

# MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP

## May 2002 Newsletter



### Quips N' Tips

by Rick Howell

Well, I don't often admit I was wrong, but if you listened to my advice to download Kazaa Media Desktop, then you must now listen to me advise you to remove it from your system. Seems Kazaa packaged in a little program which runs in the background and allows your computer to be accessed from a remote location and used as a node on someone else's network. Sounds illegal doesn't it? Well, when you load Kazaa, they inform you about the software you are installing, however it is buried in the license agreement which you accepted when you installed the software. You remember the license agreement don't you? It was about six pages of #6 condensed font text which nobody reads when they install software. Hey, I didn't read it and, apparently, no one else does either. Kazaa continues to be the #1 download from <http://www.cnet.shareware.com>.

The antidote for a Kazaa-infested system is to be found at <http://www.kazaalite.com>. Here you will find everything you need to rid your system of this parasite and still be able to take advantage of all the files available on the Kazaa network. Kazaa lite was developed by a Russian programmer who actually read the Kazaa license agreement and got pissed. Can't say I blame him much.

Seems the latest thing in MP3 downloading is to look for ZIP files and download the whole CD, cover art and all. No wonder the Recording Industry Association of America is upset. Now anyone with an inkjet printer and a CD burner can make their own CDs and give them away to their friends. No more paying \$15 for a CD which cost the record company about twenty cents to produce. In my humble opinion, turnabout is fair play. It's the screwing you get for the screwing you got.

And you all have seen the pop-up ads for the wireless X-10 cameras you can install in your home. These are neat little gadgets which you can place anywhere and connect them to your TV or computer or even to the internet so you can monitor whatever is going on in your home, even from a remote location. One thing they forgot to tell you is the transmitters have a range of about three hundred feet. This means anyone with a receiver can drive down your street, intercept the signals and see what is happening in your house. I saw it demonstrated on a local news channel last week. Kinda gives a whole new outlook on wireless networking, huh? There is a time and a place for hard wiring.

Speaking of wireless networking, several manufacturers are putting out high-speed wireless network equipment these days. A word of advice might be prudent here. Stick with the established standards. Look for 802.11a, 802.11b, or 802.11g compatibilities. There are several proprietary specifications on the market today which might not be there tomorrow, and have no guarantee of working with future specifications. If you want equipment you can use for a while, stick with the standards.

### MEETING NOTICE

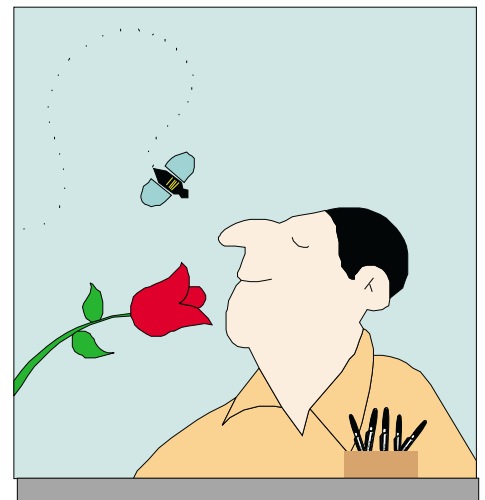
by: George Miner

**When:** Tuesday, May 14th, at 7:15 PM

**Where:** Old Bedford School (in 1800 block of Bedford Road)

**Program:** This month there will be a presentation given by club members that will be informative to all. We will get together at the I-Hop after the meeting for coffee and conversation. Bring a friend. All are welcome!

See y'all at the meeting.



# CD/MP3 Players

By Bruce and Pete Brown (taken from *PC Magazine On the Net*, May 7th)

The three most obvious reasons CD/MP3 players are selling well are versatility, familiarity, and price. CD/MP3 players let you play regular audio CDs as well as CDs burned with digital tracks. When loaded with tracks, a single CD can hold 10 or more hours of music, or 150 to 200 tracks (depending on the encoding rate). And most consumers already know how to use a CD player, so there's no learning curve for the primary function.

With street prices of the reviewed units ranging from \$130 to \$200, the combo CD/MP3 players are costly compared with most plain CD players but inexpensive compared with most portable RAM-based players. Important features to look for are the size and type of batteries, battery life, media compatibility (with audio CDs and both CD-R and CD-RW burned media), antishock protection (which prevents music from skipping during movement), and the interface (the buttons and menus that control operation). The tested players all come with small remote-control units and either ear buds or headsets.

