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What Is the Ideal iPod Competitor?

Microsoft is still searching for the answer

Even now, after so many years since its appearance, iPod still manages to rule the MP3 Player world and this is even more remarkable if we think about the technologies' short life cycles. Despite fierce competition, users are still buying iPods like there is no tomorrow. And not only that, but it also acts as a locomotive for the entire Apple train and for other companies specialized in iPod accessories which have become millionaires overnight. For several years now, MP3 player producing companies and others have been trying hard to find a replacement, a gizmo able to decrease iPod's 75% market share. Microsoft has recently announced one of the most powerful alliances aimed at ending the iPod domination. Ballmer and his company have been joined by some of the best electronics producers: Philips, Creative and Samsung (and certainly, if Xbox 360 hadn't competed against Play Station 3 for next generation console supremacy, Microsoft would have called Sony to join this alliance, after all, with iTunes on the Japanese market, Sony's position is seriously threatened) and their goal is to send iPod into oblivion. How should the ideal competitor for iPod look like? There are hundreds of sites and forums on the Internet whose main topic is what should be changed or added to iPod. A larger hard drive, a radio module, a longer-lasting battery, video capabilities, bigger displays, support for cellular telephony, more formats, all these features have been suggested for a better iPod, not to mention that there are already MP3 players superior to Apple's player which include some of these functions, but none of them has even budged iPod's leading position. Microsoft and its allies will have until fall to discover the chosen one, the real iPod killer. Actually, this might be an interesting marketing idea for them, to dub their players iPod Killer Nr. 1 from Samsung, iPod Killer Nr. 3 from Creative and so on, until there will be one that deserves the name. The only problem everyone fails to see is that iPod's success has nothing to do with hardware or with software. Microsoft, Creative, Samsung and Philips researchers may invent any hardware wonder, such as the 0.5 mm hard drive able to store 5 TB or the software interface able to take voice commands, they will still fail to come up with an iPod killer. The reason of the above statement is this: iPod's success is due to marketing strategy and historical conjuncture. Recently, the MP3 format has celebrated 10 years, but few people remember that the MP3 format became mainstream when Napster appeared. In July 2001, forced by artists and record companies, Napster closed its ports, and in December 2001, Apple launched the iPod, a device meeting the requirements of millions of users that had filled their hard drives and CDs with hundreds or even thousands of MP3s downloaded off Napster. The issue regarding Napster's policy is for the history manuals to discuss, but iPod benefited from that unique conjunctural moment of satisfying the users' need to listen to their favorite music without having to buy a notebook or to take their PC with them at all times. An attractive design, a simple interface which can be operated by anyone, efficient marketing, all these factors have turned iPod into an unstoppable money making machine. Steve Jobs knew well the laws of marketing and realized that Napster needed a replacement, so he created iTunes, Napster's legal and a little bit modified version that posed no threat to record companies. We join other experts in asking "Where would iPod be without iTunes?" Companies that invest money and effort into dethroning iPod shouldn't have skipped the digital music history classes and understand once and for all, that iPod is the result of a once in a lifetime moment, which cannot be recreated even if they add two wheels and a 5TB hard drive. The only ones entitled to the [iPod killer](#) tag are cell phone producers, because a device that features cell phone functions, aside from music playback functions, would draw swarms of acolytes. It remains to be seen if they succeed, because

iPod will be improved and sooner than we think, we might witness significant changes brought to Apple's wonder player. As for the companies that want a MP3 player at all costs, they can either support cell phone producers to launch as soon as possible models with large capacities hard drives that have insanelly low prices, or give their money to charity for better purposes, such as curing cancer or helping third world countries.