

# Digital Rights Management at odds with rights of consumer



MATT SCHNEIDER

If you ever want to have fun at the expense of your conservative capitalist friends, get them started on a rant about personal property, then ask them about digital rights.

Sure it sounds boring now, but just wait 'til you see the looks on their faces when they segue from insisting on the right to their property to the necessity of Digital Rights Management (DRM).

DRM is an umbrella term for the measures that companies take to "protect" their digital content. This protection amounts to controlling the ways in which you're allowed to use your purchased media.

One of the classic—and still most prevalent—forms of DRM can be found on almost every DVD you own: region settings. These determine what regions (ie countries) a particular DVD is authorised to be played in. For example, you can't watch your North American copy of *Pulp Fiction* in Germany: DVDs marketed in North America are marked as Region 1 and can't be played in Germany's Region 2 DVD players. Instead, you're stuck with the choice of buying your collection all over again or owning two DVD players—one for American movies and one for European imports.

The same policies are in place for music. CDs from major labels often have copy-control labels on them, indicating that the record company has taken measures to prevent you from playing your CD as you please. In the case of my copy of Radiohead's *Hail to the Thief*, it means that I can only play it on my laptop if I use the included CD application, which regularly crashes my computer—leaving my Xbox as the only way to listen to the thing.

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Likewise, Apple's iTunes DRM prevents you from transferring your iTunes purchases to an MP3 player other than an iPod, making every purchase you make on iTunes just one more reason not to buy a non-Apple MP3 player.

With the new emphasis on digital delivery, DRM is becoming a bigger threat to consumer rights than ever. When you buy something online, you're not always buying what you would get if it were a physical product. Unbox, Amazon's newest digital download service, offers customers the ability to download their movies digitally at an average savings of about

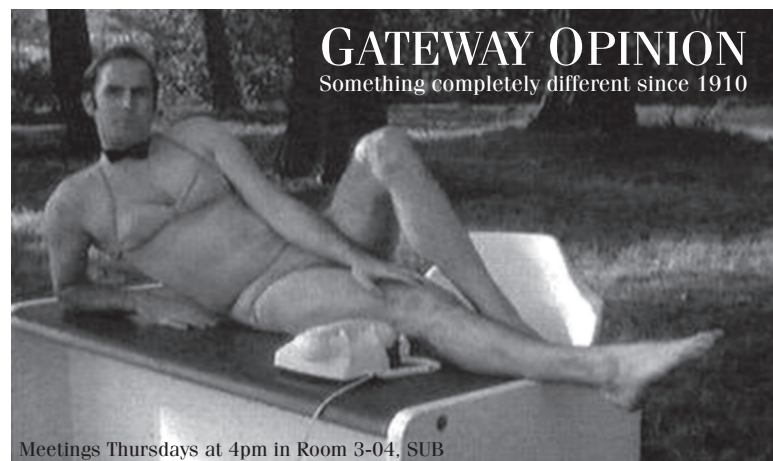
five dollars. While it may be cheaper and more convenient than going to a store to buy your movies, as always, the devil's in the details.

According to Unbox's terms-of-service agreement, you're not actually buying the movie you're downloading, you're renting it—albeit indefinitely. Because you're only renting the movie—a point the agreement emphasizes by referring to the movie as "rental digital content" and your payment as a "rental fee" (despite the fact that the button you click to pay for the service says "buy" on it)—Amazon controls how you view it.

You can't play the movie using any software other than their software, and if you delete their software, the agreement gives you the following bit of customer relations: "your ability to view all Digital Content you have downloaded to the Authorized Device will immediately and automatically terminate and we reserve the right to delete all Digital Content from that Authorized Device without notice to you." Enjoy your purchase indeed.

While I can understand that the digital age requires a new business model, I think that we should probably leave serfdom off the list. Sure, businesses have a right to make their money, but in that case shouldn't their customers have the right to own their purchases?

The concept of digital property is a new one, but that doesn't mean that we should have to work our way forward from the Dark Ages all over again.



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# Texting too much takes its toll



ELIZABETH MCMILLAN

*"Maybe this trend bypassed the Maritimes; maybe I was too busy enjoying the novelty of caller ID to notice. Needless to say, I was unprepared for the onslaught of this new social realm. People could text as fast as they type, and all without a keyboard. It was fascinating, yet disturbing. I had to get in on the action."*

As a recent transplant from Eastern Canada, I expected a bit of culture shock when I moved out West. I assumed this would result from an overwhelming supply of ten-gallon hats, belt buckles and cowboy boots—what I didn't expect was to feel like I was living in the technological Stone Age.

Let's make one thing clear: I hate cellphones. They aren't convenient—they're a nuisance. People call at the worst times and I feel guilty picking up. It's like waiting in line at the bank, only to have the cashier serve the lazy schmuck who calls in (sitting at home wondering about his interest rates, no doubt) ahead of you.

Despite this, every summer when I move back in with my parents I have a cellphone. This way I get to avoid their inadvertent screening of my social life and protect them from the drunken, late-night phone calls at the same time.

Year after year, instead of being a responsible cellphone addict, I continually lose, misplace and forget my phone. I've left legions of people concerned about my whereabouts because I couldn't inform them I was at the doctor's and would phone back later. Like any amateur phone user, I

also neglected my phone at opportune times, causing it to ring during dinners, work hours and hospital visits.

When I relocated to Alberta, I intended to rely on landlines and stay under the cellular radar as much as possible. I didn't anticipate that not only would I never be home to use said landlines, but that talking on cellphones isn't the worst of its technological demons.

As someone who grew up a part of the instant messaging generation—I even remember ICQ—I never expected to lose touch with IM capabilities. Dismissing it as a European trend, I left myself open and vulnerable to mobile ignorance—I was blindsided by text messaging.

Maybe this trend bypassed the Maritimes; maybe I was too busy enjoying the novelty of caller ID to notice. Needless to say, I was unprepared for the onslaught of this new social realm. People could text as fast as they type, and all without a keyboard. It was fascinating, yet disturbing. I had to get in on the action.

It took me five minutes to find a respectable ring tone that would not make me disown the device. It took even longer for me to type a

one-screen message. I was amazed that with two simple letters my name could be completed and that a jumbled mess of letters would suddenly fall into place. It was like learning a whole new alphabet. I felt like a senior citizen just learning about the Internet. My thumbs were clumsy and I failed to grasp linguistic short cuts. I tried to hide my inadequacy in short responses, not intending to be rude (text-message etiquette being a topic for another day).

Sometimes I retaliated and questioned the validity of this new intrusion into my already complicated daily communiqés. After all, wouldn't it be easier just to call? How much time was I really saving? Was I merely contributing to making the world a more detached and sterile place?

Slowly, however, this little monster has permeated my life. It's now an alarm clock, a daytimer and a comprehensive list of everyone I know. I've learned to adjust the ring tone depending on the social setting and even have a functioning voice mail. I look forward to those pesky message notifications, so chances are if you call I won't answer—but text me and I'll get back to you right away.