



Turntable.fm and Blip.fm are both social music web apps. They allow you to listen to music online, and turn that listening into a social experience. They have some notable differences, though. Which is right for you? This comparison might help you to decide.

Functionality Overview

If you're new to both sites, here's a quick run-down.

Turntable Functionality

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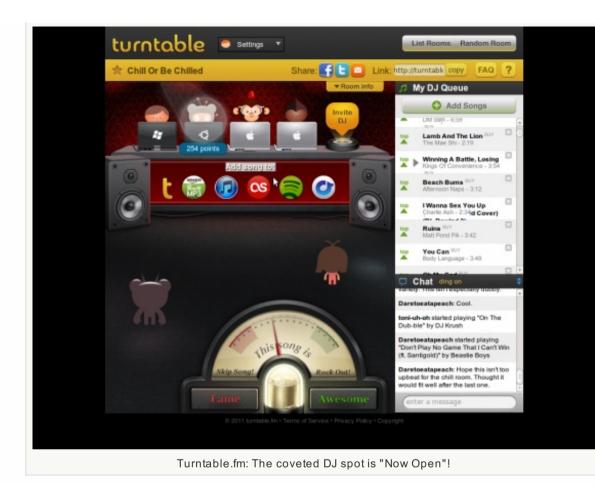
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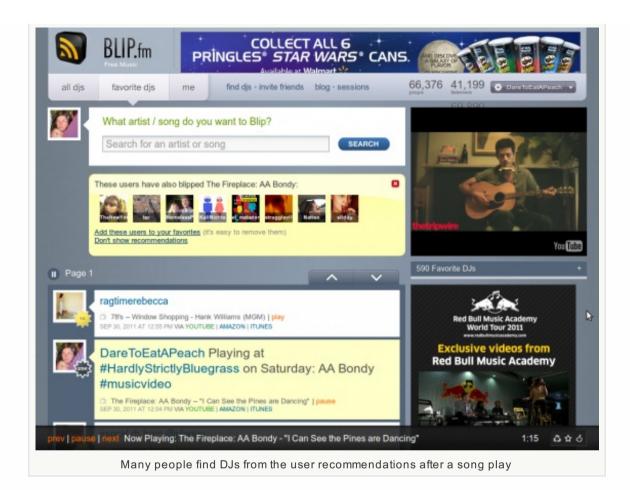
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Turntable is set up like a virtual concert venue. Your profile is represented by an avatar who is either in the audience or is one of the DJs playing music. The rules about who gets to DJ and when vary from one virtual venue to the next. There are at most five DJs on stage at a time and they take turns choosing songs. There is a meter at the bottom of the screen. Anyone in the room can hit the "awesome" button to give the DJ a point. Or the a listener can hit the "lame" button to express disdain. If the lames outnumber the awesomes, the song gets skipped. Points can be used to get more impressive avatars.

Blip.fm Functionality

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Blip is often described as "Twitter plus music." I don't like this description because it appeals to neither Twitter fans nor Twitter adversaries, but it is accurate. If Facebook and Twitter are a lifestream of consecutive status updates, than Blip is a music stream of consecutive song updates. Your station consists of your songs and your followers' songs, although you can create a customized station using their Tag Tuner or add songs to your playlist. You can also play just songs you've blipped. Instead of points, Blip offers props and badges. Unlike Turntable, users have to earn points in order to give them away.

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In Favor of Turntable:

Cute Avatars Give Real-Time Feedback

Turntable looks like Second Life with its little avatars, though at this time you have little control over their actions. When someone likes a song, his or her avatar's head starts bopping. Not only is this adorable, it gives the DJ real-time feedback on whether or not people are enjoying the music.

On Blip, people give "props" when they like a song. These are collected on your props page, and you don't see them unless you go there. The instant feedback on Turntable tells you several things: if listeners "like" a song right away, it is probably already a song they know and love. You can watch as several people hit the awesome bar around a particularly lovely climactic section. It also tells you which songs have played well in that room. If someone got a lot of avatar head-bopping to some underground hip-hop in the indie rock room, you can probably pull off that Aesop Rock mashup you were considering.

