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The pocket hard drive is the latest must-have for presenters on the go

BY **Harry Waldman**

A computer at home, a computer at work, a laptop on the road — and enough files to make your head spin. Having presentations, photos, e-mails, documents, and audio and video clips on the right machine at the right time is becoming an increasingly important issue for many presenters.

Luckily, an increasingly popular form of hard-drive storage has emerged that is tailor-made for solving this problem. These so-called pocket hard drives are small, portable, require less power than their larger external counterparts, and can store up to 60GB of material with ease. Some models also come with backup software that makes it easier than ever to keep files up-to-date and safe from spontaneous computer crashes.

These benefits make pocket drives alluring for presenters, but to get the right drive for your needs, a little research goes a long way.

Growing gigabytes

In the past few years, hard-drive storage has improved alongside every other type of technology, with three factors paving the way. First, the storage capacity on standard desktop computers has gone from a few hundred megabytes to more than 80GB in less than a decade. The physical size, or form factor, of hard drives has evolved as well. Drives in general [[??]], both for desktop and laptop computers, have become smaller, allowing hard drives to become more compact. Finally, USB and FireWire connections have become universal for speedy, reliable data transfer. These

factors have revolutionized the external-hard-drive market, giving presenters a number of backup and storage options that didn't exist a few years ago.

Two classes of external hard drives have emerged: the standard external drive and the pocket drive. The differences between the two classes are subtle but important. The Maxtor 300XT, for example, is a 160GB external drive that hooks up to a computer via a FireWire connection and costs about $320. I use the Maxtor 300XT drive to back up my business data as well as my wife's documents and presentations. Measuring 6 x 8 x 1 inches and weighing more than 2.5 pounds, the Maxtor is essentially a desktop hard drive. And it requires a bulky transformer and power cord.

Now compare the Maxtor 300XT with the Pocketec Pockey drive, a typical example of a pocket hard drive. The Pockey can hold between 20GB and 60GB of data, depending on the model you buy. That may seem paltry next to a drive like the Maxtor, but it's impressive when you consider that the Pockey can store this data in a scant 5 x 3 x 0.5-inch, shock-resistant case that weighs 5.5 ounces. Not only does it have the Maxtor beat in compactness, the Pockey drive does not need a transformer for extra

power. Available with either a FireWire or USB 2.0 connection, the Pockey draws power right from these connections. Although the Maxtor is more suitable for office backup, the Pockey's size advantage makes it more convenient for trips back and forth between offices, serving as a drive for additional presentations, graphics, extra content and backup files, if needed. Also, it's small enough to fit into my wife's purse, which makes it easier to travel with than most presentation equipment.

Anatomy of a pocket drive

The main selling point of the pocket drive is its size — and marketers know it. Just take a look at some of

the prices associated with these little wonders and it's easy to get sticker shock. Unlike external and internal hard drives, for which you pay X amount of dollars per gigabyte, pocket drives cost you — as do ultraportable projectors and digital camcorders — an additional premium for portability and convenience.

Like the Pockey, most of today's pocket drives are derived from laptop hard drives. Consequently, pocket drives still lag behind in storage

SmartDisk FireFly and FireLite

SIZES: FireFly: 5GB, 20GB. FireLite: 20GB, 30GB, 40GB.
INTERFACES: FireFly: USB 2.0. FireLite: FireWire, USB 2.0.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: FireLiteonly: Connectix CopyAgent (Mac); Retrospect Express Backup (Windows).
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 8.6 through OS X; Windows 98 SE, 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $199-$329.
CONTACT: SmartDisk, 239.436.2500, www.smartdisk.com.
CIRCLE 313 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

EZQuest Cobra Slim Line

SIZES: 10GB, 20GB, 30GB, 40GB, 60GB.
INTERFACE: FireWire.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: Intech Hard Disk Speed Tools.
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 8.6 and higher; Windows 98 SE, 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $169-$459.
CONTACT: EZQuest Inc., 888.898.8380, www.ezq.com.
CIRCLE 315 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

Pocketec Pockey DataStor

SIZES: 20GB, 30GB, 40GB, 60GB.
INTERFACES: USB 2.0, USB/FireWire combo.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: None included.
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 8.6 and higher; Windows 98, 98 SE, 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $199-$349.
CONTACT: Pocketec, 818.717.9556, www.pocketec.net.

