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How about a movie to go with your music?

CinemaNow.com offers movie rentals via download

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Chances are, if you have a computer, Internet access and time to spend online, you've downloaded a song or two. In recent years, services such as Napster and iTunes have provided safe, legal copies of music files for download, at a cost that has lured in millions of subscribers.

With larger numbers of people having high-speed Internet access, the download of much larger files (such as entire movies) becomes possible. This is where cinemanow.com, a service that allows one to legally rent or purchase movies by download, comes in.

Though you may never have heard of it, cinemanow.com has been around since 1999. Its partners/investors include Microsoft, Lions Gate Entertainment and rental chain Blockbuster.

Use of the service is straight-forward: Register with the site and browse for movies (which can be browsed even without signing up). Once a movie strikes interest it can be added to the "shopping cart" and checked out.

After completing the checkout process, the user might be asked to download a small download manager file

for CinemaNow, along with certain ActiveX controls for a browser. (This may be problematic for users concerned about security.)

"Can you say 'spyware?'" said Christopher Blount, senior hospitality management major.

Once necessary files are present, the download begins. Upon its completion, the user can access the movie through a tab on the Web site for up to 48 hours.

Taking an hour or two, depending on connection speed, to download might still feel excessive for waiting on a movie. However, the time is not spent driving to a rental store or waiting for a mail delivery for a film rented via mail-order.

"You can start watching your movie in as little as 30 seconds ... rather than 30 hours," said Director of Marketing Jared Goldsmith.

The movies are streamed, so once a certain amount is downloaded the user can begin watching the movie while it continues to download in the background.

You rent a movie for 24 hours, but the clock does not begin ticking until "play" is hit. If the user is not going to watch the movie right away, he or she doesn't lose any time.

Unfortunately, despite high-speed Internet access allowing easy downloads of large files, many people may not have the hard drive space to store those files.

Another problem is the intangibility of a downloaded file.

"I would like to download them for the convenience factor. However, I would prefer to be able to burn them and view them on a DVD set up rather than a computer," said Heather Schroeder, junior paralegal studies major.

CinemaNow operates in the "pay-per-view window." Movies available are very new, but are not available in advance of a DVD release, so there's no special advantage time-wise.

Ultimately, CinemaNow offers an alternative to renting physical movies and as a leader in such services, it is effectively the Napster or iTunes of movies.

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