

30 Gigabytes Dot Com

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10 things your iPod will never tell you

1. "It's good to be king — but my reign may be coming to an end."
Since launching the [iPod](#) in 2001, Apple has been the undisputed leader in digital music players, owning 90 percent of the market. What has set the iPod apart is not only its hip, user-friendly design, but also its companion iTunes music store, the first megamart, offering an ever-expanding catalog of songs for purchase at the click of a mouse. This two-pronged approach has given Apple a huge lead over competitors; so far the company has sold over 40 million iPods and more than a billion songs on [iTunes](#). But the iPod's days at the top may be numbered.

At issue is Apple's proprietary format, which makes the iPod incompatible with other [MP3](#) technology. According to Chris Crotty, senior analyst for [consumer](#) electronics at iSuppli, such closed systems either move toward compatibility or get surpassed by the competition. Think of AOL's early bid to set up its own online world — highly successful, until the bigger and better [MSN](#) rendered it obsolete. Apple is similarly positioned and could end up painting itself into a corner, just as it did with [iMac](#). "Over time the market prefers open [platforms](#)," Crotty says.

2. "Customer service is a privilege, not a right." Customer Service isn't what it used to be. According to Ross Rubin, analyst at the NPD Group, companies across the board are pushing "more self-service" to cut costs. But even so, he says, Apple is "pretty aggressive in terms of the consumer electronics industry." iPod buyers, for example, get just one call to [customer](#) service during the first 90 days of ownership; each one after that costs \$49. (If you want more phone time, the AppleCare Protection Plan costs \$59, offers unlimited calls for two years and doubles the one-year warranty.)

So where to turn for free help with your sputtering iPod? You can always visit an [Apple Store](#) — if you happen to live near one and don't mind the wait. But the Web is the real motherlode of information. For starters, Apple's site offers tons of troubleshooting advice and some quick-and-dirty DIYs. But for more-complex problems, the company has, in effect, outsourced customer service — to its own customers. Sites like iLounge.com and iPoding.com offer tutorials and bulletin boards where users answer one another's questions and explain tricky repairs. And you get to come back as many times as you want.

3. "If you drop me, I'm toast." You've seen the ads — hip, young people exuberantly dancing with iPod in hand. But the reality is, the device is delicate. Apple's edgy designs "tend to be more attractive, but also more fragile" than other players, says industry analyst Rob Enderle.

At the heart of many iPods is a tiny [LCD](#) that can stop working if it's dropped or even knocked around. (Just imagine boogying down the sidewalk with your [iPod](#).) But it's not only the hard drive that needs careful handling — the screens on these players have been a source of trouble as well. Apple admits some of its Nano iPod screens were faulty, causing them to crack and scratch too easily, but claims the problem affected "less than 1 percent." Patrick Destvet, a New York City psychologist, says it isn't just a Nano problem; the color screen on his new 30-gigabyte [video](#) iPod was scratched up after a month, making it hard to see anything on the device. "Coming from Apple, I didn't expect this," Destvet says.

To [protect](#) your iPod, invest in a padded case. Apple sells a \$99 leather shell; other good covers include Incase's neoprene sleeves and Speck Products' rubberized cases. Visit [www.applestore.com](#) for the best selection.

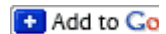
4. "You say 'backup'; we say 'copyright infringement.'" Apple makes it very easy to load your iPod with music — iTunes [software](#) is free to anybody who wants it. But once you've filled

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your player with as many as 15,000 songs, it's not so easy to get them off again. Because of _____, Apple doesn't let you move music from your iPod to another _____ or other electronic devices, even though it would be legal to do so. This measure was taken to appease the music companies. "A lot of people are quick to point the finger, but it's not Apple that is necessarily driving the restrictions," Crotty says. "Not that they mind" – since such controls allow Apple to stymie the competition.

Fortunately, there are ways to circumvent Apple's roadblock through third- _____, which allows you to move music from your iPod back to any computer. Among the many options, both Mac and _____ users can download PodUtil (about \$20) from www.kennettnet.co.uk, while PC users can save a few bucks with PodPlus (\$15), available at www.ipodsoft.com. After downloading the software, you'll be asked to plug in your iPod so the software can pull the music from your player and save it in your iTunes folder.

5. "My _____ is pathetic." The _____ boasts a robust battery life of 20 hours. But if you look at the fine print, Apple admits on its _____ site that "battery life and number of charge cycles vary by use and settings." The company also warns consumers that you can recharge a battery only so many times before it must be replaced. According to The Rough Guide to iPods, the magic number is 500, depending on use. And you'll know it's coming – after 400 charges, your _____ will hold only about 80 percent of its capacity.

For a few years Apple simply refused to recognize the problem and recommended that users buy a new player if the battery died. Only after a public outcry – and a class-action lawsuit – did the company develop a battery-replacement program. Now you can send back your ailing iPod and get another for \$59, plus \$6.95 shipping. Most likely, you'll receive a comparable used or refurbished unit.

Better to extend the life of the battery you have. Do this by regularly updating your iPod's software. Check Apple's Web site for the latest version; you can download a free upgrade there. And don't charge your iPod in its case, where it can overheat and diminish the battery's capacity.

