Carrying all of your information with you

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Many computer-literate professionals and students find themselves working on multiple computers. We have our home computers, our laptops, our work computers, and computers at school. Sharing files across a number of computers is problematic. Using one of the Web-based file storage solutions would work except I use some computers that do not always have Internet access. The solution that I like the most is to carry my “active” files around with me on a small flash drive that plugs into a USB port on any computer.

I personally use a 16 GB drive that is waterproof and shockproof. I paid a little extra for the increased durability but I have never regretted it. I have found that 16 GB is more than enough storage for my needs and I always have it hanging around my neck when I head off for work. My wife thinks that it looks a little nerdy and calls my flash drive my necklace or my “nerd bling.”

Flash drives come in a variety of blinged out versions. Mine is a simple rubber-covered striped design but it is possible to buy drives covered in rhinestones that so serve as true bling. Some people like to carry around decorative flash drives that are shaped like animals, keys, twigs, baked goods, or hamburgers. The choices are as wide as your imagination and personal interests. The cost of these unique styles is a bit higher but still relatively low for a signature drive that everyone will recognize as yours.

Many companies now give out flash drives as promotional items. The company’s name or logo can be engraved on the side of the drive and the company’s catalog loaded as a Word file on the drive. Some business conferences distribute their proceedings on flash drives to reduce printing costs and to make it easier for the conference attendees to carry them home.

The technology behind nerd bling is constantly improving. My first flash drive was relatively small at 64 KB. That is less than one percent of the capacity of my current flash drive. One of my colleagues uses a 200 GB pocket-sized flash drive that contains all of her course materials.

There are some problems associated with using flash drives. The lost and found box in the Walsh computer labs is often full of flash drives that students leave behind. These drives almost always contain school assignments and occasionally sensitive files from employers that the students are working on. The portability of flash drives also makes them vulnerable to being left behind when their owners finish their work at a computer. If you find yourself “losing” a lot of flash drives it might make sense to encrypt all of the files on your flash drive. This will lower the portability of the drive as you need to be at a computer that can handle the decryption.

Flash drives have a lifespan. I have heard that some flash drives may give out after 10,000 read-write cycles. That is a lot of use and I am not sure that I have ever approached that number on any of the flash drives that I have owned. I have only had one flash drive fail on me and that is because I dropped it off my desk and rolled my chair over it before I realized it was on the floor. Fortunately I had backed the drive up a day or two before and did not lose much work. I back my flash drive up every Sunday evening to prevent accidental data loss. I hope that you find using a flash drive as useful, secure, and convenient as I have.

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