CIRCLE 316 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

CMS Peripherals ABSplus

SIZES: 20GB, 30GB, 40GB, 60GB.
INTERFACES: FireWire, PCMCIA, USB 2.0.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: ABSplus Backup.
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 8.6, 9.1, 10.1 and higher; Windows 98, 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $299-$499.
CONTACT: CMS Peripherals Inc., 800.327.5773, www.cmsproducts.com.

CIRCLE 317 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

LaCie PocketDrive

SIZES: 20GB, 30GB, 40GB, 60GB.
INTERFACES: FireWire, USB 2.0.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: LaCie Silverlining Pro drive management.
COMPATIBILITY: Windows 98se, 2000, Me, XP; Mac OS 8.6 and higher.
PRICES: $179-$599.
CONTACT: LaCie USA, 503.844.4500, www.lacie.com.

CIRCLE 318 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

capacity when compared with less-portable desktop drives (external and internal). At the moment, desktop drives can hold up to 160GB of storage; laptop drives top out at around 60GB. An advantage of pocket drives, however, is their comparative shock resistance. Made to be moved around, pocket drives can withstand a fair amount of jostling.

But size and durability aren't the only factors to consider. The power and interface options are important, too.

Power and transfers

Another advantage of pocket drives is their low voltage. Many models don't even need a power cord with an attached transformer; they get most of their power through the USB or FireWire connection. If necessary, additional power can be drawn from a PS/2 (Windows-only mouse/keyboard port) or mouse port via a small supplied cord that usually comes with a splitter so you can keep your mouse or keyboard connected.

Most pocket drives on the market use either FireWire or USB 2.0 for data transfer. The reasons for this are obvious, as most computers sold today now come with both FireWire and USB ports.

The good news is that in most systems, FireWire and USB 2.0 drives are recognized instantly. This is particularly true with the newer operating systems, such as Mac OS X and Windows XP, in which true plug-and-play functionality has finally become a reality — most of the time. But even with older operating systems, such as Windows 98, the ordeal of installing a pocket drive may only mean installing a driver from a supplied disk.

Most FireWire ports transfer data at 400 Mbps (megabits per second) and have six pins — essentially four for data and two for low-voltage power. The power supplied by these two pins is usually enough for pocket drives, but not for larger external drives like my Maxtor 300XT. The only drawback to this interface is that some laptop computers do not include the two power pins. The reason? Manufacturers believe FireWire is mainly used for plugging a camcorder in to a computer, and these cameras usually have their own power source. If your laptop's FireWire connection doesn't have the required power pins,

you can still use a pocket drive via the computer's four-pin FireWire port (or PCMCIA card) and connecting to the PS/2 port with an additional cord.

The USB 2.0 interface is also offered by a number of pocket drive manufacturers. This standard is as inexpensive as FireWire and, at the moment, slightly faster at 480 Mbps.

There is one drawback to USB 2.0, however. Although the standard is backward-compatible, if your computer's port uses the older USB 1.1 and your pocket hard drive uses USB 2.0, you will not get the latter's speedy 480-Mbps transfer rate (compared with USB 1.1's 40 Mbps). For that you will need to install a USB 2.0 port.

APPLE IPOD

All work and play

So you are torn between spending money for an external hard drive and an MP3 player? You could, technically, get both. Apple's iPod is the perfect example of an MP3 player that doubles as a hard drive storage option in FireWire disk mode. And since it's now available in both Mac and Windows versions, your only hard decision will be which songs to delete to make way for more presentation slides. Then again, you could make things easier on yourself by getting the 20GB model.
■ Julie Hill

The soft side

While pocket hard drives are eminently portable, they have a secondary use as a hard-drive backup. Consider CMS Peripherals' ABSplus. Available in USB 2.0 or FireWire versions in sizes ranging from 20GB to 60GB, the ABSplus has a sophisticated but easy-to-use backup system.

