

Social music lovers become 'Moggers'

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The launch of a site intertwining music blogging into a social network could be an opportunity for MOG to segue into a deal with major players in the music industry including music labels and online music stores, if not also appeal to online advertisers.

Don't even mention, though, that MOG is part of the MTV empire that was hatched by a former executive of the music channel. After all, MOG wants to be considered anti-MTV if anything, sending out an e-mail to members who may have gotten the wrong message when some news reports incorrectly announced that MTV had created the social networking site MOG.

Armed with the motto "Bare your musical soul," Berkeley, Calif.-based MOG hopes to attract music fans via its growing member base and its MOG-O-MATIC technology -- for both Macs and PCs -- which keeps score of a user's digital music collection updating their profile automatically.

The site's functions include MOG-O-MATIC widgets, in addition to users creating their own personalized widgets, allowing them to display current playlists, concerts they are attending, favorite artists, recommendations and write blog posts, among other things. Users also have access to customizable skins for profiles designed by pop artists such as Kinsey, Frank Kozik and Coop as well as embed audio samples, video clips, and links to the MOG community. And according to the company, MOG can be added to any blog or MySpace page. It also said that it would be rolling out with many new features soon.

"Thanks to bleeding-edge technology and ridiculously easy tools, MOG takes the work out of showing the world what you're about musically and connecting you with others with similar musical tastes," stated MOG chief executive David Hyman. "We use all of MOG's smarts to point you in the direction of people like you, based on the music you're into -- NOT to pretend that a computer really knows what you like."

But MOG isn't some creation by a college student, coming from the mind of Hyman, a seasoned music/Internet industry veteran. So far, the company has raised \$1.4 million in Angel funding to date since it was founded in June 2005.

Hyman, not only a former senior vice president of marketing at MTV Interactive, but is also a co-founder of music magazine Addicted to Noise and a former CEO of Gracenote, provider of its Music Recognition Service and content delivery engine for use in consumer electronics.

Gracenote is providing MOG with its music recognition service, who also powers Apple's iPods and iTunes with the similar service, and who provides the software to automatically catalog, organize and display music collections from CDs.

"At MOG, people still matter most," Hyman said. "We see our technology as an enabler, but MOG's users are the definitive. That means we allow you to edit anything in your collection -- from adding CD's you've been listening to in your car or vinyl you've been spinning at a recent party to deleting those embarrassing Olivia Newton-John tracks."

And staying true to its motto, social networking doesn't occur by zip code, gender, or age; rather the site connects users by similar music tastes, but still providing a search for Moggers.

Albeit, only launching its beta version Tuesday, users of the site have already posted a number of ideas on its feedback forum that if implemented could propel the site's potential for attracting music fans as well as companies via its tools. Suggestions have included providing album art, scanning ID3 tags, including top songs and artists list among Moggers, listing opening bands on a bill and page views, adding music tools, and getting more artist blogs.

Yet, the site does hit on the impact of consumer-to-consumer recommendations. According to a December 2005 report from IT research firm Gartner, consumer taste sharing is changing the landscape of the music industry. Among the study's findings, it found that one-tenth of early adopters of digital media stated that they make music purchases based on others' recommendations, while one-third said they were interested in online music discovery and recommendation tech powered by their taste in music.

Moreover, in the same study from Gartner analysts Michael McGuire and Derek Slater predicted that "by 2010, 25 percent of online music store transactions will be driven directly from consumer-to-consumer-taste-sharing applications, such as playlist publishing and ranking tools built into online music stores or external sites with links to stores."

Falling in line with what is the latest trend for a growing number of online music fans and continuing to build its member base and tools capabilities, could spur added interest from online music stores and music labels, as it now only provides 30-second sound samples of every song as well as direct links to iTunes and Amazon for download and CD purchases.

As Hyman noted, "like an older brother that plays you Miles Davis for the first time or a favorite musician that turns you on to an unexpected influence, MOG helps people connect with trusted voices to expand their

musical exposure."

"Computer generated recommendation models tend to be self-referential in nature and don't account for the fact that taste is complex and ever-evolving," he added.

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