

# tools of the trade



T-Mobile Sidekick

## High-Tech Vacation

Pilots have had noise-cancelling headsets for years, and now **Bose Corporation** offers an improved second version of its **QuietComfort® 2 Acoustic NoiseCancelling® headphones** for those sitting back in the cabin. Designed to block ambient noise, the headphones can be used to listen to CDs, watch onboard movies, or just eliminate the persistent roar in the fuselage. Or you can wear them on the train or bus into work, at work, or at home. The way it works is the headset has microphones in the

earpieces that listen to and then generate blocking frequencies for the noises around the wearer. You don't have to plug the phones into anything for this function—you can wear them just to block noise. There are batteries in the earphones that power this function with the flip of a switch. These



Bose QuietComfort 2 Headphones

batteries are monitored by indicators that will keep track of how many hours of use they have left in them. The QuietComfort 2 has a single audio cable with a built-in volume control that connects to almost any audio source. A five-foot extension cable and carrying case come with the headset.

[www.bose.com](http://www.bose.com)

It has been described as looking like a bar of soap, but the **Sidekick** from T-Mobile is actually a Web connection that delivers pages in color, and it's also a phone. The screen slides up to uncover a full-sized QWERTY keyboard for thumb-typing, and there's also a thumb wheel for navigating. The screen has an impressive 65,000 colors and Sidekick's powerful browser. Building on the success of the monochrome Sidekick (winner of the 2003 *PC World* Product of the Year), the new color Sidekick has a service that delivers

unlimited e-mail, AOL Instant Messenger™, Internet browsing, text messaging, and mobile snapshots. That's the data side. The phone side of the communications includes built-in paging, caller ID, conference calling, call waiting and call hold, directory assistance, detailed billing, voicemail with messaging alert, call forwarding, and international dialing. There's a hands-free headset for those who find the shape awkward. The Sidekick is a rounded rectangular 2.6 × 4.6 × 1.1 inches and weighs just slightly more than six ounces.

[www.t-mobile.com](http://www.t-mobile.com)

## Vacationing at Home and Away

If you plan on taking a few weeks and are staying close to home, there's new software that will help you transfer your record collection and tapes to CD—a far more entertaining project than cleaning the garage. **Audio Cleaning**

## Sneaking Bits in and out of the House

Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ THE ELECTRIC CURRENT THAT ENTERS YOUR HOUSE to power practically everything arrives silently, just barely spinning the wheel in the glass-covered meter on its way in. Television and radio transmissions pass through all the rooms like windy plasmas, unnoticed by everyone but the receivers tuned to their frequencies. And that's the way it's supposed to be.

The best technology is invisible. Gears turning in a pool of dark oil might interest an engineer, but the average person just wants a clean windshield, comfortable seat, and

an engine that turns over and carries them down the street. It would be overwhelmingly complicated if we had to keep an eye on the workings of all our machines as we used them. And that's one of the major complaints about desktop computers—they're still too complicated for many people to even bother getting one. Consider the simple task of addressing an envelope—pen vs. PC. Count the steps for both processes. For one, you pick up the pen and copy the address. For the other: 1. You turn on the computer. (Wait) 2. Click on the User icon. 3. Click on the

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**Lab 2004** from **MAGIX** will convert, restore, and clean up vinyl LPs, vintage 78s and 45s, and audio tapes (music and speech), creating digital music that can be burned on CDs, saved on your PC, or converted to MP3s. With your turntable or tape deck connected to your computer via the line out from the amplifier or tape or phone jacks, Audio Cleaning Lab records and lets you save in four formats, including WAV and MP3. Then you can re-master the record-

ings, doing everything from eliminating clicks, crackles, noise, and hisses, to optimizing stereo and real-time effects. You can even filter out singing for Karaoke tracks or restore soundtracks from old videos (AVI). There are easy-to-use wizards, and although you might need a cable connection with an adapter for your computer, a quick trip to Radio Shack is as technically challenging as that gets. You could use the inexpensive software to create sound files for your company's website or archive interviews, recorded notes, or audio records from the office, but while on vacation you probably should record on CD all those albums you've been saving before somebody sticks them out in the garage. [www.magix.com](http://www.magix.com)

