

Revealing the Science of Song By: [Dennis McCafferty](#) | 2010-02-12 |

With the music industry hurting, a new online tool promises to take the risk out of discovering hits.

Being that the music industry is in a rut these days (Forrester Research predicts that revenues will decline to \$9.2 billion after reaching a high of \$14.6 billion in 1999), record-company execs are looking for any edge they can get. Today, that may mean developing technologies that demystify the science of song.

At least that's the idea behind uPlaya, a Web-based product that taps into mathematical algorithms to process music and determine its hit potential. All music genres—rock, pop, rap and country—can be evaluated by uPlaya, which is produced by San Francisco-based Music Intelligence Solutions. It uses a patented technology called Hit Song Science, which analyzes characteristics such as timbre, pitch, melody, brightness, rhythm and tempo, and measures how they change over time.

Why does time matter? Because these characteristics are perceived unconsciously by the listener, and the correct mix of these parameters during the length of a song is more important than an individual characteristic. The underlying attributes of the track are compared to millions of other songs, including proven hits. The technology also spots new trends and highlights how new songs fit in with these emerging trends.

All songs are scored on a 1-10 point system. Artists and industry execs can "test" songs out at the product's Website, which offers various pricing packages, such as a six-month plan for \$90. While the product is still in the early stages, uPlaya has received interest from "tens of thousands" of music-industry players, according to the company. Blue Infinity Music is one label that has signed on, as its CEO Robert Lamm (who is also a member of the band Chicago) says the technology is uniquely qualified to find the right audience for a song. "Musicians constantly want to move into uncharted waters," he says. "So having an idea of what may work brings a fresh objectivity to music projects."

uPlaya is partnering with top music brands such as MTV, Urban Latino Media Group, American Songwriter and All Hip Hop to expand its reach to artists.

"With millions of artists competing for attention on the Web today, the stakes have never been higher," says David Meredith, CEO of Music Intelligence Solutions. "This science shines a spotlight on talented artists that otherwise might not have the connections needed to break out."

Smarter Technology was curious about how a few selected, proven hits from the past and present would fare, and the team at uPlaya was happy to give them a test run. A mix of classic rock, pop and even a standard was selected.

The results? It looks like times have changed. Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven," the Beatles' "She Loves You" and Frank Sinatra's "My Way" did well enough, all essentially earning a 7 out of 10 rating, which qualifies for "gold" status. But current sensation Taylor Swift, fresh off winning four Grammys, clocked all three songs with her smash hit "Love Story," which earned an 8.7 "platinum" score. Music purists need not pull their hair out: It's all about the science of song, remember?

"These results make sense," Meredith says. "The older songs are good. But Swift's song is much more current when it comes to what people like today."