

Submit
Submit articles, news or reviews for publication on evolt

Article Categories

- Backend
- Code
- Commentary & Society
- Community News
- IA/Usability
- Jobs
- News
- Reviews & Links
- Site Development
- Software
- Suggestions
- Visual Design

Highest rated articles

- [PHP Login System with Admin Features](#) (4.59)
- [Where / What Vision Systems and Visual Design](#) (4.52)
- [PHP Login Script with Remember Me Feature](#) (4.5)
- [Style Switcher in ASP](#) (4.37)

 **Help Support evolt.org**

Evolt.org is an **all volunteer** organisation that relies on member support to survive and grow. [Find out](#) how you can help through:

- **Giving Money »**
- **Providing Mirror Servers »**
- **Buying evolt.org merchandise »**
- **Contributing your knowledge and expertise »**

ONE TIME GIFT	 DONATE
\$15 MONTH	 SUBSCRIBE

Napster A New Killer Internet App

Posted on 12 Nov 1999
in [Software](#)
by [Matt Haughey](#) (mathowie)

Rated 3.89 (Ratings: 0)

Want more?

- More articles in [Software](#)

Matt Haughey

[Member info](#)

User since: 08 Jul 1999

Articles written: 9

[Napster](#) is the greatest thing to happen to mp3's since . . . well since anything I guess. Someone told me about it a couple weeks ago, so I downloaded their beta, ran it for a few days and I have to say that I'm **very** impressed. It's the newest killer internet app and an amazing tool for music lovers. If the recording industry knew about this, they'd probably shut it down. Let me preface this by saying that all the Napster disclaimers say you shouldn't be exchanging copyrighted material, but everyone does. I could go on and on about how I feel mp3's promote the sales of CDs, but that's an argument for another day. For now, set aside your piracy issues and read about this new app.

Napster's a new application that can best be described as a combination of the following: basic mp3 player, playlist manager, file transfer client/server, chat client, mp3 search engine, and community storage app. It's not just another mp3 player though, it's truly an internet application. It can exist off the network, but it's largely useless without it.

The basic rundown

After downloading, you're asked a few configuration questions, username, pass, location of your mp3s, location where you want new ones to reside, and whether or not to use their player, or an external player of your choice. Napster's player is very basic, and I preferred using my default player, [freeamp](#). Next, it will search your entire hard drive for mp3's and add those to your library automatically.

Logging on and using Chat

Once you're logged into the network (which can be buggy at times, remember this app is still very much in beta), you are presented with a chat window like the one linked below



When you first login, you will be shown a private chat area where you are by yourself. You can join public channels by clicking the "Join" button at the lower right. A menu will popup showing you a topic list by name, how many users are connected to each, then a full title of each area. I joined the jazz channel because it's hard to find old jazz records and CDs at many music stores, and finding good jazz mp3s is just as difficult. I also joined an Alternative channel due to the high number of users and potential for finding good music. On the chat window shown above, the chat area is shown in the middle left, and the users connected to the channel are shown at the right. I don't know if it's because it's a new app, but even the crowded rooms are very quiet. The chat area isn't the most interesting part of the app, so I often see maybe one message every ten minutes or so, and not much conversation in real time.

You can right click on any of the user names, and get info about them, or add them to your hotlist. You can also order the list of users by clicking on the column titles. I'm on a cable line at home and T3 at work, so I like to stick to T1 or better servers. I usually sort the list by connection, and try to find a couple T1 users with more than 100 songs. I add those users to my hotlist and then search their libraries for interesting songs.

Reaching the different functions of the app is accomplished by clicking on the buttons in the top bar. The next part of the app is the library window.

The Library/Player

The top half of the library interface is a basic list of all your mp3's on your drive. The path is shown relative to the root directory specified in the configuration. You can sort by column name, and double clicking a title will play the file in your chosen player. Below the library section is the controls to the internal player. The controls are very basic, pretty much just play, stop, fast forward and rewind. It just fine for listening to mp3's, but I changed my config to use my default mp3 player since I found the Napster player to be lacking a volume control, something I use as much as any other control on a typical mp3 player app. To the right of the player controls is a playlist creator and manager interface.



Searching...

I find I use the search engine more than almost anything in Napster. Remember that your library is online and open to anyone, but so is everyone else's. I haven't mentioned it before, but at the bottom of all the application windows is a status of the number of users online, number of songs, and size of the total storage. Currently there's over half a terrabyte of music (and seems to be growing day by day) being shared on the napster network. So how do you find something useful among all those files?

Luckily the search interface is quite useful and custom searches are very easy. I typically search by Artist/Band name, but if there's a specific song I'm looking for, I use the title search as well. I've found I get the best results by limiting my searches to a 128kbps bitrate (standard "near CD-quality" sound) and limiting servers to cable connections or better.



After getting good results from your searches, just double click the song titles to begin downloading them. Your screen will automatically switch to the transfer window and show the download status. The next part of the app is the Hotlist.

The HotList

The hotlist portion of the client reminds me of icq and hotline clients. You can manually add and remove clients, but I rarely use those buttons. Whenever I see someone on a fast line (T1 or greater) in the chat area with a lot of music, I add them to the hotlist. I can't tell if it's napster's servers or my client, but I never seem to see the same people twice. I might add 5 people to my hotlist and download a bunch of material from them. If I log off for the night, and log back on the next day, they're always offline. Also lately, I've had friends join, send me their username by icq or email and we'll both be connected, yet each one sees each other as offline. I guess it's a beta thing.



The Transfer Window

The next window in the interface is the transfer window. The upper region shows the downloads in progress and those that have passed, and the bottom half shows what people are downloading from your drive. This is a lot like a ftp server access log. You can disconnect people if you like, but I feel the interface is lacking a button to add the people downloading from your drive to your hotlist. Sometimes I see what someone is downloading, and I'll check on their collection to see if they have songs I'd like. I have to look at their name and manually add it to the hotlist. The default settings in napster are only one user downloading at a time allowed and only one download per user. I have a bit more bandwidth, so I've allowed up to 6 people downloading up to 2 songs each at a time. Don't worry if you stack up a bunch of downloads that are queued up, if you have a permanent connection, just leave it for a while. Napster runs quietly in the taskbar and seems quite stable. If you're downloading from a cable or higher user, they're probably going to be online for a while, I usually set up a bunch of songs to download and ignore it for a few hours.



Feedback

The feedback window is the last part of the interface, and it seems like mostly an afterthought. I have submitted a few short messages about the problems I've found, but there's no return mail entry. I haven't heard back from them, so I'm not sure if they attached my username to the message or if there was any feedback loop set up to let me know they received the message and responded.



Final Thoughts

Overall, this app shows **a lot** of promise. It's a true community sharing all their music. Sure you can lie and say your T3 line is actually a 14.4 modem so no one bothered you, but what's the point really? I think of it as one giant hard drive that everyone can take from and give to. It hasn't reduced the number of new music CDs I buy, as I've used it mostly for finding obscure or impossible-to-find music. I mean, where else are you going to get a copy of The Mr. Belvedere Show theme song?

- [Matt Haughey](#)