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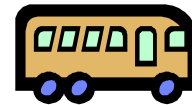


OVER
450
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Global Newsletter October 2007

Onboard the Universal Serial Bus



Universal Serial Bus (or USB) has rapidly become the standard for connecting devices to your computer. In fact, many computers no longer ship with a floppy disk drive as standard, but will have at least one USB port. USB connectors are used by input devices (mice, keyboards, scanners, digital cameras), output devices (portable CD writers, printers), storage devices (external hard disk drives, flash or USB memory keys/sticks) and even decorations and novelty items such as mobile phone chargers, flashing light snowmen, coffee cup warmers and mini reading lights.

This month we take a look at some of the things to look for in the USB world.

Plugs and cables

Not all USB plugs are created equal. It's likely that your computer will accept type A plugs, but the other end that plugs into your camera or printer may be a type B, a mini or a microUSB plug. Ensure that your cable has the correct plugs for your device on both ends. And if your USB cable seems a little short, you can buy extension cables but you may need a special booster if you want to go over 5 metres or 15 feet.

Power

Devices can draw a low power current through a 5 volt supply to the USB connection; however this may not be sufficient for high powered devices like external hard drives. Multiple USB devices on one computer can experience performance problems and errors if their combined power requirement is too great. Powered hubs are available which provide additional USB connections and an external power source, though some devices may still need their own power supply (e.g. printers).

Storage

After starting out with a capacity of 4 floppy disks, USB storage devices (flash drives or USB keys) can now hold over 4,000 times that amount, with capacities currently hitting 16 GB. Flash drive designs range from options like lanyard attachments to crystal studded drives that can be worn as jewellery. But if you are worried about transporting your important files on such a small, easily lost device, consider security features like encryption or a fingerprint reader.

Many MP3 players are now the size of a flash drive and provide song file storage through their USB connection, but also have special software installed to allow the song files to be played.

Speed

Like a traditional hard disk drive, flash drive performances can vary so if you are transferring large amounts of data you will want a fast read and write speed. A fast speed also allows you to use your flash drive as extra memory for Windows Vista, speeding up the performance of your PC when you need it. Readyboost won't work on slower performing flash drives.

Also, make sure your computer and all USB devices adhere to the more recent USB 2.0 standard, which has a faster transfer rate than the original USB 1.1 specification.

Contact your local Computer Troubleshooter and find out how to get the best from your USB devices.



Contact your local Computer
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