

Streaming outlets are driving U.S. music sales

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A woman uses the iPhone application of Swedish music streaming service Spotify on March 7, 2013, in Stockholm, Sweden. The Nordic country is at the forefront of a global recovery in music sales driven by streaming music services such as Spotify. Photo by: AFP PHOTO/JONATHAN NACKSTRAND

U.S. music sales grew at a fast pace for a third straight year in 2017. Music-streaming outlets like Spotify were the main reason for this growth.

The latest numbers were released on January 3 by BuzzAngle Music, which tracks U.S. music sales. The United States is the world's largest music market. The company reported that music sales in the United States jumped 12.8 percent in 2017. That was three times the growth seen a year earlier.

Streaming is quickly becoming the most popular way to listen to music. It is replacing downloading, which once seemed like the future of the music business.

Music Can Be Played Online At Any Time

When people download music, they pay for a song or album then save the tracks on their computers or smartphone. Streaming allows people to build playlists of favorite songs without having to download them. These tracks can be played online at any time. Customers on streaming

sites like Spotify can stream for free or pay a subscription fee. Paid streaming offers benefits that free streaming does not. For example, paid streaming is ad-free.

In 2017, around 1.67 billion songs were streamed each day in the United States. By comparison, only around one-third as many tracks were downloaded over the entire year.

Music streaming grew by more than 50 percent in 2017, compared to the previous year. Also, more people were paying for their music streaming.

In 2017, 80 percent of audio streams came through paid subscription sites, BuzzAngle Music said.

Last year's growth continues the recent growth in music sales, which had been dropping for years. Sales first began falling following the rise of the Internet. The Internet made it easy for people to download music for free.

Some Artists Criticize Spotify

Not everyone is cheering 2017 sales figures, though. Many artists complain that they are seeing little of the money.

Geoff Barrow is a member of the band Portishead. He criticized Spotify on Twitter. Barrow claims it is "almost impossible to make a living" through Spotify. The payments for each song streamed are far too small, he said.

Spotify claims it does help musicians by bringing them new audiences. Having more fans helps musicians sell more concert tickets, the company says. Increasingly, musicians make money from their concert ticket sales rather than recordings.

Spotify is currently the leading streaming service. It has built an online library of around 30 million songs. It does have competition though. These include the streaming services of Apple and Amazon, as well as the French company Deezer and rapper Jay-Z's Tidal.

Older Formats Are Becoming Popular Again

The rise in streaming was the biggest music business news in 2017. However, there were other areas of growth.

Sales of vinyl albums grew by 20 percent in 2017. Vinyl is a 20th-century format that once seemed dead. In recent years, it has become popular again.

In 2017, vinyl buyers mostly bought rock and older titles.

The top-selling vinyl title of the year was the soundtrack to the superhero film "Guardians of the Galaxy." It includes songs by music legends David Bowie and Marvin Gaye.

Like vinyl, the cassette tape is an older way of listening to music. It has become popular again. Sales of cassettes more than doubled in 2017. But, they remain a tiny part of the overall market. Fewer than 100,000 cassettes were sold in 2017.

The Top-Selling Album Was Not On Streaming Services

Pop superstar Taylor Swift's "Reputation" was by far the top-selling album of 2017. It sold nearly 1.9 million copies.

Swift kept "Reputation" off streaming services for its first three weeks. That drove up sales of the album.

Not all artists can do what Swift did though. This unusual sales move can only be pulled off by a major star with many devoted fans.

Experts say music sales have been growing in other countries as well. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry will release worldwide sales figures in the coming months.

Quiz

1 Read the section "Some Artists Criticize Spotify."

Select the sentence from the section that shows WHY some musicians have problems with streaming.

- (A) Not everyone is cheering 2017 sales figures, though.
- (B) He criticized Spotify on Twitter.
- (C) The payments for each song streamed are far too small, he said.
- (D) Having more fans helps musicians sell more concert tickets, the company says.

2 Read the section "Music Can Be Played Online At Any Time." Which sentence from the section shows HOW the music streaming business changed in the last year?

- (A) In 2017, around 1.67 billion songs were streamed each day in the United States.
- (B) By comparison, only around one-third as many tracks were downloaded over the entire year.
- (C) Music streaming grew by more than 50 percent in 2017, compared to the previous year.
- (D) Last year's growth continues the recent growth in music sales, which had been dropping for years.

3 One MAIN idea of the article is that music sales grew in 2017 due to streaming services.

What is another MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) Old ways of listening to music, like vinyl and cassettes, are becoming increasingly popular.
- (B) Sales for popular albums, like movie soundtracks, are increasing because they are offered on vinyl.
- (C) Taylor Swift had the top selling album in 2017 because she already had a huge fan base.
- (D) There are many streaming services available, and musicians like Jay-Z are creating their own.

4 Read the sentences summarizing the MAIN ideas of the article below.

Music sales increased significantly in 2017. Old ways of listening to music, like vinyl and cassettes, are becoming popular again. Even more people are paying for streaming services, but some feel streaming services do not pay artists enough.

Which answer choice would complete the summary?

- (A) People prefer to download music because streaming services have ads.
- (B) Some artists have kept their music off streaming services to increase album sales.
- (C) Spotify is the most popular streaming service with over 30 million songs available.
- (D) Music sales fell for many years because people no longer wanted to buy albums.