## ***DGN Dioneer Multi Codec CD/MP3 Player***

The DGN Dioneer Multi Codec CD/MP3 Player is a fine buy. Moderate in weight and size—at 11 ounces and 5.8 by 5.0 by 1.0 inches (HWD)—the Dioneer (digital crossed with pioneer) comes with two rechargeable double-A batteries, an AC adapter/charger, ear buds, a small clip-style remote (which you can use for operation but not for settings), and a carrying bag. CD audio (CDA), MP3, and WMA formats are all supported, and the firmware is upgradable to support future formats. We found the control interface (which uses a four-line LCD and multiple buttons) less than intuitive, but we were able to figure out all the functions without resorting to the manual. The Dioneer played CDs, CD-Rs, and CD-RWs perfectly, though loading data from a new CD took longer than with the other players (the player's firmware memorizes the ID tags for up to 12 CDs). Volume goes satisfactorily high, and when we changed the equalizer settings (normal, classic, rock, and jazz), we could perceive slight differences. The antishock technology works well, buffering up to 8 minutes in digital mode. We had to shake the player much harder than you would in normal use to force a skip, although it was a bit easier with audio CDs than with digital media.

## ***iRiver iMP-350 SlimX***

Although it's the most expensive of the tested CD/MP3 players, the iRiver iMP-350 SlimX was our favorite. The very thin SlimX (hence its name) measures 5.50 by 5.25 by 0.75 inches (HWD) and weighs 8.8 ounces. Rechargeable batteries, ear buds, an external double-A battery holder, a carrying bag, and a full-function remote control are all bundled with the player, which supports CDA, MP3, WMA, and ASF formats. (It's firmware-upgradable, to add new

formats.) You can also use WinAmp playlists with the SlimX. A bonus is an FM receiver that you control with the remote, which has an LCD screen. The SlimX has a slightly irregular round shape, which makes it easy to carry. The buttons on the side of the device and on the remote control are very easy to use. The SlimX was great at avoiding audio breaks from movement, even when we shook it violently (it has 8 minutes of antishock protection in MP3 mode). Volume levels were more than adequate, and CD-R, CD-RW, and CDA media all played without a hitch.

## ***Philips eXp401***

At 7.6 ounces and 1.1 by 3.5 by 4.7 inches (HWD), the Philips eXp401 CD/MP3 player is the lightest and most compact of the four CD/MP3 players we tested. It's small because the eXp401 plays 3-inch discs only, which limits the capacity to 180MB, roughly 3 hours or 45 tracks of content in MP3 format. The sharp-looking two-tone gray case has silver and bronze accents and a jewel-like LCD. The eXp401 comes with an exceptionally small, coin-shaped remote control and better-than-average ear buds that actually stayed in our ears. It runs on one double-A alkaline battery.

The eXp401's 100-second shock protection worked well, and we liked the very simple navigation, but we found the volume didn't go high enough, even for sitting in a quiet room. The small size is handy, but we'd rather have rechargeable batteries, longer playing time (with larger discs), and a lot more volume.

## ***TDK Mojo 620***

The TDK Mojo 620's user controls are easy to figure out and use, and the player comes with a handy utility that can convert your MP3 filename information to the FIF format (artist, title, genre) for quick and easy navigation. But navigation is the brightest light in what we found to be an otherwise flawed player.

Unfortunately, the Mojo was unable to read our CD-RW burned media, though it had no problems with CD-R or CDA discs. We also found the Mojo to be the most sensitive to movement. You might not notice problems when you're taking a calm walk, but when we moved the Mojo abruptly, the unit skipped too easily with both CDA and MP3 discs, even with the ESP set at the highest mode (which is supposed to buffer 8 minutes of content). The 12-ounce, 6.0-by-5.25-by-1.1-inch (HWD) Mojo does come with comfortable behind-the-ear headphones, and it plays music nice and loud, the way we like it. And navigation is a strong point, but the player's questionable performance in our testing was disappointing.



# The Perfect PDA

By Jeremy A. Kaplan and Bruce and Marge Brown, *Extreme Tech, PC Magazine, May 2002*

What would make the perfect PDA? (Personal Data Assistant) None of the current products are quite ideal, although each has some unique features. So we constructed the dream PDA. It would have killer battery life, built-in wireless, an affordable price tag, and an OS as easy to use as Palm's and as robust as the Pocket PC. Now we need to secure seed money, develop mock-ups....

1. LCDs like those on the Compaq iPAQ and the HP Jornada are brilliant. Easily visible indoors and out, with bright colors and readable text, they make the ideal interface.
2. Expandability is a big deal with PDAs these days, so we like having both a Secure Digital and a CompactFlash Type 2 slot, as in the HandEra 330. You can increase the PDA's memory with one slot and keep the other free for expansion modules.
3. The jog dial on the Sony Clié series sits right under your thumb and offers an easy means of interacting with the PDA.
4. Wireless is great, but which protocol do you adopt? The ability to have various tiny radio cards (similar to the SIM cards in some cellular phones) powering an internal antenna would let you switch easily among the various wireless protocols: 802.11a or b, Bluetooth, GPRS, and so on.
5. Toshiba has put rubber side grips on its new Toshiba e550 PDA, which makes it much easier to hold. We've one-upped Toshiba by wrapping the rubber onto the front of the unit.
6. The main buttons on the Casio BE-300 are cleanly laid out and neatly labeled (Launch, OK, Esc, and Power). We found them refreshingly simple.
7. The slide-down faceplate on Sharp's Japanese Zaurus line of PDAs is a refreshingly clever way to hide a complete QWERTY thumb pad. We've removed some extraneous keys and enlarged the remaining ones.
8. Finally, built-in speakers and a microphone are a must, for voice activation, built-in cellular phone functions, and MP3 music files.

