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### Guvera, warming up for its U.S. launch

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Guvera, an Australian company offering free, ad-supported music downloads and streams, announced Thursday that it will open its virtual doors in the U.S. on March 30. Those doors won't be open all the way, however; only the first 100,000 people to sign up will be granted access, at least until the company lines up more advertisers.

I discussed the company's business model in a [previous post](#), so I won't go into a huge amount of detail here. Since then, though, I've had the chance to play with both Guvera and [FreeAllMusic.com](#), a site offering five free ad-supported downloads per week. Each has its charms and its shortcomings -- Guvera seems more generous but a bit harder to navigate, while FreeAllMusic makes it easier to find tracks but takes a more in-your-face approach to its sponsors' pitches. Both offer handy ways to sample artists and albums by grabbing a few free songs -- legally.



The experience with Guvera starts ...

... with the user disclosing, at length, his or her preferences for music, movies, vacation spots and the like. This info helps Guvera put its users in front of the advertisers most interested in them. It also earns credits that the user can use to download tracks.

Chief Executive Claes Loberg said the goal is to give advertisers an alternative to the interruptive style of messaging that the public is paying less and less attention to. When someone searches for a song, Guvera returns a list of links to different brands that are offering that song for streaming or downloading. (Whether you can download a track depends on the number of credits you've accumulated and spent.) Clicking on a link takes you to a page created by the advertiser, featuring a playlist of songs designed to do two things: appeal to the people the company wants to buy its products or services, and give visitors a specific image of the brand.

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For example, Loberg said, McDonald's designed its page on Guvera's Australian site to appeal to 18 to 25 year olds. In addition to promoting the fact that the chain's restaurants are now open 24 hours a day, the page provides links to store locations and to nightspots that are open around the clock. So there's a specific message -- McDonald's is now open all night -- and an implicit one -- McDonald's appeals to the kind of music-loving people who keep those hours.

Of course, McDonald's may already have a well-established image in the average consumer's mind, and no amount of hipster advertising can change it. But for a new or unfamiliar brand, Loberg said, Guvera offers the chance to create the kind of emotional tie with consumers that might otherwise take months of marketing.

At least, that's the theory. I know my experience on Guvera has given me a much cooler impression of [Slush Puppie](#) than I had before (or than its usual website provides). Not sure if I feel that way about Mickey D's, however.

In addition to revealing its U.S. launch date Thursday, Guvera announced licensing deals with three large music publishing agencies -- BMI, the Harry Fox Agency and SESAC -- as well as INgrooves, a digital distributor. It had previously signed deals with Universal Music Group, EMI and IODA. The company also said that its technology would be able to deliver video and TV programming by the middle of the year.

-- Jon Healey