

It's the year of the terabyte

April 1 2009, By Craig Crossman

I remember my first hard drive. Back then, getting a hard drive for your computer was tantamount to a rite of passage. It meant that you no longer had to struggle inserting floppy discs with their limited capacities and their plethora of assorted frailties. Until my first hard drive, whenever I wanted to load a program, I first had to find the floppy that contained the wanted application, insert it into the disc drive and then wait until it loaded. And wait. And wait.

My first hard drive's capacity was a whopping 20 megabytes and at the time, I thought it was all the storage I would ever need in my entire lifetime. It also cost around \$900 and again at the time, I thought it was a steal at that price. Of course, the programs such as the word processor and other productivity applications were so small that they actually fit on a single floppy disc. So a 20-megabyte drive really did represent a bottomless repository for all of my computing needs. But nothing ever stays the same and when it comes to computers, that's a good thing.

The operating systems and the programs our computers had to run continued to grow as they became more feature-rich and graphically intensive. A word processor that was 100 kilobytes swelled to 100 megabytes and more. So [hard drive](#) capacities grew to meet their storage demands. I remember seeing the first gigabyte hard drives appear and thinking "My gosh! That's a THOUSAND megabytes on one hard drive!" Again I thought that it was all the storage I would ever need in my entire lifetime.

So now we have entered the "Terabyte decade" with a THOUSAND

gigabytes of storage on a single hard drive. But I'm no longer taken in with the subterfuge. No longer do these drives hold the promise of all the storage I will ever need. Because now I know that along with my mammoth operating system and bulging applications are the untold quantities of digital data I will be ever generating and collecting such as photographs and high definition videos that promise to eat every single terabyte I can throw at them. So it's a good thing that already there are multi-terabyte drives emerging.

Just like the growing progression of the multi-megabyte and multi-gigabyte drives, terabyte drives begin their growth with baby steps. First to appear after the single terabyte drives have been 1.5-terabyte models and now there are 2-terabyte versions just making it to the market as we speak. Soon we'll see 3-terabyte models and by the end of the year, maybe even a 4-terabyte version?

But capacity isn't the only thing repeating. The dollars you pay to buy them are pretty much in the same range as those drives of yore. As the capacities grow, the purchase price of the smaller capacity models decrease. But I don't think we'll see the prices of even the newest high capacity terabyte models top what those initial megabyte and gigabyte drives cost. For example a top-of-the-line 2-terabyte external hard drive goes for around \$180. The former top-of-the-line megabyte model sold for over a \$1,000 and gigabyte models around \$800 when they first appeared. So it looks like things are getting better as the storage pattern repeats. Who knows? Maybe when the first petabyte drive (that's a thousand terabytes) makes its debut, it will sell for under a hundred bucks. Anyone want to make a bet? I'm also betting that most of us will still be around when that happens. I'll get back to you in a few years and we'll compare notes.

(Craig Crossman is a national newspaper columnist writing about computers and technology. He also hosts the No. 1 daily national

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