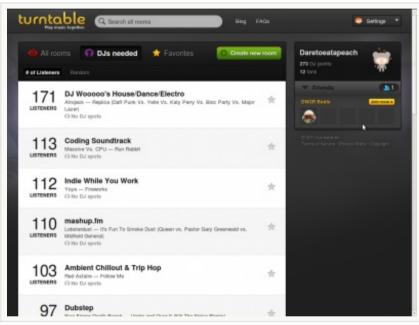
Users have profiles

In keeping with the tradition of Twitter, Blip only allows you a link and a few sentences to describe the music you play. On Turntable you have a full profile that can be viewed by clicking on the avatar. Why is this important? Because when you're trying to decide whether or not to follow a DJ, it's useful to know if the 80s B-side set was an anomoly or if the DJ plays that music all the time. On Blip, you can view a DJ's entire playing history, but most people won't take the time to dig. With a profile the DJ can state clearly what he or she primarily plays. This gives each DJ more freedom to play outside the DJ's genre without fear of scaring away listeners.

Music is divided by genre

Blip is a free for all. Anyone you follow will show up, along with your own songs, in your

radio stream. You can listen strictly to your own songs in chronological order on your profile page, but most of the time you'll want to be on your main page so you can discover new music. If you're the type who listens to only one genre, this won't be a problem. But in this increasingly diverse global age, most of us are interested in more variety. So if one of your DJs is in the mood to play a retrospective of sixties folk and concurrently another DJ you follow is playing hot new dance tracks, your playlist will go up and down from Joni Mitchell to Booty Shakin' Beats remix back down to another girl with an acoustic guitar.



On Turntable this jarring experience is avoided by having different rooms, which are usually distinguished by genre. DJs take turns playing for the entire room, and the pressure is on each DJ to play a song that transitions well from the one before it. If someone plays a song that doesn't fit the theme of the room, the moderator can give that person the boot or annoyed listeners can lame the track so it gets skipped.

No YouTube

Personally, I like that Blip.fm plays YouTube videos because it has allowed me to catch up on all the videos I missed since MTV went in the toilet. But enough people don't like the

YouTube songs that Blip created an option to remove them from your search results and skip them on your station. The sound quality of most YouTube videos will be adequate for the majority of work-day listeners but the discerning listener with a fancy stereo may notice a difference.

The real problem with YouTube videos isn't the difference in sound quality of the homegrown and official music videos. The problem is slogging through crappy bootleg concert footage and teenagers doing living room covers in the hopes of landing their big break. On Turntable, all their tracks are clean so your only risk of getting a dud is if you upload it yourself.

Use the music you have on your computer

Recent changes to the Blip.fm song database have sent many of its biggest fans away. Previously, on Blip you could play any song as long as there was an mp3 link out there. This has led some people to upload songs strictly for use while they are DJing, which was a lot of work just to share new tunes with your pals. However, Blip's recent deal with the labels has removed this functionality. Thus all of the old links to mp3s in the archives are broken. The tradeoff is a million clean mp3s with label support. You can also play YouTube videos on your station, which fills in many of the gaps on unreleased or extremely new tracks.

Turntable has a database, and you can upload any song that you have on your own computer. This is hands down the best advantage of the site. While a large database is good, it's no competition for an unlimited database. So long as you can find it and download it, you can play it on Turntable. Keep in mind that music sites tend to get more restrictive as they age because they get threatened with lawsuits by the record labels. Turntable is in Beta while Blip has been around for a few years so it is possible that once Turntable explodes in popularity it will change its policy too.

The arrangement that Blip has with the record labels is supposedly similar to the one at Grooveshark, so if you have an account with them and are satisfied with their selection than the selection at Blip most likely won't be a problem for you.

No Ads

Blip.fm has banner ads and occasionally roll-over pop-up ads. Some of them are pretty damned annoying. However, Turntable is a new site so there's no guarantee it will stay ad-free for long.

This leads me to a final and more subtle advantage of Turntable...

Turntable is a New Site

New sites have a number of less obvious advantages. While Blip is still a small team, the Blip developers have been in the works on a new site for the past year. Thus supporting Blip is not their primary concern. The Turntable developers, on the other hand, will send an avatar to your room immediately if you contact their customer service. Because the site is new, you may still have a chance to influence the developers about new feature decisions.