With its proprietary software package, the ABSplus backs up all files in their native file formats. This means the files are readable and directly accessible, just as they are on an internal hard drive. In addition, the software package synchronizes data files between the ABSplus and a laptop (and even a desktop), ensuring that your data is current.

The ABSplus backup software essentially mirrors everything on your internal hard drive, including operating system, applications and settings — and it's bootable. Which means that if your laptop's hard drive crashes one hour before your seminar starts in Timbuktu, all is not lost. You can pop the bad internal drive out of the laptop, open the ABSplus case, take out the hard drive and place it in your laptop — that is, if you feel comfortable enough to do so.

The key is to be sure the drive is always current. The ABSplus software makes this task easy through an automatic feature that scans your source drive and copies changed files each time you plug it in.

Before you buy

All these advantages are making pocket drives popular accessories. But before you buy, consider the following:

Does your computer have FireWire or USB ports? This will determine which format you should buy. Be sure to consider all the computers you do your work on. [[SINCE WE HAVE THE SPACE, WHICH WOULD BE BETTER IF I HAVE BOTH?]]

Does the computer need a software driver to run the hard drive? Although most drives claim to be truly plug-and-play, this isn't always the case. For example, Pocketec's USB Pockey drive required that drivers be loaded on both an IBM ThinkPad and a newer iMac before it would work. This is only a minor headache, however, as drivers can be downloaded from an included disk or the Web.

What capacity will you need? Take a look at your current hard drive and see how much space your digital images, electronic slideshows and other documents are taking up.

How much are you willing to spend? Expect to pay a little more per gigabyte than you would for an external hard drive.

Although pocket drives are relatively pricey, the advantages they offer — shock-resistant portability, ample storage capacity, and impressive transfer rates — make them an ideal tool for presenters, especially those who use more than one computer or are on the road more often than not. ▣

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SANDISK CRUZER

Flashy storage

If anything over a gigabyte sounds like overkill for your purposes, take a gander at the latest flash-media drives. Popping up like dandelions these days are flash-memory drives that offer anywhere from 8MB to 256MB of storage in a lightweight package that can fit onto a key chain. Sony's MicroVault and IBM's thumb drives have led the market, but innovation continues to abound. SanDisk recently unveiled its Cruzer, which allows users to pop in Secure Digital and MultiMediaCards of varying capacities.
■ Julie Hill

SONY MICRO VAULT

Iomega HDD portable drives

SIZES: 20GB, 30GB.
INTERFACES: FireWire, USB 2.0.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: Iomega Automatic Backup and Disaster Recovery.
COMPATIBILITY: Macintosh OS 8.6 and higher, OS X (FireWire, OS 9.1 and higher); Windows 98 (USB 1.1 only), 98 SE, 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $199-$260.
CONTACT: Iomega Corp., 800.697.8833, www.iomega.com.

CIRCLE 319 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

Iomega Peerless drive

SIZES: 10GB, 20GB.
INTERFACES: FireWire, USB 2.0.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: Iomega QuikSync.
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 8.6 through 9.1; Windows 98 (USB only), 98 SE, 2000, Me.
PRICES: $240-$300.
CONTACT: Iomega Corp., 800.697.8833, www.iomega.com.

CIRCLE 320 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

Apple iPod

SIZES: 5GB, 10GB, 20GB.
INTERFACE: FireWire.
BACKUP SOFTWARE: None included.
COMPATIBILITY: Mac OS 9.2, OS X; Windows 2000, Me, XP.
PRICES: $299-$499.
CONTACT: Apple Computer Inc., 800.692.7753, www.apple.com.

CIRCLE 321 ON READER INQUIRY CARD