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Is that 8 MB on Your Keychain? M-System's DiskOnKey Reviewed

by [Paul Cesarini](#)[M-Systems](#)

SRP / SP:	\$49 / \$48.45 (8mb version; additional sizes available)
Requirements:	MacOS 9.xx; Available USB port
What's Hot:	Small and functional design; no drivers needed
What's Not:	Expensive

In the past year, we've seen a slew of odd-yet-interesting "convergence" devices hit the market. Fuji released a combo digital camera / MP3 player. Apple released a combo Internet radio tuner / MP3 encoder / CD burner application. Kerbango released a (now-defunct) radio / Internet radio. HandEra released a combo PDA / dictation machine. Sony will soon release a combo MP3 player / PDA. Several companies have combo watches / MP3 players / remote controls / calculators. Basically, the computer and electronics industry are tag-teaming us end-users in an effort to provide that perfect amalgamation of products -- that "must have" gadget or program that makes our digital lifestyle complete. Entering into the fray now is M-Systems, with their DiskonKey product. DiskonKey is a combo USB hard drive / keychain. One more time: a combo USB hard drive / keychain.



I still can't decide if DiskonKey is geeky or cool, useful or silly, necessary or irrelevant. I'm pretty much in the "cool and useful" camp right now. However, my opinion is just that: my opinion. Needing that voice-of-reason second opinion, I demonstrated DiskonKey to one of my staff here at the BGSU Student Technology Center. I connected the 8mb DiskonKey product demo we received first to an iMac DV. The DiskonKey showed-up immediately as a PC hard drive. I then connected it to some Windows and Linux systems in our area. DiskonKey

worked fine with one Windows system, as it was running Windows 2000, but didn't work at all on a Windows system running Win98. A quick check to the M-Systems site revealed that Win98 users need to download and install a software driver for DiskonKey to function properly (another reason to get a Mac?) DiskonKey also worked fine on a Linux system we have that uses the 2.4 kernel, though, according to the M-System site, it wouldn't work on Linux systems running the 2.2x kernel. Presently, that rules-out all PowerPC versions of Linux, except the pending Yellow Dog Linux 2.0 release.

The staffer I demonstrated DiskonKey to watched patiently as I connected and disconnected it to a handful of systems, running a handful of platforms. I explained the whole notion of USB mass storage, flash memory, and a few related terms. I showed her how the status indicator light glows when the DiskonKey is connected, and stops glowing when you drag the DiskonKey icon to the trash (or when you use the Put Away command). She thought about it, then attached a few of her keys to the DiskonKey, hefted it, twirled it around on her finger, and thought about it some more. Her final verdict was, "Pretty geeky, Paul."

This may sound obvious, but there's nothing quite so demoralizing as when you stumble upon a piece of technology you think is cool, only to be abruptly corrected by the Opposite Gender. This has been happening to me for the past 30 or so years now. I'm betting it also happened when I was an infant, but my memory doesn't stretch that far back.

OK, maybe the marriage of portable electronic devices and objects most commonly found in pockets and purses is a little strange. Why would anyone want removable media fused into a keychain? Who would buy this? Well, most of Japan, for one. DiskonKey is tiny, wearable, electronic, and cool. If that doesn't scream "best seller in Tokyo", I don't know what does. (Remember Tamagochi?) It even comes with a built-in belt clip, for those of you who would prefer not to use it as a keychain.



Oddly enough, DiskonKey actually has competitors. Agate Technologies, Inc. offers a similar device called the Q USB Hard Drive, and Trek makes the ThumbDrive. Neither competing product was available for testing at the time of this review. Unlike the DiskonKey, however, it appears both competing products require software drivers.

So, what's not to like about the DiskonKey? Well, the price is a bit steep. I realize \$49 may not seem like a lot, but that's only for the 8mb version. Sizes ranging from 16mb - 32mb go for \$67 - \$99. M-Systems has announced even larger capacity versions -- up to 512mb -- slated for release this year. No word on pricing for those, yet, or if these larger configurations will be bootable if an active System Folder was present.

I'm somewhat hesitant to recommend this product; it's simply not essential. No one really needs one of these. However, after carrying it around for a few days and using it on Mac, Windows, and Linux-based computers at work, I still think it's kind of cool and very much handy. To me DiskonKey is like your first

microwave oven: you can't imagine any reason why you'd need one, but find yourself using it daily once you get one.

So, what's next -- a combo MP3 player / USB hard drive / PDA / keychain / Mighty Robot / eyeglasses holder? Now *that* would, indeed, be "pretty geeky".

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