

Book Review

iPod & iTunes: The Missing Manual

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While the title of the book is iPod & iTunes, the book concentrates heavily on iPod. Part One opens with a comprehensive discussion of the iPod's functions: the screen, scroll wheel, buttons, menus, etc. The amazing versatility of the iPod emerges in the first pages of the introduction. It can be used as a hard drive adjunct to your Mac to transfer files from computer to computer. It also may be used as an electronic book reader or personal organizer. The book covers all of these topics in detail.

It then moves to the concept of the iPod as a satellite to your computer with a discussion of connectivity via Firewire and USB 2.0. The CD that comes with the iPod contains all the software that you need to quickly get your iPod up and running. The software serves both the Mac and PC worlds.

If you already have Apple's free iTunes program and music stored in its library, it will quickly and automatically transfer the entire library to the iPod upon the initial connection. Optionally, the book explains how you can select only certain designated songs if you wish.

Extra dividends throughout the book are special instruction boxes. For example one box explains the danger of breaking connections while music or files are being transferred. It explains the proper method for unmounting the iPod.

Because of Apple's desire to protect against unauthorized copying, certain files cannot be transferred from the iPod to a computer. However, there are legitimate reasons to transfer appropriate files from iPod to computer. The book cites third party software that may be used to perform this function.

Part Two contains four chapters dealing with iPod software. One chapter is an extensive review of various digital formats such as MP3, AAC (Advanced Audio Coding Format), and others.

Another chapter concentrates on iTunes for Macintosh and Windows. There is extensive information on how to import music into iTunes from a number of sources, editing song information, playing music from the computer, creating playlists, and burning CDs.

For Windows users, the book details techniques for using iTunes with the Windows MusicMatch Jukebox. Information on how to “rip” CDs into MusicMatch is given, as well as how to import other music files into MusicMatch and administer them.

One of the highlights of the book is the discussion of the iTunes Music Store. In establishing the Music Store, Apple has legitimized the audiophile’s desire to download music with the backing of the music industry. The Music Store’s inventory contains over 500,000 songs from major-label artists. The inventory is growing rapidly. The songs may be downloaded legally into iTunes for a nominal fee. The book explains the process from setting up the initial account through searching and shopping. Once the music is acquired, the book explains the many ways to utilize it.

In Part Three, the book explains other uses for the iPod. In the Address Book function, transferring files from other sources is described. One can easily export contact lists from Palm Desktop, Entourage, Outlook, or other compatible programs, and drag the exported file into iPod’s Contacts Folder. Moreover, although the iPod works with Apple’s own iCal calendar program, it also can display date-book information and appointments from other programs. Finally, the ubiquitous iPod has still other functions, from performance as a hard drive, to playing games, displaying text files, and much more. All of these functions are described in the book.

Although the book has the many strengths enumerated above, in my opinion, there is one weakness. While it does an excellent job of explaining how to “rip” audio files from CDs, it is not as systematic in explaining how to do so from long-play records (LPs). Many large collections of “vinyl “ records are still in existence, and many of these audiophiles would like to convert many of their LPs to the CD format. Some of the steps can be ferreted out of the book, but a more orderly description, including equipment, software, and connection requirements would have been helpful.

In conclusion, the book is a valuable addition to any computer user's library. It is an excellent source of material for operating the iPod and the exciting iTunes software.

Available from Pogue Press/O'Reilly & Associates, Inc. for \$24.95 minus the 20% SCUM discount.