

PC Bits and Bytes
By Rob Marlatt

There are a lot of computer users out there these days. Almost every home has at least one computer. Like television many years ago, nowadays the computer has taken over much of our everyday living.

Most people that own computers admit that they know only enough to operate their computers, but do not feel comfortable beyond that when it comes to taking care of their computers. I am going to offer some tips that may help you keep your computer running better or just help you in adding some 'short cuts' to what you already know or do. Each month, I will make some suggestions to you that I hope that they will be helpful.

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EXPLORING MEDIA DRIVES: This month and next, are going to be part history and part informational. Since I am going to be discussing external media and media drives, I would like to give you a brief history of media to show you how much it has changed in a relatively short time. However, I am only going to go back to the 70's and 80's. Before then, it was not for the home user.

Back in the late 70's, most external storage for computers was kept on an 8-inch floppy disk. Even though the disk itself was large, the storage capacity was small by today's standards. The low-density 8-inch floppy disk only had 175kb of storage capacity. Later on came the 5-¼ inch floppy disk. Smaller in size, it held 360kb of low-density storage and 1.2mb of high-density storage. Next came the yet smaller, but more durable 3-½ inch floppy disk. This disk held 720kb for low density and 1.44mb for high density. This became the most common storage disk for several years. But eventually, the ZIP disk came out. The ZIP disk was almost the same size of the 3-½ floppy in stature, but held 100mb of storage. Later on a ZIP version of 250mb was released. These lasted a while, but were not common in most home computers. In most cases, a separate external drive was required.

In the 80's tape backups were good for large servers, but not too common for the home user. In the 90's the CD became available to use for writing files to. Not just music, but data, as well. The CD held 650mb of storage, so this was great! You could only write to them once, though. So later on came the ReWritable CD that is over 730mb of storage. Even better!

Not too much longer, the same pattern came with the DVD. You could copy to a DVD, then later on you could re-write to a DVD. With a huge amount more of storage capacity.

The only problem using CD's or DVD's for backing up or storing files, they were not very practical because they might get scratched or broken if you did not keep them in a secure case.

Back a few years ago, someone came up with the idea of using these small 'sticks' that will hold as much as or more than a CD or DVD. They are called Flash Drives. Some people call them Thumb Drives and by other names.

The Flash Drive just pops into a USB port and instantly become a media device that you can store any type of file on. Most have a way to wear it around your neck or on a key chain. You can take your files anywhere and go from one computer to another with ease. They can range in storage from a relatively small amount like 256mb up to 32gb or more. And yes, these are smaller in physical size than any of the other storage devices from the past.

So, as time goes on, what gets larger gets smaller.

Next month: I will tell you what media devices are good for backing up special files on your computer.