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**TODAY'S PAPER**  
**ENTERTAINMENT**

**The latest cool accessory is no flash in the pan**

By IAN JOHNSON  
 Saturday, October 2, 2004 - Page L10

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They're known by a confusing array of names: USB flash drives, jump drives, memory keys, thumb drives or keychain drives. And they're not just for geeks any more.

No matter what you call them, they're the hottest new accessory for the wired crowd -- everyone from teenagers to busy execs -- and these tiny, durable storage devices are becoming the floppy discs of the 21st century.

"It's huge," Mark Rogers, business development manager for Verbatim, told *The New York Times* last week. "It was so small before last year it was under the radar," he said. "Then all of a sudden people starting taking notice."

Indeed, *The Times* article cited the recent Tom Cruise thriller *Collateral*, in which a USB drive is used to transfer an assassin's case files.

Attached to keychains or backpacks or worn on lanyards around the neck, USB drives plug into a computer's USB port for almost instant transfer of files. And they're cheap: \$35 models now store 128 megabytes of information (a floppy stores 1.4 MB), while the largest models can hold two gigabytes -- enough to transport large collections of music and photo files, and even video clips.

With such a hot new technology, the possibilities are endless. Victorinox and Swissbit have teamed up to offer a Swiss Army knife with a flip-out USB memory drive. The Mega Memory Watch, an analog timepiece, has a USB drive hidden inside it. Philips offers a USB drive with a built-in digital camera: The Philips USB Key Ring Camera takes 1.3 megapixel shots and is available with 64 MB or 128 MB of memory. There are drives with built-in MP3 music players -- with tiny playback controls, headphone jacks and display screens, and they're simple to use: You plug the drive straight into a computer, then drag and drop songs onto the drive's icon,

But for something that can be worn around the neck, the flash drives have a long way to go style-wise. While Japanese websites offer whimsical versions shaped like lipsticks and rubber duckies, at Staples Business Depot in Toronto, the dominant colour is still grey.

As capacities get larger, USB drives are also changing the way we commute. Instead of lugging your notebook computer from home to office or class, you can carry a copy of your PC's files on your keychain.

Forward Solutions' Migo, for example, lets you make a clone of your settings, important files and Outlook e-mail. Then, if you plug the Migo into another computer, you can make it look just like your own -- right down to the wallpaper and desktop folders.

Naturally, anything this portable and versatile will raise less benign possibilities. There are spyware

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capacities: The tiny StealthSurfer, for example, has its own version of Netscape 7, so you can browse the Web from someone else's computer without leaving a trace.

Meanwhile, police have reported USB drives being used to transport pornography. And companies are being advised to restrict their use. According to this month's edition of PC World, the U.S. Department of Energy already has banned USB flash drives from the workplace, saying copying and stealing sensitive data with them is just too easy.

*Ian Johnson writes the Chic Geek column for globetechnology.com.*

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