

Rapper J-Kwon goes from homeless kid to hit-maker

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week, but after that, he'll go through the maze."

J-Kwon declined to talk further about his life in the drug trade, but he relied on it to help him survive on the streets as he worked on making demos. His music reflected his life at the time — he calls it "street music."

"I definitely was making evil music. I had some good music ... but that point in time, I was definitely making battle music," he says.

During his mid-teens, he was befriended by a promoter in St. Louis who led him to the hot producers The Track Boyz. They immediately decided to produce his debut, which was later optioned by Jermaine Dupri's So So Def label.

"His rapping, I liked it, but it was his personality, how he sold himself to me that really got me," says Hot Boyz producer Mark Williams. "He was cocky and charismatic. He had a little bit of everything in him and he wasn't scared."

"As a rapper, he's not trying to be anyone but himself. J-Kwon came to me with his own story and his own ideas on how to present it," Dupri

said in an e-mail to The Associated Press.

Williams says J-Kwon has an edge other teens lack.

"Most other 17- or 18-year-olds are worried about going to college. 'Kwon was homeless; 'Kwon was in the street, so he didn't have the comfort that other 17-year-olds had."

J-Kwon also had responsibilities that other teens don't have — he's a father of at least one child. Though he makes references his "kids" in an interview, when pressed later for details, he says simply: "I don't even want to get into my kids."

But clearly, his precarious position in the streets, plus his fatherly responsibilities, made him feel even more pressure to succeed.

"When I got with The Track Boyz, I was like, I need to make hits now," he says.

He got one his first time out with "Topsy," which flew up the charts with its catchy foot-stomp and hand-clap beat and call out hook, which says "everybody in the club gettin' tipsy!"

But given that J-Kwon just recently turned 18, the song — which talks about getting a fake ID and drinking exces-

sively — has raised some eyebrows.

J-Kwon can't understand why the song should upset anyone. "If I was 23, I could do Budweiser commercials and all that and it would be good. I don't understand it."

So far, any criticism that the song might have received hasn't impeded its success. The humorous video is getting heavy airplay on MTV and BET and has made J-Kwon an instant celebrity.

His sudden affluence and fame hasn't been an easy adjustment for J-Kwon, though.

"He's having a hard time, but he's learning," says Williams. "(He went) from being homeless to not being known to blowing up and having a lot of money in his pocket."

Not like he's had much of a chance to spend it, though. "I don't even have time to spend with my kids," he says.

He's also worried about misconceptions that may arise from "Topsy." Despite its drinking theme, the video brings to mind a mischievous, young Will Smith —

Microsoft Corp. pays \$440 million to settle InterTrust patent suit

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

REDMOND, Wash. — Microsoft Corp. is paying \$440 million to InterTrust Technologies Corp. to settle a 3-year-old patent infringement lawsuit over technology for protecting music, movies and other digital content against piracy.

Monday's announcement marked the second settlement this month by the world's No. 1 software company. Microsoft agreed about two weeks ago to pay Sun Microsystems \$1.6 billion to settle a private antitrust suit and resolve patent claims.

The settlement with InterTrust, of Santa Clara, Calif., resolves all legal issues between the two companies and grants Microsoft a license to InterTrust's patents on digital rights management, code designed to prevent the unauthorized copying of files, the companies said.

A key function of DRM is to limit the number of copies

that can be made from a song or movie that is downloaded over the Internet — a growing business as the distribution of entertainment goes increasingly digital.

The settlement is part of an effort "to provide peace of mind for our customers and partners by letting them know that patent licensing is our responsibility," said Marshall Phelps, Microsoft deputy general counsel and corporate vice president of intellectual property, or IP.

With the agreement, customers can use Microsoft products and services without a license from InterTrust. Developers, however, may need a license from InterTrust for other uses, including the combination of Microsoft technology with third-party technology, according to the joint statement.

InterTrust, owned by a joint venture of Sony Corp., Philips Electronics NV and the investment banking

company Stephens Inc., sued Microsoft in April 2001.

At the time, InterTrust officials talked of trying to halt sales of the then-new Windows XP operating system and said damages could amount to billions of dollars.

The lawsuit followed a breakdown in licensing talks in 1998-2000, when Microsoft was considering an investment of more than \$100 million in InterTrust. Settlement talks began at the urging of a judge last summer.

Last month Microsoft agreed to settle a patent lawsuit filed by AT&T Corp. over voice-recognition technology for terms that were not disclosed.

Last year Microsoft settled claims by Time Warner Inc. involving Netscape Communications, now owned by Time Warner's America Online unit, and paid \$35 million to settle a case brought by Immersion Corp. over joystick technology.

U.S. music sales continue to rally

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Aron's Records in Hollywood. "It's been down the last two years, this is an upswing."

Industry observers said no single factor has driven the turnaround.

Mayfield sees similarities with the industry's slump 20 years ago. Sales of disco music dried up after the dance scene fell out of vogue in the early 1980s. In the late 1990s, the Backstreet Boys, 'N Sync and Britney Spears drew millions of teenage fans who had been out of the music marketplace, but sales didn't keep up as the audience got older.

"That music was hot and nothing moved in to replace it," Mayfield said.

He also draws comparisons between the loss of eight-track sales in the early 1980s and the phasing out of cassettes in this decade, a format that provided customers with a cheaper alternative to CDs.

The early 1980s and the early part of this decade were also marked by economic downturns. Conversely, the music industry was better able to weather the recession in the early 1990s because of CD sales driven by consumers replacing their vinyl record and cassette tape collections.

Still, the recording industry has focused on Internet piracy, and its trade group cites surveys that indicate the number of people engaging in file-sharing has declined since the group began suing computer users.

But other research shows millions continue to download music, movies and software over peer-to-peer networks.

A recent study by two professors at Harvard University and UNC-Chapel Hill, may suggest how the industry's sales could be improving amid file-sharing.

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