

So You Wanna Get Involved, Eh?

MacAMP Lite 1.5.1

ICQ 1.6.7 (beta)

Zip USB Drive

So You Wanna Get Involved, Eh?

This month marks the beginning of something new at Apple Wizards — a new product review paradigm. Okay, so maybe I just wanted to use the word "paradigm"... can you blame me? No! Blame Scott Adams.

Dilbert-esque fantasies aside, we have begun something new here at Apple Wizards, and we like to call them mini-reviews. Mini-reviews are just that — short, to-the-point reviews that cover fairly simple products, from nifty web utilities to cool text tools and more.

What's so special? Well, unlike our full product reviews, which are reviewed

by staff members, mini-reviews are open for writing by anyone — and that means you! This month, for example, we've got a mini-review of ICQ by Bill Horne and one of the USB Zip Drive by Teemu Masalin (as well as one by Apple Wizards staffer Phillip Grey).

Did your new printer turn out to be a lemon? Did you find that some no-name peripheral performs better than a brand-name one? Did you find the greatest software invention since, well, the Mac OS? If so, share your thoughts with hundreds of thousands of other Mac folks by writing a mini-review! They'll thank you for it.

Now that you're thinking of products you'd like to review, let me give you the low-down on how we're going to do this:

1. Send email to mini-reviews@applewizards.net . List the product you'd like to review and give a brief summary of your thoughts (a sentence or two).
2. We'll write back to say whether or not we'd like to publish your review (and don't worry about being rejected — we're really nice people!).
3. We'll then send you a kit, if you don't already have it, which contains the items you'll need to draft and submit your mini-review.
4. You'll send in the mini-review and then become famous when it's published!

As if the admiration of hundreds of thousands of fellow Mac users wasn't enough, we've got an added incentive: folks who continually submit high-quality mini-reviews will eventually have the option to become a full-fledged member of Apple Wizards, with full product reviews, cool licensed software (a nice Apple Wizards perk), and the camaraderie of our resident model, Daria. <wink>

So what are you waiting for? Get on the ball! Get those mini-reviews rolling in! There's no time like the present, folks!

P.S. Next month, mini-reviews will move to their own column. From the Desktop will once again be my little editorial space, at least until our next big idea comes along...

Erik J. Barzeski
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MacAMP Lite 1.5.1
Gold Medal

Price: \$10

Contact Info: <http://www.macamp.com/lite/>

Now that you've made some MP3s (see A Spider Speaks, this issue), you'll no doubt want something to play them. Enter MacAMP Lite, the resource- and screen real-estate-lite version and little brother to @soft's MacAMP (which is still technically in beta).

MacAMP Lite, or MALT as the @soft people prefer to call it, offers the ability to play the following sound formats: 669, AMF, CD Audio, DSM, FAR, IT, M15, MED, MIDI, MOD, MP1, MP2, MP3, MTM, S3M, STM, ULT, XM, and more. This alphabet soup can be extended with new "engines." What's that mean? Basically, if you've got a sound file, MALT will probably play it.

ontrol strip fans will feel right at home with MALT, which acts like a control strip for playing your audio files. The tab at left (in the above screenshot) allows you to drag the strip to any location on your screen (provided it touches the side). The timer, which can be disabled, is followed by rewind/repeat, play/pause, stop, and fast forward/skip buttons — just like those on most CD players. The playlist button (next to last in the above screenshot) acts as a "quick save" feature — just drag it to any location on your hard drive and a MALT playlist will be created. Create playlists for a wide variety of music and switch among them with drag and drop!

