

Sights & Sounds of Multimedia

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Headphones

There are many earbuds available for purchase today. Most electronic devices that involve sound come with a set of headphones. Availability is not the issue for headphones; the issue is comfort and quality.

Audio-Technica has many sound-related products, but one of the most interesting is the noise-cancelling headphone product. I received a review copy of their product for trial.

The kit I received comes in a very nice fabric-covered stiff case to protect the product. Inside are the headphones (they look like earbuds), an extension cable, two extra sets of replaceable rubber tips, a plug to use in an airplane's sound system, an AAA battery and the headphones themselves.

The headphones have a short cord with a 3.5 mm plug, a control box, a long cord and, finally, the earbuds. The control box has a battery compartment, an On-Off slider switch, a Monitor button, a power light and, on the back, a clip for your shirt or blouse.

The control box turns on and off the noise-cancelling feature. The Monitor button turns it off temporarily.



The earbud tips are soft rubber and are very comfortable. In my experience, there are few earbud tips that are comfortable for very long. These are one of the few.

The noise-cancelling feature is amazing! When it's turned on, most of the exterior sound is eliminated. The company information states that 85% of background noise is eliminated. This is accomplished by having a miniature microphone in

each earpiece which picks up noise and creates a wave 180 degrees out of phase; the two cancel out.

With the 3.5 mm plug connection, these headphones can be used with many devices: cell phones, MP3 players, speakers and so on.

These are great for everyday use or when traveling. The price is fairly high for such a product, but the noise-cancellation feature and the protective case add to its value.

About: Headphones

Vendor: Audio-Technica
www.X.com

Price: MSRP about \$170

Advanced Access Repair

Microsoft *Access* is capable of creating and using massive databases. Many businesses rely on these data files for daily operations, reporting and extraction of specific kinds of data. If the database becomes corrupted or damaged, *Access* cannot open the file and its utility is lost. This can be catastrophic for a business.

Advanced Access Repair (AAR) to the rescue! This program can repair many *Access* database corruption errors and create a file that *Access* can use. This is an easy solution to a company's serious problem.



The program will analyze the broken file to determine what corrections need to be made. It will work on versions of *Access* from *Access 95* through *Access 2007*. Here are some of the faults it can correct:

- Recover structure and records
- Recover deleted tables and records
- Recover autonumber fields and indexes
- Recover password-protected databases
- Fix files on corrupted media (floppy disks, CD-ROMs, Zip disks, etc.)

For testing, I used an Access database with over 12,000 records. I used AAR on the database as is. Analysis and repair took 44 seconds, but it wasn't clear just what had been repaired. The .mdb file was saved with a “_fixed” suffix to the file name. The _fixed file opened immediately in Access with no error messages. The original file opened in Access, but with several error messages. AAR completed repair satisfactorily.

The web site for AAR has several sample database files that cannot be opened by Access due to corruption or damage. I tried these out and found that AAR repaired each satisfactorily.

AAR is a useful tool to repair Access databases that have become damaged or corrupted. It is fast and produces an error-free result, in my tests.

The company has other repair tools, as well, for Excel, Word, Outlook and databases other than Access.

About: *Advanced Access Repair*

Vendor: DataNumen
www.DataNumen.com

Price: about \$300

iPointer

I got a demo of an interesting product at CTIA (a large communications show). It uses a hand-held device like a cell phone which you can point at a retail establishment to get information. The demo used the Hilton hotel as a test subject to show the interior facilities – rooms, pool and so on. The information would be an incentive for a prospective customer to choose the Hilton over other hotels.

The iPointer includes a compass and GPS as its location indicators. The GPS give latitude/longitude information (where you physically are). The compass tells what you are looking at. These data go to a server which identifies the entity involved, then sends information back to your source device.

The information stored on the server would be created and provided by the client (Hilton hotel, in this case) and updated from time to time as needed. The data could be photos, video, text and/or contact information.

While prospective customers would be the users of a device such as this one, the target client for the company is a retail business.

This sort of device is indicative of the innovative uses that can be made of today's (and tomorrow's) technology. We've just begun to see some of the useful applications that can be made for cell phones.

