

# Yahoo Radio

By Don Lewis

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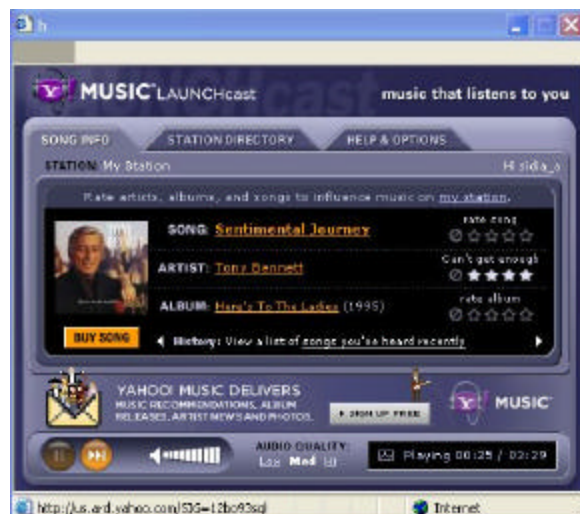
Yahoo offers three levels of service called LAUNCHcast, LAUNCHcast Plus and Yahoo Music Unlimited.

## LAUNCHcast

Yahoo LAUNCHcast provides free music listening supported by advertising. It features programmed stations broken into many categories and genres. I estimate that there are about 200 different stations. However, about half of them require the paid services LAUNCHcast Plus or Yahoo Unlimited. This still leaves a large variety of stations to choose from in the free services. These include the categories of Top 10, Urban, Rock, County, Pop/Dance, Jazz/Blues, Decades, Oldies and more. Under these categories are genres of Today's Big Hits, Love Songs, Country and Smooth Jazz as examples. There are far too many to mention. The stations play music from the Yahoo database. There are no disk jockeys or other commentary.

I was disappointed to find that there were no blues stations and only one classical station in the free service. This probably would have ended my research with Yahoo except for the "My Station" feature. This lets you rank artists, songs, albums and genres to build your own station. It mixes in tracks or similar artists or artists that are recommended by other fans of the artists you have ranked. You can change the ranking of any track as it plays. You can reject any artist or song so that it will never play again on your station. You can also skip tracks, but the number of skips allowed is limited. If you take advantage of the My Station feature you can soon build a station with the music you like. More blues and classical stations in Launchcast would make it a much more competitive product.

The LAUNCHcast service runs in a popup in MS Internet Explorer. No special player is needed, but no other browsers are supported. There is a downside to this, however. Response is slow in loading the LAUNCHcast pages. The player runs in a popup that is subject to be blocked by the Internet Explorer's and other popup blockers. Yahoo provides instruction to put the service in the trusted zone, but it still usually gets blocked on the first try. Starting it again usually works, but sometimes there is a server error to cause further delays. The process is a little unstable. Worse, Internet Explorer occasionally crashes. This player is simple with only a few options. Once it gets going the music sounds good even though it is medium quality. It does not define what medium means, but it was not bad and I



could not tell a lot of difference in it and the high quality in the paid services.

A 30 second commercial is played about every 10 to 15 minutes. They are not too intrusive except when a particularly aggressive one is played repeatedly.

After about an hour of listening the music stops and a screen ask if you are still there. To continue you must go through starting the pop-up again. This gets a little annoying.

You can listen to 600 songs per month for free without any special restrictions. After this threshold the customized radio is not available, no song skipping is allowed and the quality is reduced to low mono. There is definitely a difference in this quality. Normal service is restored at the beginning of the next month.

### **LAUNCHcast Plus**

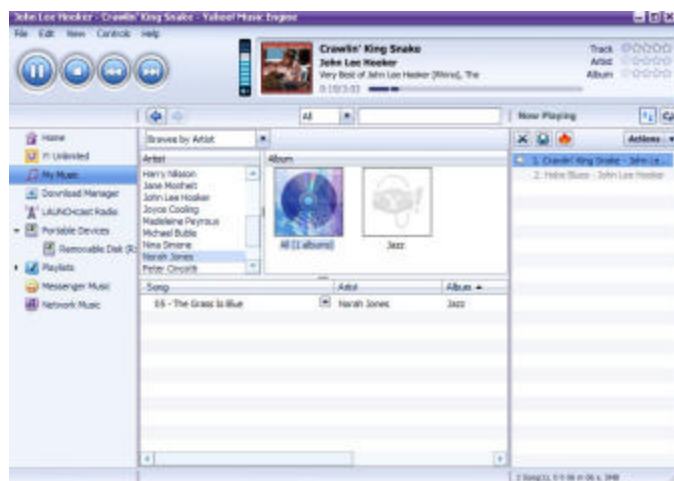
LAUNCHcast Plus offers high (CD) quality, unlimited customized station play, unlimited song skipping, no commercials and access to the exclusive stations. It is available either on a monthly basis for \$3.99/month, or for an annual subscription of \$29.87, billed annually (that's \$2.50 a month).

### **Yahoo Music Unlimited**

This service requires downloading and installing the Yahoo music engine. The engine only runs on Windows XP or Windows 2000. The download went quickly, but the installation had problems. When I restarted after the installation was complete, my computer hung with a black screen and a message stating an Auxiliary Device had failed with F key options to continue. The F key options did nothing. Restarting again brought the system back up. The music engine application is free and will not be impacted if you cancel a Yahoo music unlimited subscription.

The Yahoo software has some annoying behavior. First, it asks to install the Yahoo Internet Explorer toolbar. I allowed this and it can be useful, but it is hard to put out of the way when you don't need it. There is a View drop down menu to remove it and it does, but it may come back the next time you launce IE. Uninstalling it removes the annoyance. The music engine installs an icon on your desk top and places itself in the system tray.

There is also a routine launched at start up that wants to call home. No reason is given, but I assume it is looking for updates. My firewall stops the communication, but why do I



need a routine constantly taking up my computer resources? There is a preference to remove the icon from the system tray, but if you run the engine, it puts it back on.

One LAUNCHcast commercial says, “You can get 1 million songs a month for five bucks, but you don’t have to listen to them all at once. Hell, no! Build your own play lists. Upgrade to Yahoo Music Unlimited” I doubt that I can listen to a million songs in a month and I did not verify that they have a million, but this is a good description of the unlimited service. You can search by artist, album or song and build your own playlists. The music data base seems extensive, but not totally complete. I was not able find music by Eddie Arnold. I did find Janis Joplin, but not the particular track I was looking for.

Instead of listening to streaming music you can download the tracks to your hard drive. They can be played there offline and even moved to other computers. The tracks only play in the Yahoo music engine and only while your subscription is in effect. Saved tracks cannot be shared with other users or burned to CDs. They can be used on up to four computers by the subscribing user. The tracks work without an Internet connection. You can create a playlist of any number of tracks from any number of artists. It is a very nice feature at a reasonable price. The only downside is that the tracks must be played on the computer.

Yahoo Music Unlimited costs \$6.99, paid month-to-month. The yearly plan is \$4.99 per month for 12 months billed upfront for a total of \$59.88.

Yahoo Music Unlimited tracks can be downloaded to handheld players for an additional charge, but the players that work are limited. iPod players are not supported. This service is called Yahoo Unlimited Music To Go. It costs \$119.88 per year, billed annually (that's just \$9.99 per month); or \$11.99 per month, billed monthly.

This is the first in a continuing series of articles. All will be published in the PPCUG newsletter as they are finished. All articles will be available in the Product Review section of the website at [www.ppcuginc.com](http://www.ppcuginc.com).