

Apple Expands in UK, Germany, Targeted by Legislation in France

According to AppleInsider, Apple Computer is planning to open as many as 20 new retail stores in the U.K., a number of new stores in Germany, and a third store in Toronto, Canada.

These aggressive plans follow the recent success Apple has had in moving into the educational computer market in Europe. The company displaced Dell to take the No. 1 spot in western Europe for educational computer sales with a 15.2 percent market share.

Apple has traditionally been strong in educational sectors, but had lost market share in recent years. Now with successful new products like the iMac, iPod and iTunes the company has renewed its appeal to a new generation of younger computer users.

European Apple execs hinted that the company's next push in Europe might be towards IT departments. According to Apple people, this long-sought-after-market is seeing a shift towards the kind of technologies that Apple has specialised in: instant message, podcasting, and corporate video production.

****French government targets Apple iTunes with legislation**

Legislation was recently tabled in the French National Assembly that seems to be targeted at Apple iTunes. The new legislation is intended to squelch services such as iTunes that use digital format exclusivity as a means of controlling distribution.

In other words, the backers of the bill would make it illegal to sell digital music that was formatted so it could only be played on specific players. iTunes downloads can only be played on Apple devices like the iPod.

Some consumer groups see this as a way of charging customers more than once for the same product. Apple is not alone in following such a policy, but the success of iTunes makes the company the most prominent and most visible target.

The bill would also make it easier to circumvent digital rights management technology such as Apple's Fair Play and Microsoft's Plays for Sure which the bill's authors see as a way of restricting consumer access to digital music which they have already paid for in some other format.

The fine for "digital piracy" would also be reduced from the current \$300,000 to a mere 38 euros when used for personal purposes.

What is behind the proposed bill is an attempt to create a "global" solution to digital music distribution, where once purchased in one format a piece of music would be available in all formats, and playable on all players. Consumers would pay a small fee and then be allowed to download and share music with very few restrictions.

Predictably, many established artists oppose the bill, while many less established artists support it. New artists are interested in exposure for their music and see laws that restrict access as favoring older, more established artists. Once they become established they become not-so-surprisingly sympathetic to marketing techniques that help them cash in on their success.

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