

Mobile Music; Take II

Last week I talked about a couple of music web sites where you can download your favorite music legally. This week I want to take a brief look at a couple of devices you can use to transport and listen to your music on the move. Actually this is Christmas shopping homework for me. My wife has been hinting that she might like something portable for listening to her freshly downloaded music. So like a good husband I'm doing my homework early. I found that there are two main types of portable music players, flash memory and hard drive.

Flash memory players use a similar type of memory found in the key type USB backup devices. In fact many of the players I checked out could double as a standard USB backup device. These players have an available storage disk of 64 to 256 Megs of memory with the 256 Meg model being the most popular. The typical MP3 song is 3 to 4 Megs in size; that will allow you store and transport roughly 75 songs. Flash memory players are typically very small and lightweight. Most of the players weigh less than 2 ounces and are roughly the size of a large disposable lighter. All of the players come with a multitude of features. One feature I know my wife will want is a built in FM tuner for listening to her favorite local music stations. Another important feature to consider is the interface of the connection. All of the flash drive players use either a USB 1.1 or a USB 2.0 interface, USB 2.0 being 40 times faster.

The editors at PC Magazine gave the iRiver 390T its editor's choice award. This particular device contained many of the same features that other flash memory players contained. What sets this player apart from the rest of the pack is its attention to detail. The editors specifically mentioned the tuner's reception and the quality of the voice recorder. This player did receive low marks however for having the slower USB 1.1 interface.

The next group of players are referred to as hard drive players. These players actually use a hard drive to store your music similar to what a laptop uses. Hard drive players come in sizes ranging from 1 gig to 40 gigs, therefore they are capable of holding thousands of songs. However, there is always a trade off, hard drive players are typically larger and heavier, typically weighing over 4 ounces. When shopping for one of these players it is more important to get a model with USB 2.0 or Firewire capability. Without the faster data throughput you may find yourself getting easily frustrated waiting for your music to load.

As before the editors at PC Magazine recently awarded an editors choice award to the top hard drive player, the Apple iPod. The Apple iPod represents nearly half of all hard drive players sold with over 3 million players sold this year. So what makes the iPod so popular? The sleek design and small size is very appealing to many. More importantly however, the easy to use controls is what seems to put it on top. The iPod is available as a 20-gig model for \$299 or a 40-gig model for \$399. Apple also recently released a smaller, lighter weight iPod Mini that comes with a 4 gig hard drive and sells for \$249.

Well I still have not decided which player I'm going to get my wife but I certainly hope that I have helped narrow down your choices. One other bit of advice, most of the players have a battery life of 8 to 20 hours so it may be wise to also purchase

rechargeable batteries as a stocking stuffer. If you need help with your computer problems please give Thomas, Roger, or Justin a call at the Computer Depot, 947-0749.