

Macworld new products and reactions

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The Macworld Expo show floor buzzed with its usual annual energy Wednesday as hundreds of vendors and thousands of attendees converged to discuss new products, Apple's recently introduced hardware and upcoming technologies. The hunt is on for cool new gadgets, the perfect software package for the office or simply the next cool techno-treasure waiting to be discovered.

A quick loop of the floor revealed a treasure trove of new technologies as well as opinions from all sides:

Mark/Space has managed to find a niche in the mobile market. While PDAs have become incredibly popular, drivers that allow these devices to synch to Mac OS X-based computers have been less than prolific. Missing Sync 5.0 has stepped in to fill the niche. The software, which retails for \$39.95 (with the exception of \$29.95 for a package that allows the Macintosh to connect and synch with the Hiptop PDA) allows for full communication and synching when the firms that made the devices might not have created drivers to allow them to easily communicate with a Macintosh.

Missing Synch has managed to gain additional support from Apple Computer, which has recently allowed developers full access to its Synch Services libraries for its Mac OS X 10.4 operating system software. This area of code, which had been closed off in years past, creates a central database to use to synchronize with devices and should allow for easier development of driver software.

When the BlackBerry became the PDA and cell phone of choice for many, Mac users were left in a lurch with a dearth of software with which to communicate with the device. PocketMac for BlackBerry, a utility from Information Appliance Associates, steps in to resolve this problem. Available for \$29.95, the program allows full synching and communication between a BlackBerry and a Mac via a USB connection. The program is frequently updated and features an avid user base that frequents the company's Web site to voice and respond to technical questions.

With a large part of this year's Macworld Expo being focused on the iPod and iPod add-ons/accessories, Ignitek Inc. wasn't to be left behind. Towering in a corner like a post-modern amplifier that could have been seen on the set of "2001: A Space Odyssey," the iCarrier functions as a small tower in which an iPod is inserted as a music source. The 45-watt system, which includes a full subwoofer, supports any iPod with a dock connector and includes RCA jacks for compatibility with other MP3 players. The unit includes a remote control, which is powered by two AAA batteries. The iCarrier retails for \$299 and is being sold at technology and electronics store.

A useful oddity, Rogue Amoeba's AirFoil 2 has stepped in to allow Mac users to stream any form of digital audio to multiple audio units. Coupled with Apple's AirPort Express wireless base stations, this allows users to communicate via an Internet link to any speakers or a stereo system that may be hooked to the AirPort Express. The software, which is usually available for a \$25 software registration fee, has been discounted to \$21.25 as a Macworld special with a future version of the software shipping in two to six weeks that will be compatible with both the older PowerPC microprocessor architecture as well as the just-announced Intel Core Duo chip that Apple's future Macintosh computers will ship with.

Opinions were generally positive about the show, although some developers expressed concerns about the necessary transitions they'd have to make to have their software run natively on both Apple's PowerPC processors as well as the Intel Core Duo chip.

"A one-man shop probably won't pony up for an Intel machine," said Paul Kafasis, CEO of Rogue Amoeba, who wondered about the availability of hardware for developers to test the new software on.

"The show is smaller than last year and predominantly iPod-focused," said John Davis of Portable USA, a Massachusetts-based technology firm.

"The rumors were for new iBooks and I didn't want an iBook," said Michael Verdi of Peachpit Press. "When the new MacBook Pro was announced, I said 'that's the one I want!'"

Verdi then pointed out that the upgraded laptop hardware as well as Apple's recent inclusion of RSS subscription technologies within its applications should help his efforts toward vidcasting. RSS technologies allow users to subscribe to Web sites and then check to see which ones have updated their content. The new feature, according to Verdi, should save a fair amount of time and removes the need to load over 100 different Web sites to see what's new.

"This was a solid rollout of new hardware and software," said Frank Moster, the technical manager for Fossil Ridge High School in Fort Collins, Colorado. "If money was no object, I would have placed an order."

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