

Sights & Sounds of Multimedia

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OpticBook A300 Scanner

I've seen many scanners over the years, but never one as large as this one! It looks about 3' long by 1½' deep, but the actual dimensions are 24½" long by 15¾" deep and 5 ¼" high. Still, you would have to agree that it's big!

From such a big scanner you expect big results, and that's what you can get. The largest document you can scan is 12" by 17" at 600 dpi resolution.

The scanner comes with a power cord, a USB cable, an instruction book and a CD-ROM containing the scanner drivers and four software applications.

Setup is straightforward. There must be a lot of users who don't read the set-up instructions, because there was a sheet of paper taped from the side of the scanner across the lid, so that the lid could not be opened without removing and, presumably, reading the text. Guess what it said – "Unlock the scanner before using it!"

Connecting the scanner involves only plugging in the power cord and attaching the USB cable to the scanner and a computer. Then you install from the CD-ROM. I suppose you could make a mistake, if you tried hard enough, but otherwise, it's foolproof.

Following the initial instructions, I scanned the cover of a booklet, which worked, but came out skewed. The booklet wasn't misaligned in the scanner, but somehow the image is. That's the only time that happened – all the rest of the scans I did came out perfectly aligned.

I proceeded to use one of the apps to scan the pages in the booklet in their entirety. The app has a button labeled "Transfer," which means Save. The default location is in Public Documents, so I had a time finding the results of my scans! They appeared perfect.



One of the provided apps is *Readiris Pro 10 Corporate Edition*. This is OCR software which can translate the graphic image that is produced by the scanner into an editable document. The process is known as Optical Character Recognition.

OCR originally was used to translate text image pages into editable text, but as technology advanced, the translation works with other types of images.

Readiris translates not only text, but also graphics, business cards and bar codes, abilities that would be helpful in business.

The scanner window is constructed so that a book can be placed on it in the crease and be able to copy the entire page without having the text near the crease be distorted. This worked pretty well, but not perfectly. I used *Webster's Dictionary* to try this out. The text in the dictionary is printed fairly close to the crease, so that I could not get all the info.

I tried the OCR on the dictionary page. It translated the text quite well, considering the small print and the wide variety of symbols contained on the page. There were no graphics on the page I scanned, so I could not test that OCR facility.

I also tried the OCR app on a single page with a simple table of specifications for the scanner. The result was something less than impressive! There were 12 errors on the page. In some cases, text was capitalized in error, in others, the letter "p" translated as "o." There were others, as well. It's curious that the dictionary came through so well and the simple table didn't.

There are large buttons on the right side of the scanner: *Bookpavilion* (one of the software applications), Preview Scan, Color Scan, Grayscale Scan and Text Scan. None of these buttons works. If you open the *Bookpavilion* application



manually, the four functions are available as clickable buttons, so the inoperative buttons on the scanner aren't a problem.

This is a very nice scanner, able to scan sizes not normally available in an office and comes with tools to convert and modify the results of the scan. It is designed to be especially useful in scanning books, due to the "to the edge" design of the scanner glass.

About: OpticBook A300 Scanner

Vendor: Plustek

www.plustek.com

Price: about \$2,000

Tablo

The tagline for this product is, "Transform your laptop to Tablet PC!" And, that's what this will do if you have the required operating system. It's only viable for XP and Vista Home Basic.

The box contains the "station," the Tablo pen, a Hardware installation guide, an Applications Guide, an Install CD, various pen tips and several batteries.

Installation begins with mounting the "station" on the lid of your laptop. For this purpose there is provided a small "deco fixture" onto which the station fits. The deco fixture attaches with adhesive tape.

The "station" is a small L-shaped metallic fixture with a horizontal bar that sticks out over the top or side of your laptop lid. It has a wire attached leading to a USB plug. When you have the station mounted and plug in the USB plug, the station has a blue light that illuminates.

The other part of the operation is the pen, which has 3 small circular batteries that fit neatly into the pen's shaft.

