Legal downloads triple in US
Correspondents in New York
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THE number of song downloads from authorised websites tripled among US internet users in the first six months of 2005, compared with the same period a year ago, new data shows.

US internet users downloaded 159 million individual songs over the period, compared with 55 million in the same period in 2004, according to figures compiled this week by Nielsen SoundScan.

The data confirmed that internet users are moving away from piracy on peer-to-peer networks and gravitating toward pay-per-download sites like Apple’s iTunes.

"It's a tremendous burst, given the amount of piracy," Nielsen Music president Rob Sisco said.

However, the figures showed that overall industry music sales - including album sales and digital downloads - are down 2.5 per cent this year. This is primarily due to a steep decline in album sales.

Single-song downloads now represent 6 per cent of overall music sales, compared with less than 2 per cent a year ago, according to the recent data.

Nielsen analysts said it may be too soon to declare the demise of the CD, noting that a clearer trend will be known after the 2005 Christmas season.

"The industry is healthy; it's going to change," Mr Sisco said. "Evolution is critical. It's similar to the decline of vinyl (albums) 20 years ago," he said.

A recent report by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) showed 2005 sales of CDs and other discs rose 5 per cent in unit volume and 2.7 per cent in value in 2004. It was the first increase after four years of declines.

A recent OECD report found a 20 per cent drop in disc sales in major developed countries between 1999 and 2003, with sharp drops in the United States, France, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands.

The recording industry has been waging a fierce battle against online piracy over peer-to-peer networks. It won a major victory recently when the Supreme Court ruled that such networks can be held liable for piracy if they encourage unauthorized copying of music or other content.

/Agence France-Presse/

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