

MUSIC 2 GO

BY HELEN GALLAGHER

Take your music on the road with the latest MP3 players.

One of the many ways the web has revolutionized society is through access to music. Music from around the world, by top stars to garage bands, is available 24/7, and quick downloads offer instant gratification. We're also beginning to see a convergence of music and video, which can be streamed live on a computer or downloaded to MP3 players and cell phones. The days of a single-purpose electronic toy are fading due to affordable technology that really does let you have it all.



IPOD IS STILL ON TOP

Researchers at AppleInsider report that Amazon.com's top seller for MP3 players and all electronics is, of course, Apple. Apple's golden child, the iPod portable media player, continues to gain market share, up to 77.9 percent of the market in March 2006.

In part, the high brand loyalty is due to the proprietary nature of the iPod downloads and its accessories. Companies are pumping out add-ons you never knew you needed. Once you factor in the cost of iPod accessories, and music that won't run on other MP3 players, you're not likely to move to a non-Apple product. Yet some add-ons necessary for making it a productive tool for your gym-speakers, a boom box system and digital jukebox software-are currently under development.

Industry pros always caution against buying into a limited technology that will be outdated too fast. Many people who bought the iPod Photo when it was released last year had regrets a few months later when iPod Video launched.

The newest model, iPod Video 5G is a huge success, with a 30 or 60 gigabyte (GB) hard drive. It marries music and video, so you can store songs as well as up to 75 hours of music videos, podcasts and TV downloads, and view them on the 2.5-inch screen. MusicVideo iPods start at \$299. Music video and TV downloads are \$1.99 each from iTunes, and include Disney, ABC and Pixar films.

The iPod Nano, priced from \$149 to \$249, is easy to use, ultraslim and beautiful; but it lacks an FM tuner, and is fairly pricey and scratch-prone. It does have a 1.5-inch screen, missing from the more basic iPod Shuffle, which retails at \$69 to \$99. It's rumored the Nano is due for a makeover by fall 2006, and that a touch-screen video Nano may be under development.

Other Brands to Try

If you can swear off the Apple brand and look around, you'll be surprised at the features other brands can offer. While these competing devices aren't compatible with iPod, they integrate seamlessly on Windows computers, using Windows Media Player, already installed on most Windows computers.



ARCHOS

Archos GminiXS-100 retails at around \$150, offers a choice of four colors, and has a 4 GB microdrive to store music. The Gmini 402 retails at \$300, has a 20 GB drive and holds up to 10,000 songs, about 200,000 photos and 80 hours of video, viewed on a 2.2-inch screen. It also includes a camcorder. Retail: \$150-\$300.



CREATIVE LABS

Find your zen at Creative Labs, makers of the Creative Zen Media players. The lineup ranges from the Zen Vision with a 30 GB drive for music, photos and video to the MicroPhoto model. Most models are available in 10 cool colors. Creative Zen Vision has a stunning capacity that won't leave you lusting for more. At \$400, this model can store 15,000 songs, thousands of photos, and 120 hours of video viewed on a 3.7-inch, high-resolution screen. It has a calendar that synchronizes with Outlook, a voice recorder and FM tuner-indispensable when you want to connect with the real world,

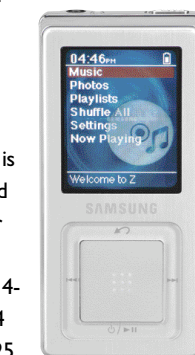
for news, weather, sports and NPR while on the treadmill. Retail: \$250-\$400.

IRIVER

The iRiver U10 is a popular MP3 player with a 1 GB capacity, but their newest model, iRiver Clix, priced at \$199.99, doubles the capacity to 2 GB and stores up to 28 hours of music, as well as photos, video and flash games on an ultra-bright 2.2-inch color display. It also features an FM tuner and alarm clock. Clix has a "now playing" feature, quick music transfer, and improved menu navigation speed. And, iRiver creates enough accessories to make this the perfect gift for your favorite coach, because you can keep buying accessories for years to come. Retail: \$199.99-\$249.99.

SAMSUNG

Samsung's YEPPYP-Z5 is comparable to the iPod Nano but offers better battery life. It lacks an FM tuner, but boasts a 4-inch LCD screen and 4 GB capacity. Retail: \$225.