If you're traveling abroad and have already loaded



**Absolute Word Translators for PDAs**

your itinerary, expense program, currency converter, and maps of cities you'll be visiting on your PDA, there's one other program you might consider—a foreign dictionary. **AbsoluteWord** has more than 300 multilingual and speciality dictionaries for the Palm OS and Pocket PC. The dictionaries feature fast browsing, expansion card support for Compact Flash, SD/MMC, Memory Stick, and FlashModule,

and data compression to make them fit PDAs. Dictionaries aren't just English-to- and the reverse: There are English-to-Dutch and Dutch-to-English as well as Dutch-to-Russian, Portuguese, French, Latin, Greek, and so on. Foreign alphabets are supported, and there is a wide range of free and commercial multilingual and speciality dictionaries offered. [www.absoluteword.com](http://www.absoluteword.com)



**MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab**

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Word Processor icon. 4. Click on \_toolbar to open menu for envelopes. 5. Select font. 6. Type in return address. 7. Type in address. 8. Select envelope type. 9. Turn on the printer and load envelope. 10. Click print. 11. Hit return after printer is selected.

Granted that anyone used to the process can do the 11 steps pretty quickly, skating the cursor around the screen and clicking, but if the simplest of processes requires so many steps, it makes you wonder about the machine.

### True Plug-and-Play

Remember when Windows' Plug-and-Play was humorously (and maybe more realistically) described as Plug-and-Pray? Well, an actual Plug-and-Play Internet may be just on the horizon. At the first world conference of electric companies in Brussels in June, one of the attendees reported on a pilot project that pipes the Internet into your house and around to all the wall sockets. Scottish and Southern Energy in Perth, Scotland, has 200 people plugged in and online. The modem plugs into the wall socket, and the computer plugs into the modem. The result is a faster connection than the high-speed ADSL already available on telephone lines—the wall-socket Net comes in and out of the house at one million bits per second or even higher.

Other areas in Europe where the technology is being tested are in Spain, Italy, Germany, and Portugal. Europe is the acknowledged leader in the technology, but the road to regulatory acceptance looks a little difficult. Telephone companies that own the "last mile" of copper wire going into homes aren't happy with competitors who can bypass their con-

nections, and the power and radio regulators also have issues with the new technology.

The companies that have a head start—Ascom of Switzerland and Main.Net of Israel—are, according to Reuters, ready to deliver "10

**An actual  
Plug-and-Play Internet  
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megabits per second across high-, medium-, and low-voltage lines in a band from 1.6 to 30MHz." They are now awaiting the much slower machinations of political and economic forces that have to be brought into line.

The stealth delivery of Internet services over power lines would fit the invisible requirements of great technology, but it will probably show up in Europe before it does here. With power and communication infrastructures that are older, radical change here would require a much more difficult upheaval. Factor in the money and politics, and you're likely to reach a "don't hold your breath" conclusion.

From another part of the world, Korea, there's a new technology that will let you carry one of the other home technologies out of the house with no more effort than pocketing your cell phone. Samsung has released for domestic distribution the SCH-X280 handset that has a built-in TV tuner. The phone can receive local VHF and UHF channels over the same broadcast signals that are received in homes. The TV picture can be viewed in color, either horizontally or vertically on the phone's display. The standard battery can

provide about two hours of TV viewing time, and there's a long-life battery that will stretch that to four hours. There's an earphone, and the receiver can even capture and store about 50 frames of video that can be used as a screen saver or background image. With far fewer than 11 steps, you can carry and/or watch TV almost anywhere.

### Bits in—Bits out

There are a couple of things that these two emerging technologies have in common. They are simple and easy. When working, they are invisible, requiring little more from the user than just paying the bill. But they aren't being developed here. The great grandfathers of these young developments are people like Edison, Bell, and Filo Farnsworth—Americans all—but it looks like the Web-in-the-wall and TV-phones will be growing up elsewhere.

It isn't that we can't also create elegant technology. Think of the way Palm handhelds do what they do. But now look at the PC on your desk. Look at what's connected to it. Walk around the desk and look at the tangle of dusty wires reaching for a power strip that's plugged into the wall. Makes you wonder. ■

### Answers to End Note, "Traveling with Cash," p. 72.

D	R	A	C	H	M	A	E	P	E	S	O
E	A	T	A	B	O	W	L	A	L	I	L
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A	D	I	E	N	O	N	S	E	R	I	F
R	A	N	D	G	U	I	L	D	E	R	S