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New Service Sounds Like Phish By Danit Lidor

Story location: <http://www.wired.com/news/digiwood/0,1412,57324,00.html>

02:00 AM Jan. 25, 2003 PT

Want to buy some 2-day-old fish?

Fans of the Vermont [jam band](#) Phish do.

Last month, [Phish](#) joined with [Elektra Records](#) and [nugs.net](#) -- a free live-music site -- to introduce a unique Web music service that coincides with the band's first studio album and tour in two years.

For a fee of \$10 to \$13, the service, called [Live Phish](#), features specially designed cover art and provides soundboard-quality downloadable recordings of Phish concerts less than 48 hours after a performance.

Shows are available in both unrestricted MP3 and [SHN files](#) -- a compacted and so-called "lossless" format.

It's a new idea, and Phish is uniquely positioned to make the jump.

"Phish had always been a pioneer on the Net," nugs.net founder Brad Serling said.

With over 160 band-related [sites](#) and one of Usenet's oldest music discussion groups, Phish lives up to *Rolling Stone's* billing as "[the world's most wired band](#)."

Fans often attend many shows in a row and go on the road for an entire tour. [Tapers](#) keenly collect and [trade](#) recordings of live shows.

In return, the band has established a supportive relationship with the taper culture. They sell tickets for special taping sections and have benevolent policies regarding the "kind" distribution of these recordings on the Internet and by snail-mailing CDs.

Drawbacks to the Internet-based system include wide variations in sound quality. Plus, "this decentralized community means that you'll never know what show you're going to find on which server, or when a particular

recording might become available," said Lee Bouyea, a contributing writer for [JamBase](#).

And access to high-quality shows can be difficult for newcomers since tapers generally only offer the recordings for trade.

"Die-hard fans can scour servers or set up mail trades to get these shows, but there are a number of fans who may be new and aren't aware of those channels to acquire shows," Bouyea said.

Enter Live Phish.

"The service is so affordable and easy to use that it's easier to just download (the show) than to bother trying to get it from a friend," said Jason Colton, an associate at Phish management company [Dionysian Productions](#).

In the past, Phish's taping [policy](#) excluded trades of shows that were commercially available. But now the policy has been [amended](#): Tapers are free to trade and share audience recordings of any live show.

"I don't believe this development will affect (the tapers) very much," Bouyea said. "They do what they do for the love of the sport, and for the most part, will continue to tape at shows whenever possible."

Other fans don't think Live Phish's paid music service will affect their music acquisition habits at all.

"I feel no more ethical conflict downloading Live Phish (from Kazaa) than any other artists' work," a Phish fan who identified himself as "Polcs," said. "I'm not concerned about (Phish guitarist and vocalist) Trey (Anastasio) being able to make the rent."

Aside from some fan grumbling, the new site has suffered the inevitable growing pains. In the first two weeks of the launch, system configuration glitches allowed some users to access files they hadn't paid for, while prohibiting paying users from downloading the files they were entitled to.

But fans have been both patient and forgiving.

"Considering that attempts of this type of service on this type of scale has never been tried before, I was annoyed but not altogether surprised," fan Michael Nestrud said.

"When the issue was finally resolved, they gave all those affected by the glitch a free concert to download from the upcoming tour," he said.

Some first-time downloaders also experienced difficulties with the service's technical details. "The learning curve can be intimidating at first, but once they're over the hump, people are thrilled," Colton said.

Not everyone is convinced that Live Phish is the ideal way to circulate shows.

"Live Phish is cheap, efficient and sounds great, but I prefer the community benefits that come with bootlegs," fan Adam Perry said. "I can't imagine how many Deadheads would never have found their husband or wife if every show were available to download online."

Live Phish is not without precedent. [Pearl Jam](#) and [The Who](#) have [made forays](#) into commercially releasing multiple live shows from their tours. Those CDs, however, are only available at retail stores or by mail order.

And while other jam bands such as the [String Cheese Incident](#) and [Widespread Panic](#) have made entire live shows available online, they haven't been offered for sale.

"The commercialization of live music is pure and simple capitalism: a demand is satisfied and a profit is realized," fan Chuck Thies said. "There is phenomenal potential to serve a larger market and rake in considerable dough."



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