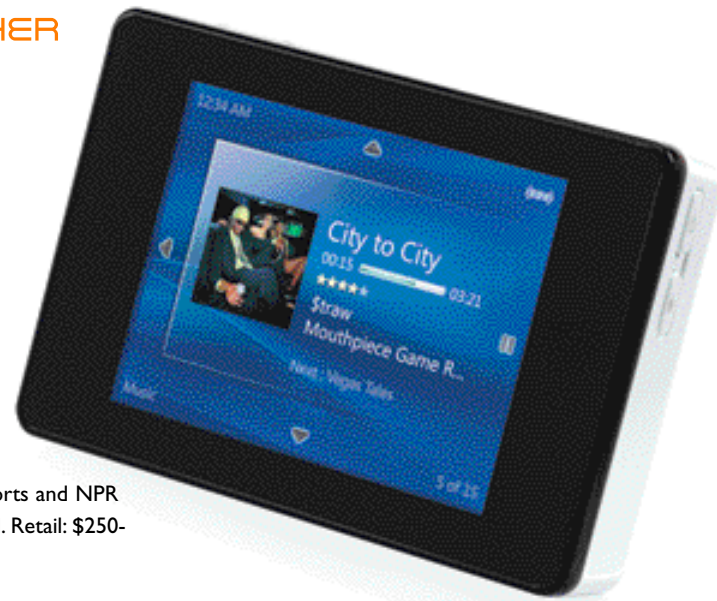
SANDISK

Finally, there's the 6 GB SanDisk Sansa e270, which includes some advanced features and offers the largest flash capacity of any player on the market, at 6 GB. It has a 1.8-inch screen and 20-hour battery life. Retail: \$280.

Download for Dollars

For iPod owners, iTunes is the only official download format to synchronize your collection, although third-party programs exist. Sure, 99 cents seems cheap-until you realize you've downloaded thousands of songs you don't particularly like. Until Apple offers a subscription-based download service, the cost of pulling iTunes off the web does add up to a lot of money.

For non-iPod MP3 players, subscriptions are a good value. Yahoo Music (music.yahoo.com) offers unlimited downloads for \$5 per month, and Rhapsody To Go (rhapsody.com/-togo) can



give you a lifetime of music for \$10 per month, compatible with most non-Apple MP3 players, including Creative Zen, Dell, iRiver, Palm LiveDrive, SanDisk and Samsung.


As music collections grow, with a typical song or album track at about 2 megabytes (MB), iPod and other MP3 players are managing to pack huge capacity hard drives into the mini-players. A 30 GB drive holds 30,000 MB, or about 15,000 songs. And of course, no one says you can't offload or delete the tunes you no longer want to hear.

Accessories

Not since the Palm Pilot was introduced in 1996 has there been such a phenomenon as the iPod. It has spawned many other trendy, expensive and limited products in the home entertainment field.

One is the iPod Hi-Fi speakers. If you can't plug the iPod into your existing stereo to project sound through the speakers, the iPod Hi-Fi will do it for you. It's currently priced at \$349, and that's just for the speakers. You might enjoy it for team use in practices, but wouldn't want to tote the heavy speakers to the beach. (The iPod Hi-Fi runs on electricity or six D-cell batteries.)

Less costly accessories include a \$29 remote control and a \$39 docking station-pretty essential if you plan to enjoy video, since iPods don't have a kickstand. A \$49 Radio Remote lets you use the iPod as an FM tuner. More accessories, including cases and skins, are available local retailers and online sources like everythingipod.com.

Sadly, as with most technology, including laptops and digital cameras, the very best model is the one that comes out right after you buy yours. 

VOLUME CONTROL

Pump up the volume with external speakers when your team needs music in the gym, but don't harm your hearing with high-volume tunes when using ear buds. Unlike external headphones that rest outside of your ears, ear buds nestled near the ear canal can contribute to significant hearing loss. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health suggests the safe exposure at about 90 decibels should be limited to two hours per day. iPods and other MP3 players are capable of reaching 115 decibels or higher. Significant noise-induced hearing loss can occur even at 70 decibels.