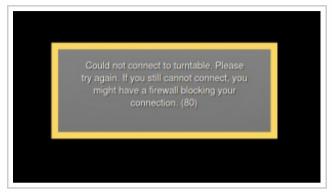
It also affects the atmosphere. When a site is brand new, most people don't have a ton of friends there already. This means they are open to chatting with strangers and there's a general buzz about sharing tips on how best to take advantage of what Turntable offers. Most Turntable users are still actively looking for DJs to follow. I would be so bold as to say that Blip.fm is possibly the least-cliqueish site I've ever encountered (more on this later), but the sense that it is no longer the coders' top priority has lessened morale.

In favor of Blip:

Actual photos

People lie, but at least each photo is unique. On Turntable it is common to see someone on the site who is identical to you in appearance because of the limited number of avatars. This will change as they get more avatars, but it still makes it harder to recognize

Less intrusive bugs



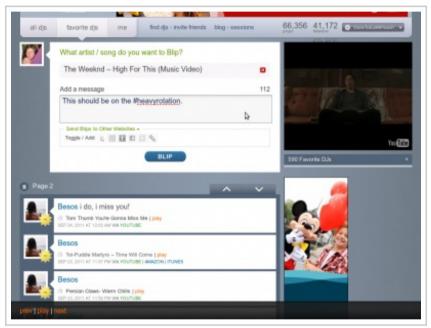
Both sites have bugs. However, the kind of bugs that Blip has usually involve the columns not sizing properly, or banner ads popping up in the wrong places. The bugs on Turntable involve the music stopping abruptly or getting accidentally booted from a room. In other words, the bugs on Turntable get in the way of you actually listening to music and are therefore much more annoying. On the other hand, Turntable is still in beta so hopefully they will get these kinks worked out soon.

All your friends are in the same place: your stream

At Turntable, rooms are divided by genre. Thus if you want to find your friends, you have to go to the room where they are. When you scroll through the rooms, it shows you an avatar if someone you follow is within. You also get an email every time someone you follow goes into a room, which will become annoying once you are following more than a handful of people. The emails can be turned off, but then you have no way of knowing when your friends go online. On Blip, on the other hand, everyone is playing to your stream (exactly like Twitter if Twitter played music) so you will always know with a cursory glance who is playing music.

Messages over chat

Part of what makes Turntable addictive is that every room is also a chat room. The problem is that it means the community actively discourages you from using the site as background. I can listen to Blip all day long, only going to the site to occasionally reblip a song or play something new. If I play two songs an hour and finding each takes a minute, I can get eight hours of music for only twenty minutes of effort.



This may come down to personal preference. If the time you spend playing music is spent only playing music, you may prefer the immediacy of a chat box. But if you are a hopeless multi-tasker like me, a music site that demands all your attention is too much of a distraction from the To Do list.

Communication is achieved on Blip by selecting songs

Because Turntable has DJs choosing songs right after each other, it would seem that DJs are more conscious about selecting for their audience. I am definitely more likely to hit the

"awesome" bar if the song is more than good, but also a well-thought out follow-up. On the other hand, because each message on Blip comes with a song, DJs often choose a song that fits their reply. For example, if someone compliments my stream, I may say thank you with Cut Copy's "Feel the Love."

The nice thing about this is that it cuts out a lot of the negativity and bickering. Again, this may come down to personal preference, but if I don't like a song I may say so in chat room but would be a lot less likely to do so if I have to choose a song to reply with. This is related to the next point...

Supportive atmosphere

It is hard to describe how the set-up of a website can contribute to its atmosphere, but it makes a considerable difference. First of all, when chat comes on the scene, you truly get to know people...and that's not always a good thing. Strangers who share a love of music feel a great kinship on Blip, but at the end of the day they are only acquaintances. You can conceptualize this as the difference between how people use Twitter and how they use Facebook. Because of Twitter's limitations, like Blip, it is less personal. There are plenty of people who are "great friends" on Twitter that would rather not be Facebook friends.

But there is a more important aspect that shapes the atmospheric differences between Blip and Turntable. Blip allows "props" but there is no way to express dislike for a song. While there have been times I wished there was an easy way I could press a button expressing contempt for the music someone has cluttered my stream with, not having that ability keeps things friendly. If I really hate a song and feel so strongly about it that I need to let the world know, I can respond with a song and a message expressing myself. However, it is rare that it comes to that. You get props so you know a song went over well. Songs that don't get props could have been hated, or maybe no one was listening, or maybe they liked it but not well enough to give it the click. Or maybe they are out of props! The point is, you don't know, so you don't stress it.

