

Nano changes make it a fun little gadget

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New iPod Nano

There really wasn't much Apple needed to do to its iPod nano, which the company claims is the world's best-selling MP3 player.

It has been able to display photos and play [video](#) for a few years, and part of the reason it's so popular is because it's small enough to use while you work out, but big enough to include a screen for song information, video viewing and other features.

Yet despite all that, earlier this month -- as in the previous three Septembers -- Apple CEO [Steve Jobs](#) stood onstage in California and

introduced the latest enhancements to the nano and other iPods. As usual, prices were dropped and features were added.

The new, fifth-generation iPod nano saw the biggest changes, with Apple improving the device by making it more of a Swiss army-like gadget that could replace other gizmos you own. The nano (\$149 for 8GB, \$179 for 16GB) can now record video and audio, and serve as an FM radio and pedometer. The screen is slightly larger (2.2 inches), and it has a more polished look.

To be sure, adding an FM radio isn't exactly a thrilling new feature, but the nano's radio is different from many others. You can set favorite stations and pause live radio for up to 15 minutes. Many stations display the artist name and song title, and if you hear a song you like, you can "tag" it so you can buy it on iTunes the next time you connect your nano to your computer.

Not all stations support iTunes tagging, but in Orlando, the feature is supported by several stations including XL 106.7, Magic 107.7, WJRR 101.1 and Rumba 100.3.

Being able to record video on a device roughly the size of two fingers is pretty amazing. You can record in either portrait (vertical) or landscape (horizontal) orientation, and there's a built-in microphone to capture sound. The video quality is surprisingly good, even in low-light situations, but I wouldn't throw out your pocket video camera (like the Flip or Kodak models) just yet.

That's because it's not very comfortable to hold the iPod to record video. The video camera and microphone are in the bottom backside of the nano, which is the most natural place to grasp the device when holding it vertically. Rotating the iPod moves your fingers away from the camera, but I tended to place my thumb on the screen, making it hard to see what

I was recording.

One great thing about the [video camera](#) is that it includes 15 video effects you can apply when you shoot video, including black-and-white, security cam, X-ray and, my personal favorite, an effect that gives your video that old-time grainy-film look. You won't find built-in video effects like this on the Flip cameras or even the iPhone 3GS. You can play recorded videos on the iPod or connect the device to your computer to e-mail or upload your movies to Facebook, YouTube and other sites.

The voice recorder is similar to the one on the iPhone and iPod touch, which lets you record voice notes, interviews or lectures and play them back on the device or on your computer. The pedometer lets you keep track of how much you are walking and set daily goals. If you have a Nike+ account, you can upload the nano's pedometer data to your online account.

To let you play back your recorded videos and voice memos, Apple had to add a speaker, something missing from all iPods (except the iPod touch) for years. And though the speaker quality isn't nearly good enough to fill a room with sound, it's nice to not have to always use headphones or external speakers to listen to music or watch videos. You cannot play the [FM radio](#) through the nano's built-in speaker because the device requires a headphone or speaker cord to tune in stations.

Despite's Apple's claims, I don't think the [iPod nano](#) will pose a serious threat to the Flip Video cameras; it's not a good choice for recording long videos because it's hard to hold. However, there is no other device on the market that is so small and has so many features, so it's a great choice for a multiuse gadget to carry in your pocket that won't take up a lot of room and will keep you entertained and allow you to record some fun videos.

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