much music as you want over the Web, or \$10 per month for all-you-can-hear access online and on a BlackBerry, iPhone or smart phone running Google's Android [operating software](#). Since I've always got a smart phone on me, I chose the pricier option.

At the office, I tried Rdio's website, which is confusing to navigate with its smorgasbord of music-related lists and features. The search function is tucked away in the upper right-hand corner - not hard to find, but definitely not screaming for attention.

Within the busy website I found one particularly clever feature: You can sync songs remotely to your smart phone, instead of having to search for them on a tiny mobile screen.

Rdio also offers a simple desktop application that works as a music player so you don't have to visit the website to play songs stored in your online queue.

The application can also add digital music you already own to your Rdio account. It checks to see which songs in your iTunes or Windows Media Player collections are in Rdio's database and keeps a list, so you can instantly access the songs online or on your phone. The service managed to find more than half of the songs I had in iTunes.

Generally, I preferred using Rdio on the Android smart phone I used for testing, since it was simpler to find, play and download songs.

I was impressed with the quality of streaming on my phone. I found I could listen to tunes without a hitch while traveling several miles between the office and my home.

With 7 million songs in its catalog, I found plenty of music I like, ranging from M.I.A.'s recently released album, "MAYA," to tunes from '60s rockers Los Bravos.

There are holes in Rdio's collection, though. I could listen to The Decemberists' two latest albums, for example, and plenty of singles, but not some of the group's earlier work.

More impressive to me overall was MOG, which has a larger collection with close to 9 million tunes. I had no problem finding old songs by The Decemberists here, and tons of other tracks, too.

MOG launched its Web-based [music service](#) late last year, but added [iPhone](#) and Android apps just last month. It doesn't have the same \$5-per-month Web-only option as Rdio, but if you have a Roku set-top box at home you can stream MOG to it for \$5 each month.

Like Rdio, MOG has tons of content on its website, but I found it much more manageable and easier on the eyes. I liked that the site offered a lot of curated editorial content, such as a selection of "editor's picks" albums and stories about musicians, but it wasn't overwhelming.

It also helped that the first page I saw after signing in was a big search box, front and center.

Probably the smartest feature on MOG's website and mobile apps is an option to play a radio station made up of tunes by any artist on the site. Even cooler: A little slider lets you decide if you want to listen to songs by that artist only, or sprinkle in an increasing amount of songs by similar musicians, too.

For example, I turned on the radio function while listening to Lady Gaga and centered the slider. This quickly yielded other Gaga songs, plus tracks by Katy Perry, Depeche Mode and, to my surprise, Taylor Swift.

As with Rdio, I preferred using MOG on a cell phone. The mobile app is more detailed and stylish than Rdio's, with a smattering of options on its home screen that let you search for music, check out songs you've downloaded to your phone and see the top music on MOG's charts.

MOG seemed to take longer to start streaming music, though, and there would often be a long pause when I skipped between songs.

Regardless, MOG won me over with its trove of songs, ease of use and design sense. I'm still a little hesitant to spend \$10 each month on a digital music service, and wouldn't take the plunge with Rdio just yet. But if music is your drug of choice, MOG makes an able dealer.

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