

music recommendation engines on test

In our assessment of the services below, one thing was clear: no recommendation service is perfect. While you would expect different systems to come up with different suggestions, we were struck by the blind spots or totally off-the-wall suggestions that bedevilled each one. (A truly intelligent recommendation service would not tell a Michael Jackson fan to check out the complete works of Guns N' Roses, for example - though Audio Scrobbler otherwise performed well.) We have listed, for each service, the first six artists suggested as worth checking out if you like each of our five "sample" artists (those listed in bold type), and marked each set of recommendations out of 10. We omitted results for composer Philip Glass, as neither Pandora nor SoundFlavor could come up with any suggestions at all for similar music.

<p>Pandora</p> <p>Michael Jackson 5/10 Commodores, Jacksons, Johnnie Taylor, Mis-Teeq, Tevin Campbell, Dru Hill,</p> <p>The Byrds 5/10 JD Blackfoot, The Novells, The Beatles, Big Country, R.E.M., Creedence Clearwater Revival</p> <p>50 Cent 7/10 Drag-On, NAAM Brigade, Freddie Foxxx, Nas, Notorious BIG, Shyne</p> <p>The Sundays 9/10 Dressy Bessy, Helium, Tsunami, Carla Werner, Cranberries, Ani DiFranco</p> <p>Boards of Canada 5/10 Vayder X, Richard Devine, Robert Miles, Chicken Lips, Enigma, Ulrich Schnauss</p> <p>We say... 6/10 Decent results, though the 'customised radio station' invariably throws in silly suggestions that you must click to register disapproval of in order to produce better results.</p>	<p>MusicStrands</p> <p>Michael Jackson 9/10 Prince, Stevie Wonder, Usher, Outkast, The Jackson 5, Britney Spears</p> <p>The Byrds 8/10 Bob Dylan, Jefferson Airplane, Buffalo Springfield, The Rolling Stones, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Beach Boys</p> <p>50 Cent 8/10 Ludacris, Eminem, The Game, Nelly, Snoop Dogg, Trick Daddy</p> <p>The Sundays 6/10 The Cure, Tori Amos, Mazzy Star, Sarah McLachlan, R.E.M., U2</p> <p>Boards of Canada 9/10 Aphex Twin, Autechre, Mogwai, Squarepusher, Four Tet, Prefuse 73</p> <p>We say... 8/10 Mostly sensible, credible suggestions for similar artists, with one or two notable exceptions. The Sundays and U2?</p>	<p>Audio Scrobbler</p> <p>Michael Jackson 2/10 Phil Collins, Justin Timberlake, Eminem, George Michael, Destiny's Child, Guns N' Roses</p> <p>The Byrds 6/10 Buffalo Springfield, The Kinks, The Beach Boys, The Flying Burrito Brothers, Bob Dylan, The Band</p> <p>50 Cent 9/10 The Game, Eminem, 2Pac, Snoop Dogg, Ludacris, Jay-Z</p> <p>The Sundays 8/10 Mazzy Star, Cocteau Twins, Kim Ferron, Bram Tchaikovsky, Beth Orton, Natalie Merchant</p> <p>Boards of Canada 10/10 Aphex Twin, Autechre, Four Tet, Squarepusher, Plaid, Prefuse 73</p> <p>We say... 7/10 While generally good, Audio Scrobbler's recommendations for Michael Jackson fans perhaps underline the difficulty in making these systems work equally well for all artists.</p>
<p>SoundFlavor</p> <p>Michael Jackson 5/10 Kavana, New Edition, New Kids on the Block, B2K, Rick Astley, Five</p> <p>The Byrds 7/10 The Band, The Eagles, Buffalo Springfield, Neil Young, Grateful Dead, Delaney</p> <p>50 Cent 4/10 OGC, Method Man & Redman, Ludacris, The Diplomats, Tash</p> <p>The Sundays 9/10 Blake Babies, Lush, Mazzy Star, Concrete Blonde, St. Etienne, Throwing Muses</p> <p>Boards of Canada 5/10 Dusted, Mocean Worker, Wagon Christ, DJ Shadow, Genuine, Amon Tobin</p> <p>We say... 6/10 Results depend quite strongly on how many, and which, of an artists tracks you use as a starting point - for consistency we used three well-known tracks by each sample artist. Interesting that Michael Jackson suggestions are most suited to a certain subset of fans.</p>	<p>Napster</p> <p>Michael Jackson 8/10 Jackson 5, Will Young, Justin Timberlake, Madonna, Janet Jackson, Prince</p> <p>The Byrds 6/10 The Association, The Zombies, Donovan, The Yardbirds, Buffalo Springfield</p> <p>50 Cent 8/10 G Unit, Lloyd Banks, The Game, Dizzee Rascal, Eminem, Dr Dre</p> <p>The Sundays 7/10 Mazzy Star, Leona Naess, Alana Davis, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Fiona Apple, Kate Bush</p> <p>Boards Of Canada 6/10 Kid Loco, Amon Tobin, Mouse On Mars, Mogwai, Stereolab, Tosca</p> <p>We say... 6/10 We appreciated the fact that Napster's 'Other members liked...' feature reflects UK music tastes.</p>	<p>iTunes Music Store</p> <p>Michael Jackson 1/10 Robbie Williams, Eurythmics, Faithless, Sugababes, Anastacia, Westlife</p> <p>The Byrds 2/10 Jefferson Airplane, Graham Coxon, Hole, Bryan Adams, John Mellencamp, Jim Noir</p> <p>50 Cent 3/10 The Game, Eminem, Snoop Dogg, Mariah Carey, Arctic Monkeys, Pharrell</p> <p>The Sundays 2/10 Arctic Monkeys, Supertramp, Neutral Milk Hotel, The Cure, James, Bruce Springsteen</p> <p>Boards of Canada 3/10 Royksopp, Ladytron, Crazy P, Mr Scruff, Sunosis, Armand Van Helden, Four Tet</p> <p>We say... 2/10 Apple's 'Listeners who bought x also bought' system produced by far the least useful suggestions - Arctic Monkeys for 50 Cent fans, for example.</p>