

iTunes cuts **bella figura**

I love Italians because they have better words than us. Not just better-sounding words, but just generally better words. Let me give you an example. The Italian word for positioning statement is *posizionamento*. How much cooler is that?

Here is another example. My favourite word is *sprezzatura*. It means making difficult things look easy. It's an awesome word that does not even have an English equivalent. But if it did, it would be a word commonly associated with iTunes. In April 2003, Apple launched its incredibly successful music-download site and made it all look so easy. So much so, that a host of idiotic competitors have gone charging after it ever since, only to fall flat on their red faces.

For four entertaining years, a cavalcade of big brands has been blowing millions creating 'rivals to iTunes', launched with all the sound and fury 'big marketing' can muster, but fizzling and dying a few embarrassing months later with a three-line press release.

Barely six months after iTunes came Dell. The boring computer brand produced a very boring music-player and partnered with Musicmatch for two years before an almost total lack of customers persuaded it to get out of the MP3 player business before it had ever really got into it.

Next came Coca-Cola's mycokemusic. In the UK, the Coke site actually preceded iTunes and offered British punters 250,000 songs with individual tracks costing from 80p. By 2006, Coke realised that if you can't beat them, join them. It closed the site and started to partner with iTunes.

In May 2004, Sony launched Connect, its music-download site, with a live in-flight

concert from Sheryl Crow. This month Sony finally admitted defeat and closed Connect after four painful years of failure. Sony makes music and MP3 players, but can't do both at the same time successfully.

Despite not having a track record in either business, Stelios was not far behind. In 2005, he launched easy-Music.com. Remarkably, the site remains live, but if



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you try to download an album, you are transferred to CD WOW!, where your 'download' will take three to five days and be burned onto a CD. In other words, it is neither easy's nor a download site anymore.

In September 2005, less than a week apart, we had two equally loopy British attempts to 'take on iTunes'. Virgin was first out of the blocks with its Virgin Digital service. 'It is so user-friendly even I



could use it,' raved Richard Branson. But nobody else bothered and the site was shut down two years later. HMV also pegged its future on a new download service in 2005 that would make it easier for older, less tech-savvy consumers to get their music on-line. 'How many customers know that in buying an iPod, they're effectively locking themselves into a walled garden?' asked HMV's director of e-commerce, John Taylor, cryptically. Three years on and iTunes' 'walled garden' continues to flourish while HMV.com appears to have withered and died. 'Technical issues' have rendered it out of action in recent weeks.

Nokia stepped into the fray last year with its Ovi platform and Nokia Music Store. It's still early days but the site already has the smell of cyber-death wafting from every pixel.

And there are lots of wannabe iTunes lemmings still in mid-leap. The big four mobile operators are about to demonstrate once again how bad they are at marketing by failing to make any money from their music-download services.

There was also Qtrax, which had the shortest launch in the history of marketing in January. Play.com is only just starting to lose money, but has many months to go. Not forgetting the two new marketing idiots on the block: both MySpace and Facebook are also in discussions to launch download services.

The players might change, but the game remains the same.

30 seconds on... music downloads

Market-leader **iTunes** has set a benchmark for single-track download pricing in the UK at **79p**. However, in January the Apple-owned service announced that it would cut its UK prices by July to bring them into line with the **99c (76p)** paid by users in other European countries. Despite this, iTunes' charges will remain significantly higher in

Europe than for users of the US site, where a standard single track costs **99c (49p)**.

This week's number-one single, **Mercy** by **Duffy**, costs **79p** from **iTunes.co.uk**, and the same price from **tescodownloads.com**, **napster.co.uk** and **7digital.com**. The

latter also offers the track with b-side *Save it For Your Prayers* for **£1.29**.

Mercy can be downloaded from **amazon.com** for **99c**, from **T-Mobile Jukebox** for **£1**, **Vodafone** and **Orange Music Stores** for **99p**, and **Nokia** for **80p**. Some services, including Vodafone's, offer lower prices when users buy more tracks.