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TECHNOLOGY eREPORT

MacNotes
The Versatile iPod:
Not Just for Music, Not Just for Macs

By Jeffrey Allen

This time the MacNotes column, like its focus, the iPod, is not just for Macs and Mac lawyers. Last year, Apple created and started to sell an iPod that, of all things, does Windows. Prior to the official Windows version of the iPod, Windows users could get the iPod to work on their computers with the help of third-party software; now they have an iPod built for them.

We all know the iPod as a slick, sleek-looking music machine; after all, Apple created it for that purpose. But, in reality, the iPod offers much more than the ability to record and replay music for you. We hear a lot about converged devices these days, usually (but not exclusively) in terms of the merger of the PDA and the telephone into a single unit. The iPod represents the very clever convergence of: (1) an MP3 player, (2) a music database, (3) a PDA, and (4) an external hard disk.

The real cleverness of the iPod's design and function (and the point of this column) is the fact that it mounts as a separate external hard disk to your computer. That means that in addition to using it to store music, contacts, and dates and to play music, you can use it for backup purposes and data storage and transportation. If you install an operating system on it, you can make it bootable, so that it becomes an emergency start up disk for your computer. Moreover, if you install your key applications on it, in the event that your computer has a catastrophic hard drive failure the iPod can become the hard disk that runs the computer, allowing you to continue to work until you can get the computer repaired. I have mine set up with my operating system, word processor, time and billing software, critical data, and my basic utilities programs that may let me revive my computer's internal hard drive by correcting the problem preventing it from booting up. I also included ISP access software and a browser so that I can get on line and send and receive email.

Apple sells the iPod in 5, 10, and 20 GB sizes for $299, $399, and $499, respectively (note that only the 10GB and 20GB iPods come in Windows native versions). The 20GB iPod is the heaviest and largest of the trio, but it only weighs 7.2 ounces and measures an easily pocketable 2.4" x 4.0" x .84". The other two versions weigh in at 6.5 ounces and are a fraction of an inch thinner. All three connect to your computer's FireWire port for fast data transfer. The included FireWire cable also connects the iPod to an AC adaptor to power the iPod and/or charge the internal battery. All three versions include a set of earphones. The 10 and 20 GB versions also come with a wired remote.

I operate on the theory that bigger is better when it comes to the amount of storage space, so I prefer the 20GB iPod. If you want to get a smaller one, you should do some rough calculations to ensure that you get one that will accommodate your needs. Apple says the 5GB version holds 1,000 songs. That translates to about 200 songs per gigabyte. I have found that my operating system, key applications, utilities, and critical data consume approximately 4 GB. That means that if I leave 500MB free (which I do as a precaution), I could use a 5GB iPod for backup and emergency purposes and still have room for about 100 songs on a 5 GB iPod. I would consider that too close to the edge and opt for at least a 10GB to give me room for additional songs, programs, and data.

If you want to do some after-market converging, you can replace the Apple earphones with a set of Sony's MDR-MC11 noice-cancelling earphones. The Sony earphones work just fine with the iPod, sound great, and, with the flip of a switch, generate "anti-noise" that significantly reduces the amount of ambient noise that reaches you. This is a great addition for enhancing your enjoyment of your music on airplanes, subways, or in any noisy environment.

Now, I will confess that while I grabbed your attention by telling you about the iPod, I had a secondary intention of

talking to you about the importance of backing-up and having an emergency plan, especially if you are a mobile lawyer. Everyone knows (or should know by now) that they need to back up their data. Many of us actually do it on a fairly regular basis. Most people who travel with computers regularly have suffered through the experience of finding themselves on the road with a computer that simply will not boot. Sometimes a hardware failure causes the problem; but more often it results from a software or system problem. (Those of you that haven't had that happen yet, wait: your day will come!) When it happens to you, will you be prepared? With the iPod, now you will have a way to prepare for that eventuality. You'll also have a useful device that will entertain you when you don't need it for emergencies.

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