

# Gobbler lets musicians collaborate over the Internet

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The light bulb moment for Chris Kantrowitz came in the form of a broken disc drive.

Sitting on a bus as it was rolling across Turkey on a concert tour in the summer of 2009, the 37-year-old Los Angeles entrepreneur watched singer-songwriter Lenny Kravitz fire up a disc drive where he had stored a song he had been recording. To their horror, the drive was dead.

"I started asking other [musicians](#) how they kept copies of their work," Kantrowitz recalled. "They were all on these old tapes and disc drives. To me, that was crazy."

That gave Kantrowitz the idea to launch Gobbler, a company that would not only back up artists' digital files but also let them collaborate to create songs with other musicians anywhere there is an Internet connection.

Digital backups are not strictly for professional recording artists. The proliferation of pocket cameras and inexpensive music recording software has meant that average people are now generating digital media at an unprecedented rate and sharing their creations with the world through [Facebook](#) and other social media.

Hollywood-based Gobbler, founded in February 2010, is among a stampede of start-ups tapping into a growing need to preserve, organize and make instantly available the digital bits that are increasingly a part of

people's creative and professional lives. Services such as Apple Inc.'s iCloud, Amazon.com Inc.'s Cloud Player and Dropbox allow users to upload songs, videos, photos or just about any digital file and be able to access them from any Internet link.

The market for these cloud services in the U.S. is forecast to grow from 15 million users spending \$900 million in subscription fees this year to 97 million users paying \$5.8 billion in 2016, said Frank Gillett, an analyst with technology research firm Forrester Research.

People "have gigabytes of music files, thousands of digital photos and a growing library of personal videos they hope to edit someday, but need to keep track of in the meantime," Gillett wrote in a June report titled "The Personal Cloud."

Whereas most cloud services focus on providing backup storage or giving users an online "locker" for accessing their files, few let people work together when doing so.

Gobbler is geared toward musicians who want to collaborate remotely. In the future Gobbler expects to zero in on other types of media such as videos and photos. The service is free now, but Kantrowitz plans to begin charging a monthly fee later this year.

"This space is becoming extremely competitive and crowded," said Danielle Levitas, an analyst with IDC. "The fact that they are focused on a particular niche makes them stand out. And having the collaborative functionality makes them even more compelling."

For touring musicians, being able to create music while they're on the road has become vitally important, said Peter Katsis, who manages the rock band Korn.

"One of my artists had a major TV show call looking for a remix last year, but no one at their record label could find the master recording," Katsis said. "So often, a licensing deal depends on being able to get to your material quickly."

Bands often send their work to recording engineers such as Howie Weinberg, who has mastered thousands of albums, including Nirvana's "Nevermind" and U2's "Pop."

"I deal with clients all over the world," said Weinberg, a Gobbler customer. "Instead of waiting for a box from FedEx, I can download a file, work on it and send it back in a day."

Like many recording studios, Weinberg's shop in Laurel Canyon has a convection oven. It's not for making cookies. Instead, it's used to "bake" deteriorating Ampex audio tapes so they can be temporarily restored long enough to be copied.

With digital files, backup copies live in the readily accessible cloud.

"The safest place for data is in a digital blob," said Kantrowitz, who has a breezy, affable manner and a knack for making complex subjects less intimidating.

Kantrowitz also has an ability to sniff out a business opportunity. Visiting his father's clothing business in downtown Los Angeles' garment district in the 1980s, he noticed a wholesale shop next door selling the type of black rubber bracelets favored by Madonna. The fifth-grader bought a pack of 144 bracelets for \$10. Whereas stores were selling them for \$1 each, Kantrowitz sold hundreds of them for 50 cents to his classmates. He used the money to start a business selling Velcro wallets and, later, stereo equipment to friends and family.

When Kantrowitz was 13, his father took him to the Consumer Electronics Show. It was there that he saw his first video game consoles. When he returned to L.A., he recruited his friends and began a business to test video games for glitches. He went on to found a number of game companies, including the online streaming firm 3D Groove.

Kantrowitz's transition into music came when a friend, needing last-minute technical expertise, asked him to help design Madonna and Coldplay's performances at the 2006 Grammy Awards. Kantrowitz's designs captured Katsis' attention, prompting him to hire Kantrowitz to work on Korn's next concert.

That gave birth to another Kantrowitz enterprise: Frank the Plumber, which creates concert designs for such clients as Beyonce, Katy Perry and Madonna, and partially helps fund Gobbler.

Kantrowitz's partner in Gobbler is his sister, Jamie Kantrowitz, a former top marketing executive at MySpace who previously worked for Rock the Vote and was deputy finance director for Andrew Cuomo's unsuccessful New York gubernatorial campaign in 2002.

"My brother and I are opposites in that I'm the one with the corporate experience and he's the one who's never had an employee badge in his life," joked Kantrowitz, who is three years younger than her brother.

Like his sister, Kantrowitz has a penchant for spotting trends.

"Chris can see around corners," said Sky Dayton, an investor in Gobbler who founded Internet service provider EarthLink in 1995. "When he laid out the idea for Gobbler, it was so clear, so compelling that I felt it had to be done. The best ideas are the ones where you hit your palm on your forehead and say, 'Of course!' "

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