

•By Tim Robertson <Publisher@mymac.com>•

Back in the mid-1980s, I would regularly make my own cassette tapes to listen to in my car. Back then, CD-players were still very new, and I didn't know anyone who actually had a car CD-player. If you wanted to make your own compilations, cassette tapes were it.

I owned a few CDs, but I mostly bought cassettes of all the new albums. If it was something I wanted to own "forever," I would buy a CD and buy a blank tape so I could jam to it in my car. In fact, thinking back, my first CD was Def Leppard's "Pyromania." I also had the actual cassette, but after listening to it a thousand times, it was getting worn out. So with the CD and a tape recorder, I would always have a "fresh" cassette in my car. If one wore out, like the original, it was only a matter of spending an hour re-recording it again. I also learned that blank cassettes were of a higher quality than the tape in the cassette version of an album. If I recorded from a CD to a high quality blank tape such as a TDK, it sounded much better than the original cassette album tape did.

But compilations were my favorite. I owned a CD-player, three cassette player/recorders, and a mixing board (not like you would see in a recording studio, but one you would find at Radio Shack, with some volume and EQ slide settings). With this setup, I could put songs from any of the hundreds of cassette tapes or CDs I owned—the best songs from each—and make a 90-minute masterpiece. I was my very own K-Tel! (For those in the younger generation, K-Tel did just that, taking songs from different artists and placing them on one album. The only problem with K-Tel, of course, was all the albums they made sucked. Mine were much better). I would take twelve songs for one side of the cassette, mix it so that each song blended into the next with no pauses, and have no extra blank tape at the end. I would also mix in various sounds, such as helicopter noises during a Pink

Floyd song, or explosions during a Dokken song. It was all very hi-tech at the time for me.

Now, jump ahead fifteen years. I still own the mixing board (though it is packed away in a box somewhere) but no cassette players. (Actually, I do own a Kenwood cassette player, though I haven't used it in years now.) Everywhere I listen to music, I have a CD player. The one in my home entertainment system, the CD-player in the Mac, and the Clarion in the Suburban. So the days of making my own compilations are over. NOT!

The Search

I had been following the steady decline of the prices for CD-R players/recorders for a while now. Keeping an eye on the Small Dog price sheet which comes with every issue of My Mac, I finally saw that which I had been waiting for: an affordable CD-R!

I will let you readers know that this column and the next few in upcoming issues of My Mac, which I will continue to write about the ins and outs of using a CD-R, could not have taken place without the help of Small Dog Electronics. Hapy, the owner, and Tom, their advertising specialist, were instrumental in getting me a CD-R to use for the purpose of writing these articles. At first, I only wanted to use a unit without keeping it, and Hapy and Tom obliged me by sending me an evaluation unit for 45 days. As I write this, though, I have decided to send them a check and to keep the unit, I love it that much! So Hapy, Tom, and everyone at Small Dog Electronics: thank you! To most of our readers, you are simply one of the sponsors of this magazine. I wish I could tell our readers how much more Small Dog means to My Mac and to the Macintosh community. Hey, I think I just did!

Anyway, with the help of Small Dog, I embarked upon my quest to capture some of my youth, and make some more of the compilation CDs like the cassettes of old. With no experience, I wasn't sure how successful I would be. I was also surprised by the lack of information for Macintosh users on the Internet. Where were the articles to help the first time users? Where were the resources for the new iMac user who wants to buy a CD-R and back up his entire hard drive? Where was the step-by-step instructions for Mac users to make an audio CD? With the exception of a few article from Andy Ihnatko at MacCentral (see <http://www.maccentral.com/news/9906/22.ihnatko.shtml>> for Part One) I couldn't find much more of anything on the subject. And as much as I enjoy reading Andy's stuff, it was not really the type of article I was looking for on the subject. So why

not start from a ground zero perspective and write it myself?