Compare this to a situation I had at Turntable.fm the other day. I was in room where 90 percent of the songs DJs chose were getting skipped because so many people had hit the "lame" button. Only one or two tracks got enough positive feedback to push the meter into the green "awesome" zone. I had recently installed a Chrome add-on that has little

pop-ups telling you who lamed or awesomed a song. So I know that there were three people in the room that were hitting the lame button within the first ten seconds of most songs playing. Perhaps they knew and hated those artists, but I get the feeling that at least one of them was lame-ing every song so it would be more likely to be skipped, and thus get back to his or her DJ turn sooner. I actually saw one DJ mark a song as lame before it even started playing and then change his vote to awesome once the song got a chance to get going. Now maybe these people are just very harsh critics and they were being true to their feelings. However, I have a solid reputation as an online DJ, and the brutality of that room managed to shake my confidence. Average Avatar who just wants to share a few songs from bands he adores is likely to walk away from such a room very unhappy.

The flip-side of this was in a room I visited later that evening. The room had a non-genre theme, so the song choices were all over the place. The chat was very positive and they were sharing non-music links as well. People said "hello" and "good-bye" as avatars moved in and out of the room. Most heads were bopping for all my song selections, and despite the vast diversity of genres, most songs had the Awesome-O-Meter firmly in the green. Perfect, right? Alas, no. One kind fellow pointed out that I'd yet to give points to any of his songs. There was a woman who kept asking if she should skip her own songs because no one had given her any points. Look, just because I don't want to give someone props for playing the same classic rock I've heard 70,000 times on the radio doesn't mean I want to have a dialog explaining that. But because props cost nothing to earn, there becomes some peer pressure to claim you love songs that really you only "like."

Blip is also a music journal

Even though both sites are designed to be used as radio, Blip has an advantage in archiving every song you play. This means that if I go back to Christmas 2009, there is a record of the night my dad introduced me to King Crimson. It means that if I want to do a "Best songs of 2010" list, I can comb through all the songs I played over the last year to see what I might have forgotten.

This used to be a major advantage of Blip, but as of September 2011 those old mp3 links

are no longer playable. Your journal still exists, but the links will all be broken (unless they were YouTube videos). This is due to the new label agreement that Blip has made. It's a big loss for those who liked to comb the archives, but Turntable has no archives at all to compare this with.

You can DJ whenever you want

To me this is far and away the biggest advantage of Blip over Turntable. I find that often when I am paying more attention to Turntable than I would like (e.g. when I am failing to multi-task effectively) it is because I am checking the chat to see if a DJ slot has opened up. This is not fun. In popular rooms, it can take about four hours to get a chance to DJ, which is a longer commitment than I want to make. To combat this, some rooms are a free-for-all. Take Indie OneNDone: there DJs are only allowed to play one song, then whoever has the fastest fingers can jump into the DJ spot. This is even worse for productivity because one will never get a chance to DJ unless she is giving her total attention to Turntable, and then it is only for one song.

The other option is to start your own room. If you have three friends rounded up and you don't care about attracting the herd, this can be a fun alternative to other chat sites. But you can't DJ on your own because, to appease the music labels, single DJs only hear 20 second clips. Otherwise, you have to go spam other rooms to recruit DJs. This is discouraged within the Turntable subculture, but I don't see any way around it as the site is currently designed: either I have to go find people to DJ with or I am alone in a room listening to 20 second clips. No fun! I have created a room and managed to get a small crowd, but when the room clears out after I go to sleep, it effectively ceases to exist. In my experience, a room with 7 avatars isn't superior to one with 100, but I end up in the crowded rooms because even in the small rooms the DJ slots are always completely full anyhow. On Blip you can listen to any DJ at any time, or play any song at any time.

Comparing Blip and

Turntable: in conclusion

Both of these are fantastic sites for discovering new music, so which is better will ultimately come down to what kind of user you are. I highly recommend them both over better-known sites like Last.fm and Pandora.

