tools of the trade

allways™ Hands-free Headsets

Hands-free, Clutter-free

The allways™ hands-free headset can be worn around the ear or suspended from eyeglasses for extended periods with no discomfort. It uses Bluetooth™ technology, so there are no wires, and you can be as far as 30 feet away from your phone or laptop, a plus for those with health concerns about cell phone use.

Quality speech or audio is enhanced with noise cancellation. You can receive, initiate, or mute calls with the push of a button, even when your cell is buried in your briefcase or purse. Allways supports voice dialing and has a redial option. The batteries provide up to 6.5 hours of continuous talk time and up to 200 hours of standby time. There's a Universal Bluetooth Adapter available for standard mobile phones. Ergonomic features include a short boom, compact design, and carry case with belt clip. www.allways1.com

Tired of the mess that shows up on your desk every day, or need a place to store disks or markers so you always know where to find them? The myKeyO™ keyboard organizer's award-winning design makes secondary use of the space already taken up on the desktop by your keyboard. The PS2 version comes in black or white and is compatible with all Microsoft Windows computers from 3.1 to XP. Only 1/10th of an inch thicker than standard keyboards, the myKeyO is 18 × 8 × 1.5 inches. The interior space is sectioned off to help you organize and keep items in place. When the keyboard is lifted to its maximum height, it stays open without tipping over. A version for Macintosh will be available soon. You can get additional information and order the Keyboard Organizer at www.keyboardorganizer.com.

myKeyO™ Keyboard Organizer

A hack is a useful tool or clever workaround that experienced users discover and then, sometimes, share. The O'Reilly Hacks series of books now includes a book of "100 Industrial-Strength Tips & Tools" for Excel. The book, *Excel Hacks*, has tools and techniques for analyzing, processing, and presenting data using the classic spreadsheet program. The book will show you how, by using "backdoor" adjustments, you can design charts that go far beyond the basic chart types and behavior provided by Excel; specify dynamic ranges that expand and contract to match your data and that you can use to create flexible formulas and charts; write macros to automatically and repetitively perform tasks in an efficient and predictable way; put

The Disc That Would Have Cost $7 Million

Michael Castelluccio, Editor

JUST LIKE THE KEYBOARD POUNDERS who sit in front of them, computers need both short-term and long-term memory to function. Luckily, the machines even have a third way to remember with removable floppy, flash, CD, and DVD devices. These carry-around memory aids were first made out of paper. After a relatively long period of plastic, silicon, and polycarbonate, they may now be going back to paper. But before we look at the new paper DVDs from Sony, let's jog our own nonremovable banks to see how this all came to be.

What Goes Around…

The first computer storage devices were rectangular pieces of paper. They were designed by Herman Hollerith, the man responsible for taking the 1890 U.S. Census. The numbers had grown too large for hand tabulation (the last count in 1880 took eight years to complete), and when Herman saw a train conductor punch out a pattern on tickets to help him identify the holders, he decided to design a card to hold data for his count. Holes punched in the cards could record Male/Female, Native/Foreign, Age, and so on. Hollerith had become the world's first statistical engineer.

Read electronically in Herman's Tabulating Machine, the cards were pressed between two brass rods, and an electric current registered when the rods touched at the site of the holes. As prudent as he was inventive, Herman knew he would need to store the results carefully, so he looked around for appropriate cabinetry. The punch cards

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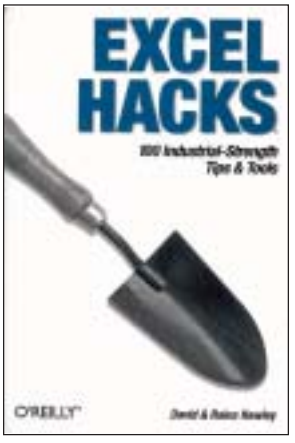
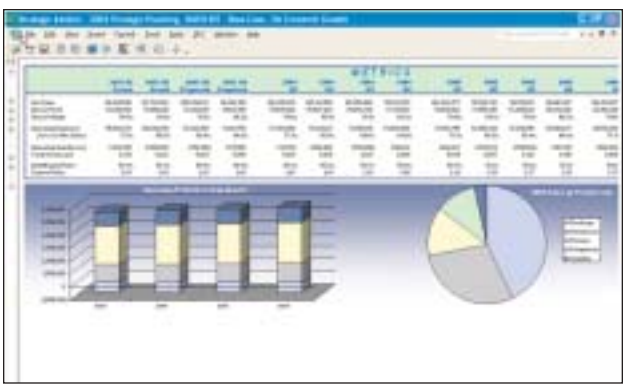


PivotTables to work and share the results without sharing the underlying data; build an interactive and normalizing data-entry environment; and more, with 100 hacks in all. You can read several sample hacks, including "Entering Data into Multiple Worksheets Simultaneously," "Addressing Data by Name," "Locking and Protecting Cells Containing Formulas," and "Adding Descriptive Text to Your Formulas," by going to www.oreilly.com/catalog/excelhks/chapter/index.html.

