

Which? action

THE LATEST ON WHICH? AND OUR CAMPAIGNS

Shifting music file formats should be legal



Which? chief executive Peter Vicary-Smith thinks copyright law should be changed so that converting your vinyl LPs into MP3 files is no longer illegal

Perhaps I'm showing my age when I declare that Paul Simon's Graceland album is one of my all-time favourites, and even more so when I tell you I have the vinyl LP version.

But whilst there is something magical about listening to my favourite songs in their original vinyl format, you will be relieved to know that I have moved with the times. I do in fact own an MP3 player and an iPhone, which allow me to listen to my favourite tunes whilst on the move.

But this is where the problems start. Though I may have the technical capability to convert my vinyl records into the digital formats of CD or MP3 files for easy listening purposes – otherwise known as 'format shifting' – under UK copyright law just owning the original or a copy of a copyright work doesn't give me permission to use it how I like. So that means I can't legally make copies, even for private use.

While the rules are different where a work's copyright has expired, in all other instances it's

against the law to reproduce your own books, CDs, videos or computer programmes for personal use.

We think this is unfair. That's why Which? is backing calls for a 'format-shifting' exception to copyright law.

And we're pleased that the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) – the trade group that represents the record industry – supports this proposed legal change, recognising that 'consumers want to be able to transfer music they have purchased to a range of different devices, so that they can enjoy it wherever and whenever they want'.

However, in line with the BPI's suggestion that a levy be applied to 'devices used for the copying of music,' we would be nervous of the introduction of any scheme that would see unfair price rises for the consumer.

We'd be interested to hear what you have to say about this. Email your views to helpwanted@which.co.uk with 'Sarah Kidner: format shifting' in the subject line.

In the meantime, safe listening!

Which? says



Financial regulation

The way public bodies operate has a significant impact on their ability to protect consumer interests. Part of the problem with regulatory interventions in the past is that they haven't taken into account consumers' experiences. This is hardly surprising, as the boards of many public bodies – notably the Financial Services Authority (FSA) – are dominated by industry bigwigs.

With the UK in recession, your interests are vital to the decision-making process. Institutions such as the FSA must ensure that all customers are treated fairly. Given the massive levels of support we've all given the part-nationalised banks, it's inexcusable that industry heavyweights should be able to pursue policies that may be detrimental to consumer interest.

Which? believes in consumer representation on the boards of public bodies such as the FSA. This would allow your views to be fed into decision making at the highest level and challenge the attitudes that existed prior to the current crisis. In the coming months, we will be negotiating hard with the FSA, the government and opposition parties to ensure your voice is heard on these issues.

Lucy Widenka, Which? campaigns project manager

Utility bill confusion

Our drive to make utility bills simpler is gathering pace. After asking members to send their views via www.which.co.uk/energystory, hundreds had done so as we went to press.

Many complained of confusing bills and tariffs – though customers of Utility Warehouse, which was

favourite in our recent utilities satisfaction survey, were more positive.

One member said: 'Energy companies have too many products with confusing price structures, so it's not easy to tell if you have the best deal.'

His comments came as our research showed that

there are 4,111 tariffs available for gas and electricity supplies in the UK.

