

Sony in streaming challenge to Apple

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Sony set out its challenge to Apple and Google as it revealed an internet "cloud-based" music streaming service that would be available on many of its networked consumer electronics products.

The MusicUnlimited service was announced at IFA, a large consumer electronics show in Berlin, barely an hour before Apple's own music-themed press conference in California, where it was expected to reveal updates to its iPod, iTunes and Apple TV products.

In addition to its iTunes music library, Apple has also been investing in streaming services, buying the Lala.com music website in December, while Google has demonstrated a cloud-based music service for its Android operating system.

Sony has so far failed to mount a serious comeback against Apple in music – its Walkman players are overshadowed by the iPod and previous efforts at music services have found little success.

The latest attempt will form part of its Qriocity online service, which was unveiled in January, with MusicUnlimited being added to an existing video-on-demand service.

The Qriocity platform will function alongside Sony's PlayStation Network, whereby users of its games consoles can access the internet, but it will cover more of the group's devices.

Sony said it would eventually "deliver a variety of digital entertainment content and services that are 'powered by Qriocity', including video, music, game applications and e-books".

The Japanese company did not give details of any content deals but said millions of songs could be stored and synchronised through its cloud service.

It will initially be available across Sony's 2010 models of internet-connected televisions, Blu-ray players, the PlayStation 3, Vaio laptops and other personal computers, with portable devices such as the PSP also due to be included.

Howard Stringer, president of Sony, said last year that 90 per cent of Sony products would be able to connect to each other and to the internet by 2011. The group's \$260m acquisition of Gracenote, a service which can track and identify music files across devices, in 2008 could play a significant role in the new service, which has been two years in the making.

Sony phased out its Connect music service in the US and Europe in 2007, leaving the way clear for Apple to consolidate its dominance in the digital download market. Since then Sony has used third-party providers to supply a digital download music service.

Content owners have been keen for a company with Sony's scale and marketing power to counterbalance Apple's dominance of the digital media field.

Apple was expected to introduce new social networking features to its iTunes software, allowing users to share details of the songs and movies they buy and watch with friends on Twitter and Facebook.

Fonte: Financial Times, London, Sept. 1st 2010, Technology, online.