If you loathe multi-tasking and primarily want to share music for a short time when you are done with your work, Turntable may be the best site for you. If you want to play extremely rare tracks or if you're a proud sound quality snob that would never enjoy a track playing on YouTube, by all means Turntable is your choice.

A quick note on extremely rare tracks. By rare, I don't mean recent indie bands or illegal bootleg mashups or popular DJ's remixes that don't have their own albums. That stuff can mostly be found on YouTube. By rare tracks, I mean B-sides from indie bands that were barely popular ten years ago or ragtime blues from the late twenties or remixes by DJs unknown outside of your region. Underplayed music is my specialty and I can usually find whatever I need with Blip's YouTube functionality.

If you are more interested in playing music than listening to music, and you don't mind YouTube videos, Blip.fm is still the better choice. Conversely, if you want to use the site as background while you get on with your day, I still recommend Blip.

Have you tried both sites? What do you think?

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Juergen

October 4, 2011 at 9:27 am Repl

Your post made me want to try out turntable – but for those outside of US (like me): "Turntable access is restricted to only the United States due to licensing constraints."



Gia

October 4, 2011 at 4:07 pm Reply

I was always into it. And your post is a treasure for me. I am totally floored by the post. I actually can DJ whenever I want. This is one of the most informative and theoretically the best post I have come across. Thanks a lot for this one.

Gia's last post .. Physical Therapy Assistant



karma

October 5, 2011 at 2:52 pm Reply

@Juergen That's the brakes when it comes to music sites. Giving the recording industry what they want is frequently at odds with what users want. For a while, Blip used a database provided by Imeem and it didn't work at all outside the US. Then Imeem got bought and ceased to exist. Did you give Blip a try?

Or in my best Bogart I say, "We'll always have Spotify."

(By "always" of course I mean "until record labels get antsy again")

I should also mention that because it is in Beta Turntable is currently only available to Facebook users.





@Gia Thank you! Your praise will help me get over my grammatical oversights.

Did you join both sites? Which do you like better?

karma's last post ..docshoe:

Thanks to ibelieveinmysoul for posting my favorite...



RYAN

October 5, 2011 at 3:44 pm Reply

Great insight.

Turntable & Blip are both therapeutic to many people.

Turntable's interaction is just far beyond what Blip can ever accomplish.



Damn The Man

October 5, 2011 at 5:26 pm Reply

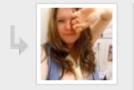
I think both sites have their ups and downs, and it really depends on your preference which site you prefer. Turntable gives a more personal experience with it's chat box where Blip offers quick comments. You also do not have to worry about playing the same song over and over while having a convo with someone at TT like you do at blip. And other is a lot less drama at TT....those of us that are longtime blippers know what I'm talking about.

Personally, I prefer Turntable over blip when I want to interact with people and have a good time while listening to music. Blip is a good way to hear your tunes without having to worry about talking to others if you are not in the mood to.

Turntable is a new site and will have more options available as the site grows. For now, it's as good as one could ask in a fledgling site and only grows with time, whereas blip seems to be losing options more and more. I left blip due to the inability to upload songs and them taking out a good bit of music. But I can still be seen there from time to time.

In closing, I think that Turntable is a better site for having fun and getting a certain style of music instead of random ones you get in a blipstream. Not to mention you hear a song once, and then it's done whereas in blip you hear it at lest twice if it's reblipped.

Both sites are good for finding new music but for me, Turntable is just the better option at this point. More laid back and more interactive.



karma

October 5, 2011 at 6:36 pm Reply

"Not to mention you hear a song once, and then it's done whereas in blip you hear it at lest twice if it's reblipped."

That's a good point!

karma's last post ..Great indie lyricists #1: Cloud Cult



Carlos (DJFang-TT & Fangbaby-Blip)

October 5, 2011 at 6:14 pm Reply

Thank you for a very nice write-up!

I have a tremendous amount of love for Blip and very special relationships have been forged there. While I don't blip as much as I used to it is still something I'm very fond of.

Having just discovered TT I'm growing quite fond of it as well! Although being "lamed" before the song is even played really irritates the heck

out of me!

Again, this is a very informative, well done article. Thank you!



DirtyUrine

October 5, 2011 at 7:41 pm Reply

Awesome post Karma!!