Next is installation of the software. Drivers come first, then the Ink Tool. The drivers not only work

with the station and pen, but install a utility in the right end of the tool bar called *PenonPC*. This utility is used to calibrate the pen and identify the center and four sides of the screen.

At this point, you can use the pen just like a mouse, clicking, double-clicking, dragging and so on. But that's only part of the story!

Now you can use Tablo to write with the pen on any *Word*, *Excel* or *PowerPoint* screen. You have a choice of pen in different colors and widths, and a highlighter of different colors and widths. The tool bar for the pen also offers clear and save. The pen writing is saved as an image in *Word* or *Excel*.

Another software application included is the *Tablo Board*, which allows you to write/highlight directly on the screen or on a web page. The toolbar also offers a brush tool, line, ellipse and rectangle drawing tools, screen save and a background tool. It also has a switch set of buttons so you can easily switch between draw mode and mouse mode.

The Ink Note tool is similar to the pen operation, but uses a plain page. This offers much the same tools, but also includes copy, print and save functions.

I was able to use this product quite successfully on an *XP* notebook, but not on a *Vista Ultimate* notebook. The Ink Tool didn't work on my *Vista* notebook, although it should work on *Vista Home Basic*, according to the documentation. It works with *Office 2003* and *2007*.

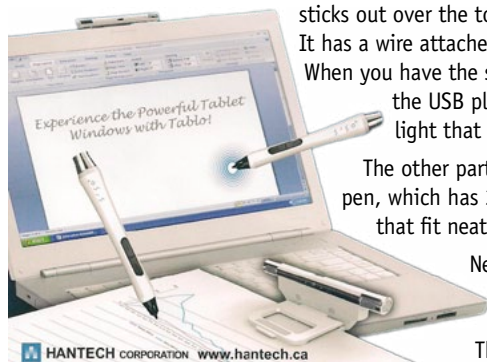
This product fulfills its tagline of converting your laptop into a tablet.

About: SISO TABLO Series

Vendor: Hantech Corporation

www.hantech.ca/index.asp

Price: about \$100



Blue Ant Headset Q1

We are surrounded by cell phones, some on our hip, some in a purse, most up to our ears. The ones up to an ear while driving may be the most hazardous automobile accessory to come along!

Enter the Bluetooth headset. Bluetooth is a wireless transmission technology designed for shorter distances than WiFi. The distance is said to be about 30 feet. There must be two devices, one for sending, one for receiving.

For cell phones, the headset is first the sender, then the receiver. The cell phone is first the receiver, then the sender. This transmission through the air of vocal material eliminates the need to hold your cell phone up to your ear and allows more concentrated attention on driving. As the states become more concerned about cell phone use, Bluetooth headsets will become more popular.

The Blue Ant headset is the same in some ways as its competitors, but is different in several important ways.

The first and perhaps the most important is comfort. The device is small and very light. It fits in either ear easily and feels almost weightless. The other headsets I've tried don't fit my ear properly and are too heavy for comfort.

The second is the voice-isolation technology. Simply put, you can hear even with outside noise. Two microphones are included in the device, one to sample the local noise and counteract it, the second for your voice transmission.

The device also has been designed to limit wind interference. There is a special setting for noisy environments.



The third, which is a new feature, is the voice-controlled operation of the device. When you first turn on the headset, you get a welcoming message, then you pair the device with your phone. More than one Bluetooth device may be

paired with the Blue Ant headset. Once paired, you can then tell the headset what you want to do. The main commands are:

- ☞ Teach me
- ☞ Answer
- ☞ Ignore
- ☞ Am I connected?
- ☞ Pair me
- ☞ Check battery
- ☞ Settings menu
- ☞ Redial
- ☞ Call back
- ☞ Phone commands
- ☞ Call speed dial 1-8
- ☞ Call information
- ☞ Cancel

This is a great product for operation either in your car or out. It's easy to use, comfortable and works even in noisy environments. A two year warranty is provided.

About: Blue Ant Headset Q1

Vendor: Blue Ant Wireless
www.blueantwireless.com

Price: \$129 MSRP, various at about \$90