About: *iPointer*

Vendor: i-Spatial
www.i-Spatialtech.com

Nokia Phone N96

There are many cell phones available today, each with a remarkable set of features. I received a Nokia N96 phone to test.

This is a “smart phone,” so-called because its feature set is much broader than the usual phone. It can send and receive phone calls, of course, which it does through its slide down keyboard. It can surf the Internet, using the built in browser and the cell network to which it is attached. It can also connect to a wireless network.

It can take photos and videos, and display them. It can play music and radio. Using the built-in GPS, it can find where you are, determine how to get somewhere else and give you a map or directions to do so.

This is a full-featured cell phone, compact in size with a very large screen (2.8 inches). It has 16 GB of internal memory and a slot for a memory card. The memory card can be used to increase memory for storage of videos and photos. In addition, since it is removable, it can easily be used to view stored items with a computer.

The camera is a quality instrument, being a 5 megapixel Zeiss Tessar 2.8 mm lens with auto-focus. The photos you take, however, are limited by your skill in taking them!

This phone can also play music of many of today's popular types, such as MP3, AAC, eAAC and WMA or play podcasts. You can store many music titles with the 16 GB of internal memory plus whatever extra your memory card can store.



You can also make, store and download videos. The phones resolution for photos and videos is quite impressive. With the very large internal memory, you can have fairly large videos with sound as well as picture. The quality of sound is fairly good, considering the tiny speakers in the case, but it is sufficient to hear what's involved.

The phone supports text messaging, a very popular feature with our younger folk. You can write your own message and send it to someone else, or you can use one of the supplied templates, which save typing.

When you get a new phone, one of the first things you want to do is recover the contact information from your old phone. The Nokia has a feature to do just that. You can even do it with only one sim card, which must be in the old phone.

Another feature of this Nokia phone is maps. You can see your current location, browse for different cities and countries, search for addresses, plan routes, view traffic and save locations as favorites for future use.

Another feature of this phone is the games (N-Gage). Several are initially available and more may be downloaded.

Bluetooth is, of course, included, so that you may drive without having to manipulate the phone, with an appropriate ear device.

This is a very versatile phone with many features. I found it difficult to learn the many features. The kit includes a Getting Started booklet, which identifies the various buttons and physical aspects of the phone. There are 11 different buttons on the phone's face. "Button" is not accurate, since each of these controls is a touch-sensitive point on the surface of the phone's hard plastic face. It takes a while to remember what each one does, and each requires a good push to activate it.

In addition, there is a volume control on the side, the picture control and a slot for the memory card. On the top are the on-off switch and the keyboard lock. The picture control is a two-handed affair. I've found it impossible to take a one-handed picture, using the picture control. It's just awkward! Instead, hold the phone in one hand, then press the picture control button with the other.

All in all, this is a pretty nice phone. You have all the tools you could ever need, massive storage, even without a memory card, in a compact container. The price is high, but the phone is "open" so that you can use any service that is supported.

About: Nokia Phone N96

Vendor: Nokia
www.nokiausa.com

Price: \$575

SmartShare USB Hub

I have three USB ports on my laptop computer, one of which is used by a USB mouse. That leaves two. One of them is often used to expand memory by a 16 GB flash drive. That leaves one.

So the problem is, what do you do when you need extra USB ports? Here's a solution: the SmartShare USB hub by Griffin Technology.

It's a simple device. It's just a USB plug with two cables attached, each of which terminates in a USB port. This doubler cable expands your USB ports by one.

There's another use for this device which may not be evident at first glance. That is when you have two USB plugs to insert, but they won't fit side by side. One or both plugs are a bit too large. SmartShare to the rescue! The two cables are separate enough to attach both your device USB plugs.

There's only a small hitch with this product. The USB port you use has only so much power. Doubling the cables doesn't double the power. So, only one of your devices can use the power from the USB port; it won't support power for two.

About: SmartShare USB Hub

Vendor: Griffin Technologies
www.griffintechology.com

Price: about \$20