

Review: Acer's portable projector brings a big picture in a tiny footprint

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I don't play with projectors very much, so it's a real treat when I get one to review.

Projectors are like any other category of gadgets: There are different

types for different needs.

I have friends who have very nice home theater projectors instead of TVs in their home.

At work, we use projectors in conference rooms and have several that can be checked out for occasional use. These loaner projectors live their lives on a cart, getting wheeled to where they are needed.

One category of projector I don't get to use very often is the portable model, one that's small enough to stow away in a computer bag for use on the road.

For the last few days I've been testing the Acer C202i, a portable DLP LED projector that's not much bigger than an Apple TV.

The C202i (\$299.99 at acer.com) is all about connectivity—you can connect to it in just about any way you can imagine.

The projector has an HDMI port for traditional video input, but it can also receive video from phones, tablets or computers through a USB port. The USB port can also play media from a flash drive.

The C202i has built-in Wi-Fi, so you can send video wirelessly from a phone, tablet or computer.

Practical matters

The projector is very small—it measures 5.9 by 5.9 by 1.3 inches and weighs just 12.35 ounces.

It can be powered from the included AC adapter or from a 9,000 mAh internal battery. The battery makes the projector seriously convenient by

providing up to five hours of runtime on a charge. The battery can also be used to charge your phone or tablet through the projector's USB port.

The C202i has a native resolution of 854 by 480 pixels with a maximum resolution of 1,600 by 1,200 pixels, and the LED has a brightness of 300 lumens. The lamp is rated for up to 30,000 hours, which means it'll last the projector's lifetime. That LED lifespan equates to 4 hours of use per day for just over 20 years.

The image aspect ratio can adjust from 4:3 to 16:9. It has a contrast ratio of 5,000:1.

The 5.02mm lens has a maximum aperture of f/1.6. The size of the projected image ranges from 29 to 100 inches depending on the distance to the screen.

Ports on the back include HDMI, USB, power in for the AC adapter and a headphone jack to connect external speakers.

Speaking of speakers, the C202i has one very small speaker that will do in a pinch for a presentation audio, but that's about it.

The projector ships with a power supply, a tiny tripod, a storage bag and a [remote control](#).

The remote allows control of all functions of the projector, including adjusting volume and focus. The remote takes two AAA batteries that are not included.

The Acer C202i connected effortlessly to every source I tried to use.

The HDMI port performed flawlessly, as did the USB port from both my iPhone and a PC laptop.

I was also able to connect wirelessly from my iPhone and a Macintosh laptop.

The projector broadcasts its own Wi-Fi signal. Connect your phone, tablet or computer to the projector's network, and you're ready to project.

Apple products can use AirPlay to wirelessly cast their screens to the projector. I was up and projecting wirelessly from my iPhone and Macbook Pro in less than three minutes.

Browsing and playing the files on a USB drive was also easy. The projector can play almost any audio or video file you'd expect, including MPEG-2, MPEG-4, H264 for video and AAC, MP3 and WAV for audio as well as BMP and JPG picture formats.

Grab and go

Using the C202i was effortless. Every connection worked exactly as it should and every file I opened played without any hesitation.

The image is plenty bright for small groups, although dimming the room lights really helps. The adjustments like focus and keystone (squaring up the image) respond quickly.

It's also quiet. There is a fan, but it was barely noticeable. Shutting down was quick, and the projector never got hot. There is no cool-down period. Turn it off, toss it in your bag and go.

The projector is perfect for business travel. Most conference rooms have a projector, but road warriors know they can only count on the equipment they carry.

Plus, the connectivity options mean you can even forget to pack an HDMI cable and still connect wirelessly.

The Acer C202i is the perfect size to toss in a bag so it's ready to go when you need it but not too big to get in the way. Just remember that it isn't the right projector for every job. You won't want to set it up in your media room or use it for gaming.

It's just right for a presentation in a meeting room or a movie night in the back yard.

Pros: Easy to connect any source. Small. Quiet. Bright enough at sizes up to 70 inches. Great battery life.

Cons: The built-in speaker is weak, and the image gets a bit dim at larger sizes in bright rooms.

Bottom line: If you remember that this is a very tiny [projector](#), it will make you very happy when you use it.

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