



## A FREE LUNCH?

Why is it that, when we expect to pay for pretty much everything else we buy or use, we expect the internet to be free?

I was thinking about this in the context of the decision of The Times and The Sunday Times to start charging for their on-line content. That's being seen as a brave decision, but some on-line newspaper content already has to be paid for: My subscription to [The Economist](#) gets me access to its web site, and The Financial Times also has subscriber-only content. So, the assumption must be that people will pay for stuff they value.

Perhaps the problem for "general" news is the dominance of the "free-to-air" BBC web site (save, of course, that the "free" part comes through an obligatory licence fee). So, it is the comparison with the [BBC](#) site and the free/paid for difference that makes the decisions of Mr Murdoch's titles interesting.

But it isn't just news that is the "battleground" here: the sale, use and sharing of music is – arguably – a larger battle. If you are interested, there's a good article about [Digital Music and Online Intermediaries](#) published by the Society for Computers and Law, which my colleague Alison Marshall (a director of SCL's Scottish branch) alerted me to. But I had my eyes *really* opened in conversations I had around the fringes of a board meeting of [CCW Long Play Limited](#), where it was argued that illegal file sharing was (put simply) theft. In the past, people sharing files might have been happy to do that against corporate music giants, but now when the rights are owned and being exploited by the musicians themselves will that continue?

The lesson might therefore be that if we all expect internet content to be free, and in particular if illegal file sharing of music continues, not only will the artists *not* have a free lunch: they may get no lunch at all!

Time, therefore, for this phase of internet growth to come to an end and, like everything else in life, we should pay for what we use.

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