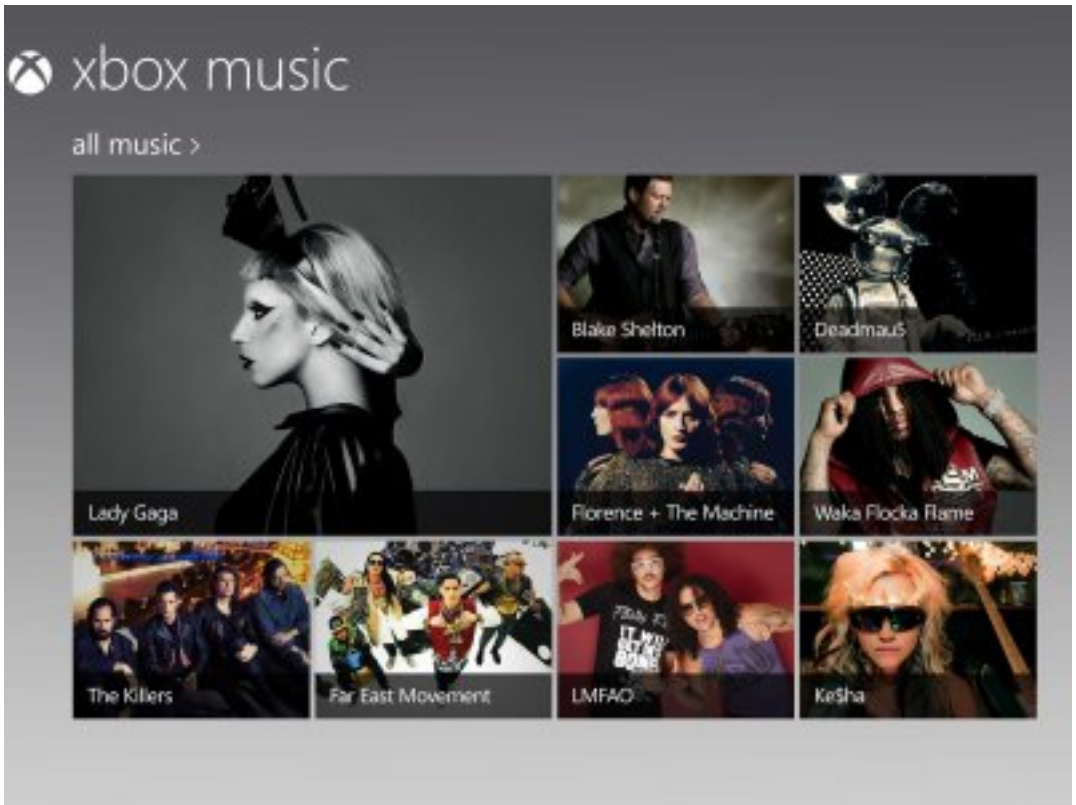
Microsoft Pulled Off Something Even Apple Couldn't Do

Today Microsoft unveiled Xbox Music [1], a Spotify-like streaming music service that'll be baked into Windows [2] 8 PCs and tablets, Windows Phones, and the Xbox [3].

Except it's better than Spotify [4], Rhapsody [5], Rdio, and all those other streaming products out there. And it exemplifies Apple's failings to get streaming music right.



The concept is pretty straightforward. For the industry-standard $9.99 per month, you get access to unlimited streaming music on your Windows 8 PC or tablet, Xbox, and Windows Phone. A Pandora-like radio feature lets you play tracks based on similar artists and styles. There's also a free, ad-supported version of Xbox Music that lets you stream tracks to your Windows 8 computer [6] or tablet, just like the free version of Spotify.

Finally, you can buy separate tracks and albums and keep them forever, even if you unsubscribe from Xbox Music. You can't do that with Spotify and similar services.

In short, Xbox Music is the complete package: Spotify-like music streaming (free or paid), Pandora-like Internet radio, and a full-fledged music store (like iTunes [7] or Amazon [6]) where you can buy music. It's something not even Apple [8] has been

able to pull off, despite reports it's been trying to do so for awhile [9].

We got a demo of Xbox Music last week and loved what we saw. It was especially impressive how well the service works between your Xbox, Windows 8 PC or tablet, and phone. For example, we created a playlist of Weezer songs on a Windows 8 tablet. When we logged into the Xbox, our playlist was there waiting for us, ready to stream through the home theater system.

And the service really shines on the Xbox. You see gorgeous album art and artist photos floating in the background as your tracks play. It's much more attractive than the stripped-down music player on Apple TV [10]. Plus you get access to music videos within the Xbox app. The whole package is extremely impressive.

Now for the drawbacks.

Xbox Music will only be available on Windows devices and the Xbox at first. That's great for the home or office, but horrible for where music counts the most: mobile devices. Android [11], iPhone [12], and iPad [13] users won't get to use Xbox Music until Microsoft [14] finishes those apps. We didn't get a precise time frame on the Android and iOS launch, but it sounds like it'll happen within the next few months.

In the meantime, Windows Phones and Windows 8 tablets will be the only mobile devices that work with Xbox Music. With such a tiny mobile presence, it's going to be tough for Microsoft to get people excited about Xbox Music at first, no matter how good it is.

On the upside, Xbox Music is about to enter millions of homes with the game console's software [6] update this week.

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