SRC Software has released a major upgrade to its core platform, creating a fully integrated Corporate Performance Management (CPM) Suite. Based on a single source code engine, the CPM Suite elegantly synchronizes strategic planning with budgeting and reporting. There's a single launch point for the multiple applications and a new user interface. Designed for mid- to large-size enterprises, SRC's closed-loop process integrates long-range planning (SRC Strategic Planning™, Forecasting™, and Capital Planning™), detailed planning (Budgeting™, Payroll Planning™, Sales Planning™), reporting detail (Reporting™, Consolidations™, Productivity Management™), and metrics management (Scorecarding™). The same look and feel for every element simplifies training and implementation and enables more control and reliable results. Users have a single login for all applications, and they can view forecasts, budgets, and strategic plans in a single report. SRC's flexible system architecture integrates with enterprise-scale databases, adapts to any network topology, and has an intuitive Excel interface. The new version has enhanced Web access methods to allow access from various locations.
www.srcsoftware.com



SRC CPM Suite

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were cut the same size as one-dollar bills after he realized he could use the same shelving Treasury had. The inventor sold his Tabulating Machine Company to another company in the 1920s. That company was IBM.

Over several decades, IBM fine-tuned the punch cards to an 80-column format with rectangular holes rather than round. But then the world of computer memory began to spin in another direction. In 1956, the IBM 305 RAMAC (Random Access Method of Accounting and Control) computer was unleashed on the business world. Its central memory boasted 5MB on a stack of 50 magnetic platters that were 24 inches wide. To lease the 5MB model would cost you $35,000 a year. That's 35,000 1956 dollars for what fits on three of today's 3.5 floppies that you tossed into your desk drawer somewhere. Or you could buy the RAMAC for $167,850 with punched card output or $189,950 with printed output.

Next, IBM gave us Alan Shugart's ingenious floppy disk. The first version was an eight-inch device—later downsized to 5.25 and 3.5. We were now fully ensconced in the world of magnetic remembrance on plastic.

SANYO's MildDiscs are biodegradable.

As the spinning hard disks inside the machine were touched by read/write heads, like a finger touched to a chin while recalling, other disks mimicked the same "musing" in other floppy, CD, and DVD drives within or near the machine. Finally, storage was both cheap and portable.

…Comes Around.

Fast-forward to mid-April of this year and an announcement from Sony and Toppan Printing. The two companies have spent a year developing a paper DVD disc that works with Blu-ray technology—a blue laser light that is likely to replace the red lasers used in today's computers. The paper discs hold an amazing 25GB of data. That's gigabytes—1,024 megabytes equals one gigabyte. The discs can store more than two hours of high-definition video, more than five times the capacity of the current DVDs. The disc, according to Sony, has a total weight that is 51% paper. There are several advantages. The composition, along with the shift in laser light, increases the capacity of the disc, thereby decreasing the amount of raw material used to create storage for the same information. An added security benefit is that you can destroy these discs by cutting them with scissors. Sony hopes to ship Blu-ray recorders that use the single-side, rewritable paper discs with a total capacity of 50GB by the end of this year.

SANYO Electric Company has decided to design a CD that addresses another ever-revolving cycle. Noting that the world's appetite for CDs has increased to 10 billion, that these little polycarbonate platters won't decompose in landfills, and that they emit dioxins when burned, the Japanese company decided to make their CDs out of corn. Called MildDiscs, these CDs are biodegradable. The material used to derive their polyactic acid base is corn—about 85 kernels to make one disc—so one ear of corn will make 10 discs. When you toss them away, microorganisms will turn them back into water and carbon dioxide. As for the raw materials needed to make the world's 10 billion discs—less than 0.1% of the world's corn production would be used.

As the paperless office takes yet another step backward, there are a few counterbalancing benefits. First, there's capacity. Compare the amount of data on Sony's paper DVD against IBM's 5MB stack of platters in the RAMAC. It calculates out to a cost of $7,175,000 on the older machine. And that's 1950s' dollars—worth maybe 10 times today's anemic buck. So, when the question is "Paper or Plastic?"—take the paper, and move on to the blue light. ■