



Geek Speak Soundtrack for Your Life

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Your personal soundtrack can determine your mood, your attitude, and your productivity. In today's world there are many methods to carry your soundtrack with you, listen to it in the car, or use it in your business.

Most of us purchase our music in the form of CDs. You can "rip" those CD's—extract the music to a compressed format on your computer's hard drive. The extracted music can be stored in a variety of different formats including MP3, MP4, WAV, WMV, AAC, and RM. In addition, you can now buy your music in pre-compressed format from a variety of Websites including iTunes, Rhapsody, and Napster. Some of these offer monthly subscriptions for more limited catalogs, others have extensive catalogs in the \$1/tune range. No matter how you buy music, the format the music is stored in will affect the technology you use to carry it around and play it back. Your best bet is to select one format, and stick with it.

From a hardware point of view, there are a wide variety of ways to play back digital music. The original MP3 players had flash memory, which limited the number of tunes you could store. These flash memory players are still around, and have the advantage of a tiny size, lower battery consumption, and a lower base price at the expense of a smaller capacity. The new iPod shuffle, the original Rio player, and the iRiver I-10 are examples of flash players.

A less expensive option is to burn your digital music to a CD and get an inexpensive MP3 compatible CD player. These players start at around \$50 and go up to over \$200. You can have up to 700MB of music per disk on a rechargeable player that will last up to 40 hours. Favorites in this category include the iRiver SlimX450, and the Sony MP3/ATRAC player. The advantage is you can carry your CDs and player around, and bring custom mixes to change on the fly (instead of returning to your PC for a new soundtrack).

The disadvantage is size.

At the next level up are hard-drive-based players, led by the Apple iPod. These players have an internal hard disk and can store gigabytes worth of digital music. Although the iPod is certainly one of the more popular and stylish models—it is limited to playing music in MP3, AAC, or Apple format. You cannot use it with WMV, RM, or other format music files. If you're purchasing digitally protected music from iTunes, the iPod is the best bet. Other great players that are more flexible from a format point of view include the iRiver H10/H20, Creative Labs Zen series of players, and Sony NW-HD3 Network Walkman.

At the high end are portable multimedia players. These players feature music and video on a small, but high-definition screen. You use not only your favorite tunes, but also your favorite movies, videos, or television shows. Examples in this category include the Creative Labs Zen Multimedia Center, the iRiver PMC 120, and the Samsung Portable Media Center.

You can also receive digital music via satellite using one of the

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two competing digital music services—XM Radio or Sirius. For those who love random music selections and talk radio with a huge variety of genres, these services can work well. Although you are tethered to an antenna, you can get over 160 digital-quality channels of music in your car, at your office, or at your home. In order to use

the music legally in your office or retail store, you can buy a business music subscription for \$25/month that includes the RIAA fee.

Whatever format you chose, be sure that you acquire your music legally and that you pay attention to federal laws for replaying music in a public setting. The RIAA can be quite strict about prosecuting those who don't follow the rules. Whatever format you select—have fun, rock on, and enjoy your soundtrack.

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