New USB hub cuts a cord

May 5 2010, By Craig Crossman

I maintain that anything helping me to get rid of wires is aces with me. Basically I can't stand wires. I truly believe that anyone who has confronted the rat's nest of wires behind their desk must be in agreement to my cordless mantra of "Wires Are Evil." Over the years, things have improved within the area of connectivity. Gone for the most part are parallel cables, serial cables and those really thick and ugly SCSI cables.

The wires we see on modern computers are usually USB, Ethernet and a smattering of Firewire cables. The good news is that wireless technologies such as Bluetooth and WiFi continue making a large portion of those wired connections disappear into thin air.

Still, wires continue to plague us and I don't see them completely disappearing in the near future. For now, power cables seem to be the final holdout. We really don't have a practical way to send significant amounts of power through the air so for now, it looks like power cords will remain a necessary evil. Of course clever engineering can handle excessive cables via cable management systems and some products that let a single [power cord](#) provide electricity to everything via a system of pass-through connectors.

Most anyone who has ever purchased a cable for their computer probably knows about Belkin. Based in California, the company is a market leader in the production of most every kind of computer and audio/video cable out there. So it's interesting to note that this leading cable manufacturer continues to come up with wireless solutions. The company has its CableFree USB Hub, the industry's first USB Hub that does not require a cable to connect it to the computer.

The CableFree USB Hub consists of two main parts. The first is the little transceiver stick that plugs into any USB port on the computer. The other is the hub itself. The powered four-port hub sits anywhere in the room and makes its cordless connection to the computer. You can plug in up to four USB devices and that's pretty much it. The connection to the computer is handled via a proprietary wireless connection called Freescale's Ultra-Wideband Technology. At rates 100 times faster than Bluetooth, the CableFree Hub is capable of handling high data transfer rates needed for video, audio, and data streams.

I don't know what took them so long to come out with something like this but I can tell you that I already have the perfect place where this will become a necessity. Years ago, I had designed a custom wall unit to hold two of my printers and two other USB devices (currently my scanner and label printer). Unfortunately the USB cable I had wired inside the wall behind the unit to the computer had become damaged. In addition, it was

an older USB 1.1 cable so I couldn't enjoy the faster speed of my new USB 2.0 peripherals in the cabinet. Being able to wireless connect all of them via a cordless connection brings me and the peripherals back up to date. Placing the CableFree hub in the cabinet lets me connect all of the USB devices there into the hub. Since the hub communicates to the computer with out a wire, all of my USB devices in the cabinet will once again be connected without the ugly wire hanging across the wall and over the desk to the computer.

The CableFree wireless hub works on any computer with USB ports, sells for $199.99 and is available directly from the Belkin website.

I realize that the cable-free office is still a ways off but the CableFree Hub is certainly another milestone toward its realization.

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