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Remixable Albums Offer Hope for Music Industry

By Eliot Van Buskirk ✉ July 14, 2009 | 10:16 am | Categories: [Media](#), [Miscellaneous](#), [People](#), [Social Media](#)

Plenty of ink has been spilled about the major labels' butterfingering approach to new technology, but every once in a while, they get it right. Witness the Romplr remixable iPhone app, the first iteration of which features three songs from Soulja Boy Tell 'Em that users can manipulate as they play.

The \$5 app ([iTunes link](#)), developed by Bell Rock & Moderati, [the same company that brought us the Zippo iPhone app](#), allows fans to mute or solo eight aspects of the songs and pepper playback with seven extra samples, so they can be played differently each time. You can record your version for later listening and share it via e-mail, Facebook, or artists' websites using a streaming from the Romplr site ([video demo](#)).

Not only does this approach give the label something new to sell — at a higher price than the songs would command without the remixing feature, no less — but it lets fans customize music the way they seem to customize everything else in their lives. We simply expect stuff to be interactive these days, and there's no reason music should be any different.

[Deadmau5 released an interactive album in February](#). Since then, this major opportunity has gone relatively untapped.

"I always felt we should do something with music to make it more fun and interactive, beyond just changing the format from physical CDs to digital downloads," explained Jon Vlassopoulos, CEO of Bell Rock & Moderati, which also released a Dance version of Romplr ([iTunes link](#)). "I'd been away from the [music] space for a while doing television [Pop Idol, etc.]... I said, 'someone must have nailed this by now,' but it turned out that no one was really doing what we thought we could deliver, in terms of this fresh, interactive vision of artists and fans collaborating."

As for Universal Music Group, the largest record label in the world, it represents an embrace of new technology that critics say has been all too rare in the past decade. Rather than fighting a new technology, a major label is capitalizing on it in order to boost its bottom line.

"If you're looking at our target demo, our consumer for music, I think kids are going to be more and more interested in doing something interactive," said Christian Jorg, Head of Digital at Island Def Jam Music Group, a division of Universal. "Obviously, they love games, and they love to interact with music. Now you've got an opportunity there with an iPhone app where you can actually do that. Rather than just listen,

which is great, you can also do something with it, and we'd like to be at the forefront of allowing that for the consumer.”

While this particular approach to interactive music works best for loop-based music such as hip hop or electronica, it could spread to other types of music too, said Jorg, who plans to release another Romplr app for his artist, [Jeremih](#), in two to three weeks.

The main stumbling block, as always, is sorting out the rights situation, because allowing fans to remix songs involves a different set of rights than merely allowing them to play it. Still, we expect interactive music formats to grow in importance as more artists and labels begin experimenting with them.

“This is our first jump into it, but we're definitely going to look at other artists and other genres,” said Jorg, “I think people are getting a lot more open to try things, on both the artist and the executive side.”

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