

One year after its launch, Apple's iPod's still a winner

BY KEVIN RESTIVO

Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod is the best portable music device available.

That may not seem like a revelation for people following the development of the fast-growing consumer market segment.

What's surprising is how Cupertino, Calif.-based Apple's 30GB unit — released over a year ago — has stood the test of time. A year in the ever-changing world of consumer technology is an eternity.

But the iPod's slick design, superior performance and easy-to-use features still makes the digital music device the best option for consumers that want a lightweight unit that can be filled with thousands of songs.



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The iPod is more aesthetically pleasing than its predecessors and weighs about as much as a deck of cards. Equally important, is its ability to easily download and manage music. The iPod has few buttons and allows users to browse for music in pretty much anyway imaginable.

The accompanying MusicMatch software allows users to rate songs and create Apple's AAC music files from a CD collection, which sound better than MP3 files but can be managed in a similar fashion. It is also fun and easy to carry around.

The iPod comes with a pouch and a firm but flexible carrying case. The case is easily attachable to a belt and helps protect the pricey iPod. The gadget is also small enough to be tucked neatly into most pockets.

Though it is easily portable, the iPod is not perfect, nor is it cheap. The iPod mini sells for \$349.99 at Future Shop. If you can get past the sticker shock, the device's sensitive buttons take some getting used to as well.

But overall, the iPod's spin wheel makes it fun to navigate through the iPod's menus.

However, the gadget's battery life is weak. With all the bells and whistles on, such as the backlight, users will find they won't get much more than a few hours of listening in before the iPod needs to be recharged — not fun if you are trying to use the iPod on long road trips or exercise workouts. The drawbacks have not hurt sales. Apple's slick marketing efforts and strong engineering has left consumers clamoring for the stylish 4GB iPod mini, above, released last month. It's easy to see why. The iPod is a winner.

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