

Look mum no media

Written by Darryn Lowe

Saturday, 02 February 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 03 February 2008 08:56

The MacBook Air is an interesting development. Sure it's been done before but the thing that is interesting more than what the MacBook Air has is what it has left out. The DVD drive.

With most sub-notebooks the drive is not internal but external but it is included however with the MacBook Air it is not. This might be more telling than you think and highlights a possible future sans physical media. A future I'd be glad to see come. Here's why...

CDs and DVDs are namby pambys:

CDs and DVDs are so fragile that they'd rather scratch as soon as you look at them rather than live a life of usefulness. Any media that would rather scratch itself in much the same way the albino dude from "The Da Vinci Code" flogged himself in religious rite is hardly fit for high use situations such as being used. As such it needs to disappear quick. I've bought Neil Finn's amazing concert "7 Worlds Collide" four times, twice on CD and twice on DVD because the flaming discs keep dying. As it is both discs are failing again and would be worthless if I hadn't ripped them to iTunes.

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It is claimed that the CD/DVDs will last for 50-100 years but truthfully it's going to be less than that. For instance my "7 Worlds Collide" disc would only have been a couple of months after purchase that it started playing up which suggests I got ripped off by cheap media. There are no scratches on the disc so it seems to relate to poor duplication as well.

More than one way to skin a cat:

With flash media reducing in price and gaining in reliability and capacity it makes sense that this should be the way to head instead of pathetic CD and DVD media. They aren't susceptible to scratches, heat, or rough play (and let's face it media takes a pounding) and their size affects how much an effect said pounding is going to have. The smaller the media, the thicker the media the less likely damage is going to happen... simple physics really.

While flash drives are a cool idea there is one option much better and incidentally it is something that Apple already has in place and it seems something that Apple has [patented](#) as well.

iTunes, your future store:

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iTunes is an amazing app. I remember using the first version all those years ago and remembering how much promise it could have. I even explicitly remember thinking how cool it would be to buy music through this app. At that time the iPod didn't exist then it did and the world changed. Here was a device that worked perfectly with the best music software I had EVER used (and I was pretty impressed with MusicMatch) and once again the thought of buying music came directly into my head. The Apple introduced the iTunes Music Store which then became the iTunes Store and I was wetting myself hoping like hell they'd bring the store to New Zealand. Many years later and here we are.

But iTS is more than just a music store as you know. In fact it is much more. It is a place where you can buy movies and TV shows as well or even rent them (all of which has yet to make it here and something tells me it's going to be another couple of years until we see it here). It is also a place where you can buy games for your iPod.

It's that latter part that makes it all interesting and I know I'm not the only one who's had this thought, in fact you yourself might see where this is leading.

GreenPeace would never have seen this one coming:

Imagine you buy your Mac and when you open it up you see all the hardware but low and behold there isn't any software with the Mac. "Oh bollocks this isn't good" you think to yourself completely forgetting the software is already installed on the machine. but here's the

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kicker, when you fire up your machine you're greeted with a new interface with nothing more than a login screen. This login screen is for .Mac and if you don't have a login for .Mac it asks you to create one. .Mac is now the source of everything and is FREE to EVERYONE except Windows LUsers (after all there's a reason it's called .Mac). With every Mac user using .Mac we now have the ability to communicate with every user we want creating a better community, but it would go beyond that.

Every .Mac account can be used with the Apple Store and iTunes Store and so if every Mac user has a .Mac account we already have the ability to purchase stuff online. But back to my setup idea.

Once logged into .Mac all your information is pulled down to your machine accordingly (new .Mac account holders would first have to setup this information) and then the install continues. The screen you would see next is the "Customise" screen which allows you to choose which software is installed. This is much the same way it is today only with one difference, it allows you to purchase extra software, say for example "Final Cut Express" or "iWork". Since you're already logged into .Mac and would have filled in your credit card details then it will just deduct that from your credit card and download straight to your machine. But it won't be limited to just Apple products. Imagine buying Photoshop, MS Office, Pixelmator, etc via a paid download directly from the setup screen? Everything installed right from the word go. Once again no physical media means the costs should be reduced (although I don't hold hopes for MS Office). What's even better is the requirement for entering a license code is negated as Apple Store already knows you've purchased the software. Piracy is reduced because Apple Store certainly isn't going to make it easy for you to get the software now is it? This should reduce the software prices even more as this is the number one reason that companies give for high prices. Remove the piracy then you'll truly see if that is the real reason for high prices.

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Where this becomes even cooler is when you decide you want to do a rebuild of your machine. Apple Store would remember which software you bought last time around and offer to download it at the same time as you install everything else but not charge you again for it. Rebuilds can be a prick because if you forget to backup something it's all gone. I made that mistake when I forgot to backup my photos and lost the majority. I lucked out on the ones I really wanted because I had made them into a Web Gallery in iPhoto so I just went to .Mac and downloaded the folder which brings me to my next point...

.Mac, your life in one place:

You know how each user account has Documents, Pictures, Movies, Music, Downloads, and Sites folders? Imagine if all of these (except maybe downloads) were saved on .Mac instead of your local machine. iPhoto uploads directly to your .Mac account but would work on a local copy if you were editing that photo. iWeb would directly work on your .Mac website instead of a local copy, although it would work on a temporary file until you click publish in order to ensure that your changes don't effect the viewer's experience. iMovie would work similarly to iPhoto as would GarageBand and iDVD, Pages, Keynote, Numbers, Final Cut, etc.

All this means that when you rebuild your machine you never have to have to worry about backing up your files as they are already separate from your machine. It also means that if you log in to another Mac your login is directly related to your .Mac account and you can work on your files from there. Essentially it means that your Mac is nothing more than a node on a huge global network just like it is when you log into your machine at work.

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iTunes itself would take on a different approach. With everything stored on your .Mac account it means that if you had the Windows version of iTunes you would simply login to .Mac and all your music would be there. You wouldn't need to authorise each machine because you'd only be using one library and it would mean you can use your iPod on any machine instead of it trying to format your iPod every time you go from your Mac at home to your Windows PC at work.

The future is now:

The MacBook Air has shown us that the iPod structure can be the future of the Mac. It removed the need for physical media by giving us shared disc access. Throw in a Time Capsule with a built in DVD drive and you've got a system in which software and other media can be shared to any machine on the network. Apple TV could access the shared disc and view DVDs instead of having a DVD drive internally. The reduced need for a DVD drive means that the Mac can be sold without a drive bring the cost down (the drives Macs use are effectively laptop drives which cost anywhere from \$150 to \$400 which is a huge saving).

Apple has already shown us that it can be done and I personally would subscribe to such a system as it makes it easier to administer. Also, the lack of media drives means that region encoding of DVDs would be reduced. If you can download it then what's the point of having a retarded lock down system. As I mentioned in my [previous post](#) the only reason the region system exists is due to not the movie studios but the cinemas as there's really no reason a movie can't be distributed around the world at the same time.

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Downloads just make sense. They're more reliable than physical media but they do run the risk of corruption down the line. They are slower but broadband is getting faster. The downside is broadband is limited in data caps here in New Zealand so you may find yourself paying through the nose if you have to do rebuilds etc and also when working on files. It's the nicest solution but the one fraught with the problems of having to hook up with ISPs that have about as much care for their customers as a rabid wolverine has for its pack. But the future of that is starting to become interesting as well so things might workout for the better anyway.