The last button, a downward-pointing arrow in the default skin, provides pop-up menu access to the current playlist (switch songs just by selecting them from the list) and to the MALT preferences. Preferences allow you to automatically pop-up the strip when the mouse moves over the tab, randomly play songs, control the volume, and more. The preferences also allow you to quickly switch skins. What's a skin? Think of it as a Kaleidoscope scheme for MALT. The five seen below are "extras" available to registered users, and many more will be available for download at

<http://www.macamp.com/skins.html> .

very once in a while, Mac users are treated to software which redefines how we use our computers in day-to-day life. MacAMP Lite, which runs on any PowerPC with 512k RAM and Mac OS 7.5 or later, is one of those products. If you don't turn into an MP3-playing skin-downloading fool in one week, count yourself an odd one. MacAMP Lite, at \$10, is worth every penny.

Phillip Grey

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ICQ 1.6.7 (beta)

Silver Medal

Price: Freeware

Contact Info: <http://www.icq.com/>

If you are a small businessperson with a need to communicate with remote offices over the Internet, you will be pleasantly surprised to find Mirabilis' new version of ICQ (pronounced "I Seek You"). Armed with this free software, an Internet connection, and a need to communicate, you can save big bucks.

ICQ allows you to send messages, chat in real time, and transfer files. These three functions will save many a phone call and fax, all of which cost you more money than you're likely to spend connected to your ISP. The file transfer capabilities even work cross-platform because platform-dependent compression (such as StuffIt compression) can be ignored, and files can be transferred individually or as a group.

Installation of ICQ is straightforward. After downloading the program at Mirabilis' (very ugly) website, at <http://www.icq.com/>, you simply follow directions to set up the software. Download and install ICQ on each of your businesses' computers, exchange user ICQ numbers, and voilà! You've got an instant (and free) corporate intranet! This can be yours without servers or other expensive equipment.

I give the latest version, 1.6.7, high marks in cost (free), ease of use and installation, and stability. The interface is also fairly easy to comprehend and use. It lags slightly behind the Windows version, and thus receives a silver medal. If your organization is interested in using the Internet for something other than surfing, look into ICQ.

Bill Horne

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Zip USB Drive Silver Medal

Price: \$149

Contact Info: <http://www.iomega.com/>

When Apple introduced the iMac, many people wondered how they would back up and transfer their files. A good solution is Iomega's new Zip USB Drive, designed specifically for the iMac. Encased in Bondi- or Blueberry-matching translucent plastics and matching USB cable, this drive works well with iMacs, new blue-and-white PowerMac G3s, and even PCs with Windows 98.

The Zip USB drive is almost ready to use right out of the box, which includes the USB data cable, universal power supply, IomegaWare CD-ROM, and users guides. I say "almost" because you don't get a Zip disk with the drive.

The installation is quite easy thanks to the manuals, but the confusion that surrounds the iMac Update may confuse some users. Version 1.0 is included on the disk, but if you run Mac OS 8.5 or newer, Apple recommends that you install iMac Firmware Update 1.0 and iMac Update version 1.1. They can be downloaded at <http://www.apple.com/support/imac/>. Also, I found that connecting the Zip drive to the keyboard USB port results in lower speeds than when the Zip drive is attached to the USB port on the side of the iMac itself.

Using the Zip drive is just like using floppies, but faster. I measured the speed with wrist watch, by copying different sized files between Zip disk and iMac (Rev. A with 96 MB RAM, Mac OS 8.1, and Update 1.0).

File Size	iMac to Zip	Zip to iMac
1 MB	0:04	0:02
3 MB	0:08	0:05
5 MB	0:13	0:08
10 MB	0:26	0:16
50 MB	2:09	1:14

Average (MB/s)		
0.38	0.66	

The Zip drive is no speed demon, but it more than suits adequate needs. It is capable of running applications and multimedia without noticeable lags. The bundled RecordIt! software lets you record music from your CDs to Zip disks. I recorded R.E.M.'s "Daysleeper" (3:32 in length) in 2 minutes. The file size was 6 MB at the highest quality settings.

For \$149, the Zip USB drive is worthy of consideration. For more information and software updates, visit Iomega's website at

<http://www.iomega.com/> .

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