

iLike becomes major factor in digital music universe
By Ron Wynn, rwynn@nashvillecitypaper.com

One criticism that's often leveled at contemporary music fans that utilize the Internet for their music enjoyment is the notion that they aren't as devoted or interested in the art form as their predecessors. But Ali Partovi, the CEO of the social music discovery service iLike, disputes that contention and says that the rapid growth and acceptance of iLike only reaffirms how much interest young people today have in all types of music.

"The one area where we were seeing a lot of room for development and growth in terms of music and the Internet was in the area of social interaction," Partovi said. "We saw the opportunity to get fans who enjoyed particular artists or genres in touch with each other, and generate more interest and communication between them. That in turn creates more interest in music and in my view is a very healthy development."

iLike now has more than 25 million users. It has emerged as the dominant music discovery service and also the main music application on such social networks as Facebook, hi5 and Bebo. They will soon be launching applications on MySpace and Orkut. Partovi is in town today as a featured speaker at the Leadership Digital Music Summit at Belmont.

This year's Summit is the fourth annual, and is being held at the Mike Curb College of Entertainment & Music Business. The number of people attending has grown from 400 in 2005 to 600 last year, and Leadership Music this year is partnering with the Nashville Chamber of Commerce to handle the increases in attendance and programs. Partovi is among 24 speakers presenting conference sessions.

Ted Cohen, managing partner of Tag Strategic, LLC, is serving as the conference's strategic chair. Jay Frank, senior vice president of music strategy at Country Music Television (CMT) is chair of the programming committee. Curb College Dean Wesley Bulla and Nashville Mayor Karl Dean are offering a welcome and opening remarks for the all-day conference. The complete schedule and registration information is available at digitalsummit.conference.org.

Among iLike's many services are links to iTunes and Amazon.com to purchase music, and Ticketmaster to buy tickets. Such artists as Dave Grohl, Will Ferrell, U2 and Jason Mraz have videos or other items available on iLike (which is a free service and available at iLike.com). Whenever artists post songs or video messages, or write blogs, they immediately syndicate the content to their fans not only on iLike, but also Facebook, their sidebar for iTunes and Windows Media Player, hi5 and Bebo and the just launched iPhone application.

Also available are Artist Newsfeed bulletins each time performers post new songs and video or issue new discs. Customized, local concert information is also available. iLike can identify the artists that users like, and tell them when they are coming to town and where they are playing. Based on listed musical preferences, it can also show users when

of their friends are going to various concerts.

“What we’re doing with iLike more and more is personalizing and expanding the musical experience,” Partovi said. “Our research shows that the people who use our service purchase 250 percent more music within the first month after they’ve been on it, as well as being heavy affiliates of both iTunes and Ticketmaster. So I think that iLike is creating more demand for music, and getting more people to buy music, and that’s something that is now a major concern of the music business.”