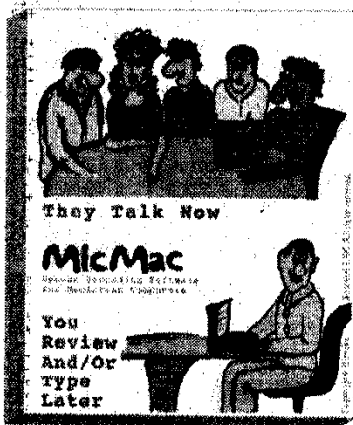


TestDrive



A matter of record

Title: *MicMac*
Publisher: *Nirvana Research*
Price: \$89.
Platform: *Apple Macintosh*

MicMac is a handy little program that turns a Macintosh PowerBook into a powerful tool for recording lectures and meetings. The program works with the built-in microphone that's on practically every PowerBook. Although MicMac won't quite make your cassette recorder obsolete, students and professional people will probably find MicMac more useful.

The key to MicMac is a clever sound-compression algorithm that stores an hour's worth of high-quality speech in 13.5 megabytes of hard disk space. Once you have made a recording, you can play it back, stop, record more and save your work to hear it later. While you are recording, MicMac constantly monitors your hard disk and shows how much space (in recordable minutes) is left.

The power of MicMac is random access. Because the sound is stored on your hard disk, you can instantly jump to any point. You can set bookmarks (which MicMac calls "markers") throughout the soundtrack, and even play your recording back faster without making everybody sound like Alvin the Chipmunk.

Since micmac keeps its recordings in Macintosh disk files, you can e-mail them to a friend (it takes roughly two seconds of modem time at 28.8 kbps to send each second of a MicMac recording) or store them on an external hard disk or tape drive. One really neat idea is to put the files on to Iomega Zip disks. A \$15 Zip cartridge stores more than seven hours of speech with MicMac.

Unlike some other Macintosh audio tools, MicMac has no problem recording in the background while you are using your Mac for something else. I made an hourlong recording at Espresso Royal while writing a chapter of my forthcoming book. On the other hand, it was hard to hear what was happening in the coffee shop over the sound of my typing. For serious work, you'll want to use an external microphone. Nirvana Research, which makes the program, recommends using Sony's ECM-R100 microphone, which can be ordered directly from Sony at 1-800-538-7650. But the chances are that any medium-quality microphone that has a battery in it will work fine.

Despite these nifty features, MicMac isn't without problems. The program has a handy little "skip" button that lets you backspace by a few seconds while you are listening to playback. Although this is a godsend for anybody who has ever tried to transcribe a taped interview or lecture, it would be nice if MicMac automatically kept playing after the backspace, rather than requiring the user to hit "play" again. And it would be nice if MicMac had separate buttons for "play" and "fast forward," rather than requiring the user to click the "play" button with the Macintosh's "option" key held down.

What's really missing, though, are editing features of any kind. Nirvana says that's because MicMac isn't designed for audio editing — there are already programs on the market that do that, and they cost hundreds of dollars, not \$89. Still, it would be nice to at least be able to cut and paste sound.

Macintosh users who are intrigued by the idea of MicMac can try downloading the "free" version of the program, MicMac Lite, from Nirvana's home page on the Internet (<http://moof.com/nirvana/>). MicMac Lite has all of the features of MicMac, but it can't save files.

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