I am currently both a Blip.fm and Turntable.fm DJ. I have been DJing on Blip for over 2 years and on Turntable for just over 2 weeks now.

Here are a few key take-aways from my vantage point:

* Blip lost many of my DJs/listeners to Turntable after Aug. 27, 2011 due to the loss of user's MP3 uploads as described in your post.

* I currently spend more time DJing on Turntable compared to Blip because many of my U.S. based DJs are now spending more of their time on Turntable and it is the "new" cool site with a better user interface IMHO.

* Being a die-hard blipper, I still use the Blip site regularly to check in with my fave DJs/listeners still on the site and play "available" music and/or YouTube videos. Blip users now have limited access and/or no access to many artist/bands due to copyright restrictions.

* Turntable "forces" me to become more of a balanced DJ and listener. I have to be more proactive with my track selections in keeping with the theme of the room. The Turntable format makes me really have to listen to the other DJs songs versus than just spinning my own tunes.

* On the other hand, when I feel like just playing and listening to my own music selections I prefer the Blip format. Blip does not limit the quantity of songs played per artist/band. RE (per Turntable FAQ): "The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) prevents us from playing more than three songs from one album or four songs from one artist in a three hour period." In summary, I prefer the Turntable user interface and I have discovered many new tunes from having to "listen" to what your fellow DJs on stage are playing. But if I want to just "play" a specific artist/band with no restrictions (except for availability and/or quality) I choose Blip. Both sites have their advantages and disadvantages and I recommend all DJs (Blip, Turntable, and newbies) to try both and decide which format suits your individual music desires/needs. Rock on! \m/



SandraAguillon

October 5, 2011 at 9:33 pm Reply

I discovered Blip.Fm about a year ago. It wasn't love at first sight, but it grew on me. I stumbled into Turntable recently, and had a similar experience. Both have become a part of my online experience. I wouldn't replace one with the other, not at this point anyway. They accommodate different moods, and they're FREE!

BTW, Yo!@Ryan@DamntheMan@DirtyUrine \m/



karma

October 7, 2011 at 5:04 pm Reply

@dirtyurine "Turntable "forces" me to become more of a balanced DJ and listener."

That's a good way of putting it. Though Blip forces songs too, because it's the only way to reply.

I truly don't prefer the interface of TT because of the forced chat (can be kicked out for AFK)

I agree that it wins on the hip "kids these days" are into it front. And the recent updates have shown that they're being responsive to the direction the site needs to go in to grow.

karma's last post ..Getting published: See Yourself in Print #1



DirtyUrine

October 7, 2011 at 5:27 pm Reply

Blip never "forces songs" on me per say. What I mean by Turntable "forces me to become more of a balanced Dj and listener" is when you are on stage Djing with fellow Djs you really have to listen to what the others are playing to stay in theme with the room rather than just playing what you prefer sometimes.

On the other hand, I do choose Blip when I'm in more of a relaxed mode/non-chatty or AFK. Even when replying, I rarely listen to the replied song unless I want to hear it. If the song is really something I wouldn't play on Blip I will go as far as cutting & pasting my reply on a different "preferred" song I would play for my listeners. I do this because I view my Blip station more like internet radio station and I only play tunes that I would listen to as well.

Just wanted to clarify these points and Ty for the reply back!



DirtyUrine

October 7, 2011 at 5:55 pm Reply

@Karma Another interesting thing I have learned while chatting on Turntable about Blip is that many of Turntable users that have never heard of Blip do not use Twitter and/or prefer Facebook. Not sure if this is statistically significant but thought I would throw this out as well. Personally, I almost didn't join Turntable because I was not a FBer but set up a FB acct just to join Turntable. I also learned of Blip from Twitter and joined a couple weeks after I began tweeting in 2009.

	-	

RocknHollywood_

October 11, 2011 at 3:56 pm *Reply*

Please check your email :)



 cliveboulton
 December 2, 2011 at 8:20 pm
 Reply

 Blip's design allows for social relationships to merge from out of tastes in blipping songs. Like Twitter useful simplicity over features seems like a winner.

cliveboulton's last post ..Watch a VC use my name to sell a con.

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1. Turntable.fm vs. Blip.fm: Two Fantastic Online Music Communities | 101.fm - April 7, 2012

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