

Online music store specializes in family-friendly tunes

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By Steve Woodward

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Imagine rap lyrics without the F-bomb, acid rock lyrics without sex or reggae lyrics without drugs.

Howard Rachinski imagined it all last year, when his then-10-year-old son began to get interested in music.

Although Apple's iTunes and other commercial music-download sites offered plenty of Christian and other inoffensive songs and albums, Rachinski wanted something that catered exclusively to religious people like himself and his family.

So, he and his colleagues created Portland, Ore.-based SongTouch, an online music store much like iTunes—but without a single “Parental Advisory” label among its 220,000 religious, inspirational and classical titles.

“Our core target market is people with Judeo-Christian values or faith not wanting to compromise that faith,” Rachinski said.

Today, tens of thousands of SongTouch customers are legally downloading 99-cent copies of such songs as Carrie Underwood's *Jesus, Take the Wheel*, Casting Crowns' *Lifesong* and Tobymac's *Catchafire (Whoopsi-Daisy)*.

SongTouch—www.songtouch.com—offers 27 musical genres, from Americana to Southern gospel, plus spoken-word performances. A recent top-selling song was Mark Harris' gospel song *Find Your Wings*. The top-selling album, at \$9.99, was country singer Alan Jackson's collection of old hymns called *Precious Memories*.

The website also offers news and features about artists, a monthly video show on Christian entertainers, upcoming music releases and customer polls.

A feature called Showcase lets SongTouch users list their recommendations, along with their comments. Other users get to rate the Showcases. Rachinski says Showcase users often turn the service into a way to help others.

"I just went through a tough time," Rachinski paraphrased one Showcase user as writing, "and I just went through this music for things that would help me. Here's what I found that helped me through it."

SongTouch already is drawing attention in the entertainment world. The website is the only online Christian store that Microsoft has built into its system of exclusive partner stores in Windows Media Player 10. Grammy winner Amy Grant, one of Christian music's top stars, sent word through her agent that she wants to record spots advertising the site. Point of Grace, a Grammy-nominated Christian singing group, asked SongTouch to feature its music video.

Rachinski is no stranger to Christian music. The former church music minister is president and chief executive of Christian Copyright Licensing International. The little-known company acts as a middleman between

170,000 client churches worldwide and the holders of copyrighted music that the churches wish to use in worship services.

SongTouch, which is affiliated with Christian Copyright Licensing, will be offered as a service to churches that want to use SongTouch's technology to sell music, including their own labels, on their websites. Christian music is about 6 percent to 7 percent of all music downloads now, Rachinski said, but he expects the category to grow exponentially.

"I have no personal animosity against Eminem or Madonna," the 55-year-old Rachinski said. "But some people want a safe place to go."

Steve Woodward writes for The Oregonian of Portland, Ore.

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