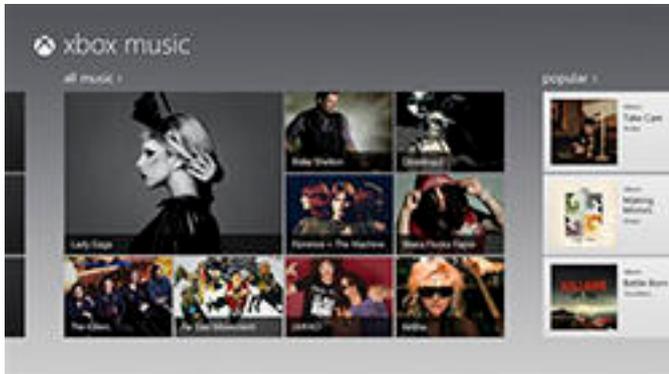


# Microsoft Launches Xbox Music on Web for Free

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Microsoft is making its Xbox Music streaming service available for free on the Web — even to those who don't use Windows 8.

The expansion beyond Windows 8 devices and Xbox game consoles starting Monday is intended to bring new customers into the software giant's ecosystem of devices and services and could help it compete with other digital music offerings like Pandora, Spotify and iTunes. It's also an acknowledgement that the music service hasn't done much to drive sales of the Windows 8 operating system.

The move represents another step toward Microsoft's goal of becoming a company that sells devices and services, rather than primarily software, said Michael Turits, an analyst with financial advisory firm Raymond James. It comes on the heels of Microsoft announcing it would buy the mobile phone handset manufacturing business of Nokia Corp. for \$7.2 billion and that CEO Steve Ballmer would step down within 12 months.

"They've said they're going to be a devices and services company. We know they want to be a device company since they're buying the Nokia phone division," he said. "This kind of thing gives more credibility to the idea they'll be more of a services company as well."

Most buyers of the new Windows 8 operating system discovered Xbox Music because it's the default player for music files that people have imported from elsewhere, according to Xbox Music general manager Jerry Johnson. Opening it up to the broader public would give more people a chance to see the benefits of having multiple devices linked to Microsoft's platform. Its music service, for example, will save favorites and playlists across PCs, Windows Phones and Xbox game consoles.

"To actually build that ecosystem, we need to bring people into it," Johnson said.

Xbox Music allows people to choose from 30 million tracks and stream them for free with ads. The service sells downloadable tracks that have been kept off streaming

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services by artists or labels. A radio service on Xbox Music also generates song playlists automatically along genres or similar artists.

The thinking is if new consumers enjoy the free experience online, some might upgrade to pay \$10 a month for the Xbox Music Pass, which allows playback on mobile phones and Microsoft's game console, Xbox 360, and its upcoming version, Xbox One. Microsoft is also launching apps for iPhones and Android devices that will allow paying subscribers to access Xbox Music. Previously, you had to have a device running the Windows Phone 8 operating system to access the plan on the go.

The decision to allow Xbox Music to run on competitors' phone platforms is in line with Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft Corp.'s move in June to release app versions of its Office software on Apple's iPhone.

Microsoft is also updating its Xbox Music interface by reducing the size of cover art but adding tabs to make it easier to create and manage playlists.

Starting with its release Nov. 22, Xbox One users will also be able to play games while listening to Xbox Music simultaneously, a feature that isn't offered on the Xbox 360.

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