



TOOL TIME

Number 15

Tips, tools, and timely tidbits to make your publishing job easier



THE ZIP IS GONE OUT OF MY LIFE.

At best, the days in the life of a computer are numbered and short.

Just a couple years ago, everyone was talking about the latest and greatest invention for the computer, the Zip Drive. Today, you hardly ever hear it mentioned. Though it was once the greatest offline storage and backup system, it has now been passed over and replaced with new and supposedly better technology. Such is the life of a computer device.

Currently, the most cost-effective offline storage device is the CD. Originally, CD drive speeds were very slow, but today both their speed and reliability have been greatly improved. The newer drives are



rated at 52x. Have you ever wondered what that number means? Most drives actually have three numbers listed in their specifications such as: 52x 32x 16x. The "x" means the drive operates at that many times the standard drive's speed. Drive speed is measured in comparison to the standard audio CD rotational speed. Therefore, 52x means it is 52 times

faster than an audio CD player.

The three numbers represent the three major functions of a CD drive. The first number refers to the READ speed; it can read 52 times faster than an audio CD. The second number refers to the WRITE speed on a STANDARD CDR (Compact Disc Recordable). It writes 32 times faster than the



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rotational speed of an audio CD. The third number refers to the WRITE speed on a CDRW (a Rewritable CD) which uses a different technology than a CDR. Thus, the three numbers on CD drives are telling you (1) the READ speed, (2) the WRITE speed and (3) the REWRITE speed.

In addition to the various speeds at which these drives function, there are also multiple methods (or formats) used to physically write the material to media. Audio (sound or music) files can be written in any number of specific ways, e.g., WMA, MP3. Some companies, such as Kodak, have developed specific formats to write unique data files to a CD, e.g., Photo CD. Data CDs can be written in the same file structure used on the computer's hard drive, or they can be compressed using various systems, e.g., Zip, Rar, ISO, Sit. Compression is done to either save digital space or keep a specific group of files together so they can be easily reassembled.

With most current CD burning software, it is fairly easy to make or reproduce digital files. Since the cost of individual CDs is generally cheaper than a floppy

disk and CDs hold a lot more data (700 mb compared to 1.4 mb), many people use CDs as their everyday data transfer method.

It used to be that once you wrote data to a CD, that CD could not be used to archive additional data. However, today most CD drives have multi-session capabilities. This means you won't need to throw away a CD once it is used; now you can write additional material to the same CD. In essence, you are adding more information to the same CD. This works best when you use the same CD burning software each time, but you can use another computer or CD drive. Each brand of software has its own system structure. If you switch software, you may not be able to add to the information you already have on the CD; however, you can generally store additional data if you are willing to lose the previously recorded information.

Although the five-inch-round CD is the most popular, CDs come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Some companies now specialize in making custom CDs in the shape of logos or other designs. There are several standard formats such as a

three-inch and a business-card size. Since CDs are written from the center outwards, which is the opposite of an old-style vinyl record, capacity is limited by the amount of continuous area the drive head can access.

Though CDs are very popular, easy to use, and fairly reliable, they too will have a relatively short life span. The DVD is rapidly replacing the CD in many parts of the world. In the Orient, storage technology has skipped over the CD and moved directly to the DVD or some variation of it.

Whatever system you decide to use to store or transfer information, it will most likely be outdated within five years. The average life cycle of the latest and greatest computer innovation is typically under two years. Therefore, be careful not to invest too much money or effort into a single system. You will soon find there is something better on the market. The old saying, "Trying to keep up with the Joneses" might be rephrased as, "Trying to keep up with Dell or Gateway." The biblical concept, "And this too shall pass," certainly applies to computer technology.

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