Now, this will not be a review of the various CD-R and CD-RW units. Unlike Macworld, My Mac cannot afford to go out and buy each unit to test. If you want to know if one unit is better than another, you'll have to do a bit of research on your own. I have only used one, which we will get to later, so please don't ask me for comparisons with other models. And since I also have only used two software packages to burn CDs, please don't ask me if another product is better than what I used, because I honestly don't know!

Definitions

While this article will be spread out in the next few issues, I did want to give you some basics before I leave you this month.

CD

Simply **C**ompact **D**isc. For the most part, when you think of a CD, you could think of either a music CD or the type of CD your computer uses, a CD-ROM. They are not the same, though.

CD-ROM

This is the disk format of CDs that your computer uses. It stands for **C**ompact **D**isc **R**ead **O**nly **M**edia. All the games and programs you buy for your Mac now usually come on a CD-ROM. Of course, you do need a CD-ROM player to use a CD-ROM disk. Fear not, though, because all Macs for the past four years came standard with a CD-ROM player.

1x, 2x, 16x, 32x, etc...

You'll see these numbers on a spec sheet all the time. What do these stand for? Basically, they refer to the speeds of a player, or recorder. If you are looking at a 16x CD-ROM, it means this CD-ROM player will play the disc 16x (x means Times) faster than the first generation CD players. When you're listening to music CDs, this will have no affect on what you hear. But let's say you're installing software from a CD-ROM to your Mac. A 24x CD-ROM will install the software much faster than a 4x CD-ROM player will. Games will load and play faster, too.

CD-R.

There are two different CD-R definitions. One refers to the unit that you use to actually make the CDs, while the other refers to the media, the CD itself. A unit, which makes the CDs, is called a **C**ompact **D**isc **R**ecorder. The media, or the CDs themselves, are called **C**ompact **D**isc **R**ecordable. Not much chance you will mess this up.

CD-RW

To really confuse you, there is also a CD-RW. This is a relatively new media, and it simply means you can re-record CDs more than once. Don't ask me the technical aspects of how this is done; though I do plan on researching it more. CD-RW stands for (unit) Compact Disc Recorder Rewritable while the media (the CD itself) stands for Compact Disc Recordable ReWritable.

DVD

No one can seem to make up their minds yet on the REAL definition of what DVD stands for: it is either Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc, depending on whom you ask. I think both work, for as a movie DVD would be better served by Digital Video Disc, while a CD-ROM type of disc would be considered a Digital Versatile Disc. Whatever you want to call it, you can read a great article written by Brian Koponen in My Mac #27 back in July of 1997.

<http://www.mymac.com/mymac/archives/jul_97/briank.shtml>

DVD-RW

While my unit does not do this, soon you will be able to get a unit and media that will use the DVD format. The RW here also means Recordable ReWritable. Most of us think of DVD as the new movie CD and players, which are the same size as regular media CDs but contain an entire movie on it. You can even order a DVD player for your Mac, which will allow you to play DVD, CD-ROM, and music CDs. The advantage of a DVD discs over a CD or CD-ROM is how much information they can hold. A CD and CD-ROM media can hold 650MB. A DVD can hold 4.7GB. Yes, that is a lot more information. I predict that soon DVD will replace the CD and CD-ROM format everywhere, not just in computers but also in home and car audio systems.

On the DVD note, you can also get Zip types of drives and disks which also use the DVD compression method to hold a lot more information. A DVD Zip disk, for instance, may hold 4GB over a 100MB Zip disk.

Disc vs. Disk

Finally (!) there are two different, well, discs. Disc and Disk. A Disc is a CD-type of media, while a Disk is a floppy or Zip-type of media. Same with the player or units which read these types of media. A Floppy Disk and a Compact Disc. See the difference?

Well, next month we'll delve into Part Two of this series, where we connect and

fire up the LaCie CD burner Small Dog Electronics sent me, try out the software which came with the burner (Toast and DirectCD) and see what sort of trouble we can get into. Maybe if we're lucky, we will actually make our first music CD! We will also explore MP3's and a few MP3 players!

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Websites mentioned:

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

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

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

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