6. "I'm destroying your hearing." A major selling point of digital music players is that you can tune out the world around you for hours at a time. But as you crank up your iPod to drown out ambient noise, you could be damaging your ears. According to a study by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, at full volume an iPod can generate up to 120 decibels, equal to the sound of a jet plane taking off. At that level you'll begin sustaining permanent hearing loss or tinnitus after just five to 10 minutes. The issue is serious enough that Apple recently introduced software that allows you to cap the volume of your iPod, or your child's iPod (available for free download at the Apple Web site).

"Noise-induced hearing loss is easy to ignore until it's too late," says Pam Mason, an audiologist at the ASLHA. Extended listening at 80 to 85 decibels is safe, according to Mason. Roughly speaking, that means you should turn it down if you can't hear someone talking normally three feet away from you or if the people around you can hear your music. It also helps to invest in a good pair of noise-canceling or noise-isolating earphones. Both types block out ambient sound so you needn't jack up the volume as high.

7. "I'm out of date before I'm out of the box." Last fall small-business owner Peter Quinones wanted to replace his iPod but kept hearing Apple was about to come out with an improved model. "I was in a holding pattern," the Miami resident says. "You don't want to buy something and find out a week later there's a new product." So Quinones waited six months, then bought a video iPod instead of the Nano he'd been considering. His new player worked with the cradle in his Mercedes; the Nano wouldn't have.

All consumer tech companies have shortened their product cycles, adding innovative new features to maintain their competitive edge. But with the iPod, Apple seems to be churning out new versions at an unprecedented rate: In just the past 14 months, the company has introduced 12 models. By contrast, the first 14 iPod models were rolled out over the course of three years.

"It can be a nuisance for some consumers," says Susan Kevorkian, an analyst at IDC, since some of the older accessories, such as speakers or docks, aren't necessarily compatible with the newer models. Fortunately, Apple has now standardized the docks for the iPod, meaning future models should still work with the one you buy today.

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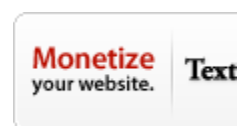
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8. "I've sparked a crime wave." You know a product is popular when it becomes a favorite target of thieves. In New York City, an increase in crime on the subways has been blamed on the iPod, as folks sporting the telltale white earphones are being ripped off in record numbers. And sadly, 15-year-old Christopher Rose was killed last summer in Brooklyn when he refused to hand over an iPod to a mugger.

But iPod crime isn't isolated to urban areas. A number of college and high school campuses have experienced a rash of thefts, leading some schools to ban the device. Keith Bromery, spokesperson for the Broward County school board in Florida, says that district recently restricted the use of iPods and other electronic devices, citing theft and peer pressure to own these items as distractions to learning.

Kevin H. Watson, spokesperson for the Law Enforcement Alliance of America, says the iPod is a favorite among thieves because "it's easy to conceal, it has turnover value on the street and people are willing to buy one on the black market." Not to mention, they're easy to spot: "The white headphones are a giveaway," he says, "just like flashing a fancy watch." He recommends other earphones and not using your iPod in dicey areas.

9. "We'll nickel-and-dime you any chance we get." The first quarter of this year was a record-breaker for Apple: The company reported new highs for both revenue (\$5.75 billion) and earnings (\$565 million). Yet even with these impressive financial stats, the company continues to pile on extra fees for owning and maintaining an iPod.

We're not talking about the burgeoning iPod accessories market, such as stylish cases and portable speaker systems. No, Apple has begun charging for standard equipment it once included with the cost of the player. Why? "It keeps retail prices down and drives sales volume," Kevorkian says. Early iPod models shipped with a wall charger and a dock. These "extras" will now cost you \$29 and \$39, respectively. Want to connect your video iPod to a TV? You'll have to buy a cord separately, for \$19.

Adding insult to injury, should your iPod conk out after the warranty expires, you could end up paying more to get it fixed than it would cost to buy a new one — repairs on a Nano, for example, run a standard \$189 plus shipping, while new in the box, it's as little as \$150.

10. "Once you go iPod, you're locked in for life." One of the reasons Apple has been able to dominate the digital music player market until now is that while the iPod can play songs from a variety of sources, music bought online at the iTunes store can be used only on an iPod. That's because the company developed its own format for songs, called Protected AAC, instead of using the widely compatible MP3. Crotty points out that while basic AAC is an open format, the digital rights management software Apple lays over it — called, ahem, "Fair Play" — renders it incompatible with other players. No other company is legally allowed to make a device that can play songs in Apple's format.

The company claims AAC has many advantages over MP3, but the format also serves as the lock on the iPod's closed door — which could lead to its downfall. "They've set themselves up as Apple and the iPod versus the rest of the MP3 market," Crotty says. "Customers may get upset that they can't move their purchased music." The tide is already turning in Europe, which, he adds, "doesn't accept a closed system as a business practice": The French government is considering a law that would force Apple to allow music on the iTunes store to work on competitors' players.



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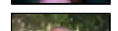
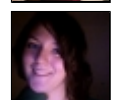
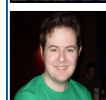
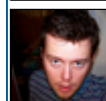
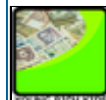
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