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/dev/random



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IT WASN'T THAT TERRIBLY LONG AGO, in the accelerated timeline of technologies, that the term "storage device" used in an IT context referred to little plastic rectangles with spring-loaded sliding metal covers, misleadingly flexible miniature 45 RPM records in black sleeves, or a variety of glorified cassette tapes ranging from slim 'n' sexy to stout 'n' chunky. Whatever their size and physiognomy, they were all pretty easily identifiable as gadgets you stick into a slot on a computer and pull out later covered with magnetic zeroes and ones (or sometimes with strawberry jelly and slightly melted, if you tried doing this before your morning coffee and got the wrong slot).

The digital archiving landscape has evolved radically since those simpler days, it seems. USB and flash memory together have conspired to render darn near every little piece of junk lying about the house capable of duplicating the Library at Alexandria with a couple of gigabytes to spare. USB memory dongles can now be found nestled in athletic shoes (sneaker net: the next generation), in ID badge holders, in lighters, in pocket knives, in plush toys, on keychains, on Donner, on Blitzen . . .

I can't help thinking that there is still a whole lotta fertile soil to be tilled in the "things you can plug into a USB port" field, though. Let's move beyond the foam missile launchers, heated gloves, and mini lava lamps and get to the really good stuff, such as personal laser show projectors, tasers for zapping offensive office mates, customizable electronic filters that let you disguise your voice (for making anonymous calls over VoIP), and adapters for recharging the aforementioned blinky LED running shoes. How about tiny deep-fryers for crafting one french fry at a time? Or a little spray gun for applying hand/sun lotion? Maybe even a miniature branding iron for those craving DIY monochrome tattoos would be handy too.

Admittedly, all of this has precious little to do with storage devices, which is the direction I thought I was headed, but nowhere in my contract does it say I have to come up with a relevant topic sentence and stick to it. Nowhere in my contract does it say anything at all, actually, because I don't have one, but even if I *did* have one, I doubt it would be capable of speech. Are you starting to understand why I

titled this column “/dev/random”? The “dumb” part has probably been fairly evident all along, I’ll admit.

OK, I’m over it.

Acknowledging without further comment the fact that storage devices large and small are proliferating madly like bored bacteria in an open package of processed beef salivary glands and lymph nodes (otherwise known as “hot links”), let us examine some of the underlying tissue . . . er . . . issues.

Given that the old-fashioned habit of reading is rapidly assuming the mantle of taking the fringe-top surrey down to watch the perspirational semi-clothed gentlemen driving in an afternoon’s worth of railroad stakes, one must in all lucidity wonder what, exactly, it is that so many people are so keen to store in their USB-enabled corkscrews. Sports trivia? Recipes? A few emergency episodes of their favorite television program? (You know, in case they get stranded in the back of a laptop-equipped taxi during a hurricane evacuation.) Bird calls? Maps and floor plans to the home of every single subscriber to *The Journal of Privacy Protection*? Their personal genome? Their pit bull’s genome? I Dream of Genome?

Whatever the reasons, I think it’s safe to say that the storage device craze is only going to get sillier. At least I’m going to do my part. Here are a few pre-emptive strike product suggestions for those flash memory manufacturers whose company names I am not phonologically limber enough to pronounce without sounding as though I might have bird flu.

- RAM-a-Lam-a-Ding-Dong: This little widget lets you download and install your choice of doorbell tones. Now your elegant neoclassical portico can emit “Dark Side of the Moon” at 120 dB. Get rid of solicitors and other household pests the fun and easy way. May cause structural damage.
- The DDRAMikin: This would be perfect for increasing server throughput while serving crême brûlée. Pick up the optional USB brazing torch for added convenience (2.5 farad capacitor not included).
- FlashFlash: This flashlight with lens and embedded memory automatically captures images of whatever’s being illuminated. It’s handy for proving to mom that there really was a monster in the yard last night, or maybe that was just your older sister coming home from the party a little late.
- The RAMBow: This beautiful and thoughtful accessory allows you to include whatever message you like to accompany your gift, in any media format you choose. It is especially useful for those times when YouTube just isn’t personal enough.
- USBJammin: This universal adapter converts, well, anything into a USB memory stick. It works with tea cozies, collectible figurines, pirate eye patches, die-cast trains, travel mugs, velvet Elvis paintings, cashew jars, mice, dice, egg cartons, paper towel dispensers, steering wheel covers, phonograph needles, gate hinges, most cosmetics containers, and over 3,250 additional common objects around the home.

Some conversions will not function as expected. Possible choking hazard for children, adults, and certain of the larger iguanas. Bridge may ice before roadway. Offer void where unavailable.

In closing, have you noticed that the once ubiquitous nine-pin port on personal computers is edging toward extinction? Coming up next on *Ohm’s Law and Order*: “USB, the Forgotten Serial Killer.”