

Product wars

In the same month that the Sony Walkman celebrates its 25th anniversary, Apple is set to launch its iPod Mini to a new generation of music-lovers. Who will win the battle of the digital music players?

1 Do you / would you buy music on-line? Why / why not?

2 Look at the 'product features' table below. Scan paragraph three of the article and complete the missing information.

	Apple iPod	Apple iPod Mini	Sony Network Walkman
Weight	5.6 ounces		
Number of songs		1,000	
Battery life			

iPod vs Network Walkman

Let the war begin! Apple's iPod is the most popular digital music player in the world and has more than 50% of the market share. July 24 sees the international launch of the new Apple iPod Mini – which is already a US success, with many shops out of stock. Advance orders are high!

25 years ago, after launching the ground-breaking Walkman, a word that has now entered the English dictionary, Sony are launching a digital Network Walkman sending a clear message to Apple: they want to take over the number one slot in the growing market for legally downloading digital music. Buy the Sony machine and you can download tunes from their website. Meanwhile, Apple's iTunes Music Store has surpassed sales of 1.5 million songs and claims more than a 70% market share of legal downloads for singles and albums. Last month, iTunes opened in Europe for users in the UK, France and Germany, with one song from a music library of over 700,000 costing just €0.99.

So, how do the music players compare? The new Sony weighs in at a tiny 3.9 ounces, while the new iPod Mini is just 3.6 ounces. According to Sony, their new digital recorder holds 13,000 songs. Apple have complained that the comparison is unfair to the iPod, which holds 10,000 songs, saying the Sony claim is based on a different compression rate. Sony already point to a much longer battery life for their player – at around 30 hours compared to just 8 for both the Apple iPod and the iPod Mini.

Huge growth is now forecast for the sale of music in digital format. The global market is worth up to \$1,500m this year, and downloads could represent about 20% of the overall music market within 10 years. Already there are over 4 million downloads of MP3 tracks each day. While the majority of music on the web is free, many consumers who currently purchase CDs online may also switch to downloading some tracks. As for owning a sleek, new digital music player – with rival models from Philips and Samsung set to appear, no one quite knows who will win the battle!

3 Read the whole article. Do you agree with the predictions in the text? Justify your answers.

4 Can you use the expressions from the text in relation to your own company's products or services?

international launch ground-breaking global market rival models huge growth

5 Work in groups of four. Compare two rival products. Produce a similar table of 'product features', as in exercise 2. Each pair describes one product and presents it to the class. Which product does the rest of the class prefer?