

Internet Radio Musicmatch Jukebox

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By Don Lewis

This is the third article in my review of Internet radio services. If you missed previous articles, they are available in the Product Review section of our website at <http://ppcuginc.com/prodrev.htm>.

The MusicMatch radio service requires the MusicMatch Jukebox player. It is available free from <http://www.musicmatch.com/>. The Jukebox claims to be an integrated digital music management software tool that combines a CD ripper and burner, MP3 encoder, playlist maker, ID3 tag editor, streaming radio service, and a media player all in a single program. The program does all of this and does it well, but it is not so simple. While the interface is easy to follow, the program has the reputation of being bloated. It has some bad habits such as installing itself in the system tray, wanting to take control of all music file types and asking to call home twice every time you start the system or launch the program. I use the ZoneAlarm firewall to control outgoing traffic. If you want to run the program as media player with no Internet



access, it takes a long time for the player to accept that it will not be able to get to the Internet. Some users have gone to previous versions due to the bloat in the current version, version 10. I did not try other versions. Old versions are available at <http://www.oldversion.com/program.php?n=mmatch>.

The free streaming radio function is pretty good, but has some limitations. There is a wide verity of stations. Most of them are available for an hour each day in CD quality for free. The stations arrange the Musicmatch database into many categories. Some of my favorites are New Orleans Jazz, Dixieland, Chicago Blues and Light Classical. The free service also provides access to Artist Match Radio for the hour. This allows you to search for a specific artist. It builds a playlist of tracks. The first is usually the artist you searched for. Then it plays music by similar or related artists. Songs by the artist you requested will be scattered through the playlist. This is a good feature. It may introduce you to new music that you were not aware of or remind you of artists and songs you had forgotten. At the end of an hour Artist Match and some of the radio stations become unavailable and the quality changes to medium. These restrictions remain until the following day. This appears to be controlled with cookies and the hour is not exact. The restrictions may not become effective for up to two hours unless you attempt to change stations. The free service does include commercials, but they are only promoting MMJ's premium service.

The premium service is called Musicmatch On Demand. It has unlimited CD quality access to all radio stations and Artist Match. It claims to have 900,000 songs in the database. On Demand also provides the ability to search for an artist and listen to a playlist of that artist only. During the seven day free trial, I discovered that not all of an artist's music is available in On Demand. The worst example was The Eagles who had 169 songs available on Artist Match but only two available in On Demand and the two songs were the same. I don't know how many songs they have recorded, but 169 songs seem low. Most other artists were better, but On Demand still did not have all of their songs. A new artists, James Blunt, was available in Artist Match, but had no songs in On Demand.

Clicking on an artist in On Demand will create a playlist of 30 songs of that artist. However, there may be many duplicates in the list. Clicking again adds another 30 songs assuming the artist has that many, but again there are duplicates. You can choose a different artist and add his songs to the list. You can delete songs from the playlist and put them in any order. The playlists can be saved and shared with other subscribers of On Demand.

AutoDJ is another nice feature. It allows you to create a playlist by entering a few of your favorite artists. AutoDJ will create a playlist of songs by these artists from your library and the On Demand data base, or it is supposed to. I could not get it to work. I entered five artists that I knew had tracks in the database but it said there was no music matching my criteria. I tired just one artist. It came up with a list that contained artists from the list of similar artists, but not the artist I had entered. I wish I could have seen this work, but I was running out of time in my free trial and did not pursue it through customer support.

The Musicmatch Music Discovery Engine is a feature to identify artists related to one that you choose. The feature searches the recommendation of more than 30 million Musicmatch subscribers. It will display a list of 50-100 artists most closely related to the one you chose. It lists tracks by each artist in popularity order.

On Demand costs \$6.99 per month billed monthly, \$5.99 billed for three months (\$17.97) or \$4.99 billed for 12 months (\$59.88).

Musicmatch offers another premium service called Radio Gold. This features unlimited Artist Match, access to all radio stations, CD Quality Sound with no ads. It can be accessed from any PC. The cost of this service is \$2.95 per month billed annually (\$35.40).

Both On Demand and Radio Gold are good services for a reasonable price. The only problem with it is the incomplete song list, but you may never miss them.