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McGill academic offers plan to end file swapping

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MONTREAL

An academic at McGill University has a plan to stop the plague of unauthorized music downloads on the Internet. And Apple Computers, which may have the power to persuade the music industry to accept it, is listening.

Music-industry veteran Sandy Pearlman, a former producer of the Clash and now a visiting scholar at McGill, spoke with a kind of nervous glee while describing his idea at the Canadian Music Week conference in Toronto recently. Pearlman proposes putting all recorded music on a robust search engine -- Google would be an ideal choice, but even iTunes might work -- and charging an insignificant fee of, say, five cents a song.

In addition, a one per cent sales tax would be placed on Internet services and new computers -- two industries that many argue have profited enormously from rampant file-sharing, but haven't had to compensate artists.

The assumption is that if songs cost only five cents, people would download exponentially more music.

Daniel Levitin, a McGill professor also associated with the project, said a simple computer program, such as those already in use on Internet retail sites, could track people's purchases and help them dig through what would become a massive repository of music on the web. Pearlman said nothing concrete is in the works with Apple beyond talks, and he has not yet spoken with Google.

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