

Use P2P Filesharing Software Safely & Legally

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Be Safe, Not Sorry

While peer-to-peer (P2P) software and filesharing networks may be wonderfully useful, there are a lot of "gotcha's" besides copyright infringement that you should be aware of, including the risk of being compromised.

The P2P program itself may be the problem. Some automatically resetting themselves to sharing mode every time the computer is used, requiring you to turn off "sharing" each time you boot up. The instructions could be wrong or misleading, so that even when you think you've turned sharing off, you may not have done so. And some P2P software has been known to be resistant to uninstalls, continuing to reside on your computer. Here are five tips on how to avoid these gotcha's.

1. Verify the legitimacy of your P2P application.

- You may be paying subscription fees to a music download service that looks legitimate and perhaps even claims to be "legal" but is taking your money and putting you at risk of violating copyright law. See [Legal Alternatives and More Resources](#) below for free as well as fee-based options.
- In addition, the RIAA also provides a listing of authorized music services on their site whymusicmatters.com.

2. Install filesharing software carefully, so you know what's being shared.

- Changes you make to the default settings of the "save" or "shared" folder might cause you to share folders and subfolders you don't want to share. Check the proper settings so that other users of the filesharing network won't have access to your private files, folders, or sub-folders.

3. Adjust the filesharing program's controls so it's not connected to the P2P network all the time or remove it altogether.

- Disable your filesharing applications when you are not actively using them. Since many of these applications make it hard to shut them down completely -- allowing filesharing to take place even after you think you have exited the program -- you could still be sharing files unless the application is turned off. Configure your software so that uploads/sharing is disabled. If you are having trouble doing this, visit the P2P vendor's site for more instructions.
- Some filesharing programs automatically open every time you turn on your computer

and continue to operate even when you "close" them. Locate and disable the option for the application to start automatically upon boot up.

- **TIP:** If you need assistance configuring your filesharing program, Cornell University has instructions on [how to uninstall filesharing software](#), and the University of Delaware web site illustrates how to [disable file and print sharing](#).
- **TIP:** If you don't disable filesharing altogether, make sure to limit the bandwidth allowed for uploading and limit the maximum number of simultaneous uploads.

4. Use a security program from a vendor you know and trust.

- Keep the software and your operating system up-to-date. Some filesharing software may install malware or adware, and some files may include unwanted content.

Legal Alternatives

The Internet offers a variety of legal entertainment alternatives, whether downloads or streaming, free or fee-based, DRM or DRM-free, well-known artists or surprising discoveries. [EDUCAUSE](#) (a community of IT leaders and professionals committed to advancing higher education) has identified a long list of these, listed on their page [Legal Sources of Online Content](#). In addition, the [MPAA](#), [RIAA](#), and the site [StreamSafely.com](#) offer their own lists of sources for safe and legal entertainment alternatives.

Bottom Line

- ***If you engage in illegal filesharing, your odds of getting caught are growing.*** To stay within the law, avoid fines, and maintain your network access, don't illegally download.
- ***Purchase your tracks or obtain them from a copyright-free site.***
- ***Share tracks on your computer only according to the explicit licenses or permissions*** granted by the copyright owner or distributor (for example, Apple allows limited sharing of music purchased through iTunes on a local network).

Related Links & Resources

- **How it works:**
[Peer-to-Peer File Sharing Risks](#) (FTC)
[What is File Sharing Software and How Does it Work?](#) (RaySync)
[How the RIAA Catches Alleged Music Pirates](#) (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2008)
- **Policy:** Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) Compliance Policy | [Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 \(DMCA\)](#) (see Title II, § 512)