## Management Made Easy

Put yourself in Scott Heintzeman's shoes. Executives at your international company, Carlson Hotels Worldwide, are demanding fewer reports with more usable data. Better access to information, in other words. And they want personal productivity devices, at a time when wireless communications are becoming affordable. Seems like a good opportunity to work up a wireless strategy, doesn't it? Heintzeman recently led the development of the Mobile Access to Carlson Hospitality (MACH-1) Pocket PC application within the context of a multi-million-dollar information system overhaul. MACH-1 delivers real-time information to PDAs from Carlson's back-end systems in such a dramatically new way that Carlson's executives and field managers are just beginning to realize the system's many benefits. Prior to MACH-1, Carlson's hotel managers spent much of their workdays hunched over their PCs

studying reports to glean critical management information. As a result, they spent little time with their staff and practically no time with on-site customers. All that has changed. With MACH-1, which the company deployed on 200 Compaq iPAQs, users have gained so much time away from their PCs that, according to Heintzeman, "they feel guilty for the time they now have to work the business versus studying the business." MACH-1 delivers personalized time-sensitive alerts that tie directly to business processes that drive strategic business objectives. Users subscribe to the management information they need to monitor their processes. They can then set five to ten measurement triggers related to specific functions and then receive wireless alerts based on these triggers. By providing faster access to critical management information, MACH-1 enables managers to respond to their business drivers quickly and directly. Let's put it in real-world terms. In the hospitality business, factors such as average room rates and service levels directly affect a company's bottom line. If a Carlson property manager knows in real time that a VIP is checking in, she can appear at the front desk instantly to welcome the party. The sooner a manager is aware of a cancellation, the faster adjustments can be made to ensure full occupancy. Scott told us, "It takes only a few minutes to train our staff to use the iPAQ and a few hours to introduce all the PDA's features, but it can take a few months for MACH-1 users to adjust to new thought processes and behaviors made possible with the system." The dream of making more timely and informed business decisions becomes a reality, along with the responsibility of responding to a real-time personal scorecard.

## Wireless Will Rule (Eventually?)...

The lack of integrated networking in PDAs isn't surprising given the variety of choices available. Users can accessorize with third-party tools, and manufacturers don't have to offer as many models or gamble on which network technologies will have be more popular. Instead, the expansion ports on new models let people choose from a fast-growing field of accessories. Adding these peripherals can be costly and the result cumbersome, but at least you can piece together a solution. PANs Personal area networks in close proximity to an individual let you transfer personal data among devices. For example, if you connect your PDA and digital phone with cables or by wireless signals, you've set up a PAN. Cables are used most commonly today, followed by infrared, but Bluetooth will be a major connection method in the future. An ideal PAN involves inexpensive, low-power, easy-to-use components. PANs can and should have a relatively short operating range and don't need high bandwidth. Bluetooth's design objectives fit the profile of an ideal PAN, but today the advantages of using Bluetooth devices are overshadowed by configuration, interface, and interoperability problems, and they still cost too much. You'll see many Bluetooth products this fall and winter, but don't expect them to sell in significant numbers before next summer.

## THE MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP

The Mid-Cities PC Users' Group is a not for-profit organization whose objectives are:

- \* to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience,
- \* education in the form of seminars and programs, and
- \* community as pertains to the computer industry.

Annual membership is \$24.00 per family with one vote per membership. Members are encouraged to notify the Membership Chairperson of any change of address as soon as possible to continue receiving their monthly newsletter. Please address any notifications to: Mid-Cities PC Users' Group: Attn. Membership Chair, P.O. Box 54141, Hurst, TX 76054

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## THE MID-CITIES PC USERS' GROUP NEWSLETTER

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Article Style: Type all copy flush left without justification; use word wrap feature for your paragraphs. This includes headings, by-lines, and the first line of each paragraph. Place a credit by-line (author's name) between the title and first paragraph. Leave no blank lines between paragraphs. Use only one space between sentences.

File Formats: MS Word or Word Perfect is preferred. If formatting is crucial and you do not have access to the above programs, send a hard copy to show the layout.

Submitting Articles: You may use one of two methods. Uploading the article to Nancy Hester at [newsletter@mcpcug.org](mailto:newsletter@mcpcug.org) or e-mailing her directly at [nancyhesterusa@netscape.net](mailto:nancyhesterusa@netscape.net)



Thanks a lot!

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