

California Computer Care

News,
Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

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We
speak
Geek,
so you
don't
have to.

A Mini Story...

Last month I told you about the new Mac Mini and that I was going to get one for the living room of my home. Well, it's here, installed, tested and delightful.

My new Mac Mini is the standard 1.25GHz, 40GB hard drive model with Airport and Bluetooth wireless and an extra 256MB of RAM added (Apple part #Z0B72LL/A).

But, why? Why, indeed. Aside from the experimental aspect and learning about the new computer and its construction, my goals are three. First, I want instant, internet access while watching TV. Secondly, I want to be able to play the music libraries on my G5 tower and iMac through the good stereo system in the living room. Lastly, radio reception in Rincon Valley is awful. San Francisco stations are either impossible to get or sound terrible. The Mac Mini provides access to my four favorite radio stations through their mostly commercial-free, internet simulcasts*.

Physically the Mac Mini is perfect for the living room. Its small size (6.5"x6.5"x2") allows it to sit on top of the TV next to the satellite box without dominating the entertainment center. Also, the Mini's CD/DVD Combo, optical drive would serve to play my music CDs and movie DVDs if I didn't already have CD and DVD players in my stereo system (maybe I'll retire them).

Here's how I hooked it up. The Mac Mini comes ready to drive almost any computer monitor. To make it display on my TV screen, I added a special adapter (Apple part number M9267G/A). Then, I hooked the Mini's head phone jack to my stereo system for sound (Radio Shack part number 42-2551). But, what about control?

*If you must know: KQED, KDFC, KGO and KNBR. *Sorry JL.*



The Mac Mini doesn't have keyboard or mouse. In my case, that is a very good thing! I don't want USB cables draped across the floor.

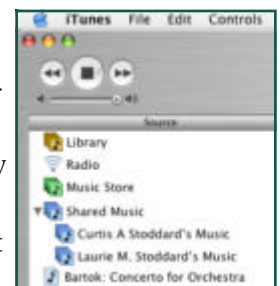
Wireless to the rescue!

I found this great compact, keyboard and mouse combination that is designed for presenters. The *Gyration GT* has a longer range and stronger signal than other wireless input devices, the keyboard fits comfortably in my lap and, best of all, the mouse can be used normally on a table or *just waved around in the air!* See <http://www.gyration.com/ultragt-compact.htm> for more information.



Networking is everything. Like life in 2005, networking is key. I added Airport wireless networking to the new Mini so that it could join my existing wireless network. As needed, the Mini grabs internet access, email, radio stations, moves files, prints and accesses *iTunes* playlists through the ether.

Airport reception is very strong (much better than my Powerbook). It loads web pages as quickly as my G5 tower and plays *iTunes* without a spit or a sputter.



Using the Mac Mini for these functions is easy. Let's say that I'm watching *Nova* on channel 9 and they put up a message on screen about more information on their web site (they do this frequently). All I need to do is grab my TV remote control, press the input button to change to the Mac Mini, launch my web browser and type in KQED's address. In a moment, I'm reading the reference and perhaps viewing a web video that enhances the *Nova* presentation. Before I had the Mini, I'd forget the web address (and even that I wanted to look up the information) by the time the program was over. It works the same way for checking information on advertisements (www.vegomatic.com) or looking up some actor's resume at IMDB.

By the way, don't be fooled by my *Photoshopped* illustration on page one. I can't really see Ryan and Colin against the Mac Mini's desktop; I can just switch from one to the other. However, some TVs have the ability to display *picture-in-picture*. If your TV can do that trick, you will be able to see Ryan and Colin in a tiny window on top of the desktop or *vice versa*. Of course, when I bought my TV set, I thought that *picture-in-picture* was a useless idea. I wish that I had it now.

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When the time comes for some music, I launch *iTunes*. Because the Mac Mini has a tiny hard drive, I don't want to waste space storing *iTunes* music that I have stored elsewhere. So, I set up my G5 tower and iMac to share their *iTunes* music with the whole network. The Mac Mini, sees the music on the other two Macs and allows me to play my choices on the good stereo in the living room. Of course, I can also play the built-in *iTunes* radio stations and real stations, KDFC and KGO, because they use *iTunes* compatible MP3 format.

Not all radio stations use MP3, some use *QuickTime* (KQED) or *Windows Media Player* (KNBR). The Mac Mini (as do all Macs) came with *QuickTime* pre-installed. For *Windows Media Player*, I had to get that online and install it. Once done I can now go to KQED's or KNBR's web site and click on their *Listen Now* link to hear the broadcasts in much higher quality than I can get over the air.

The Mac Mini is proving to be quite a boon for my entertainment, information and just plain laziness. In a few months I may just add an *elgato EyeTV 200* box to turn the Mini into a *TiVo* style video recorder. Now, if I could only teach the Mini to go to the kitchen and bring back chips and beer.



February Tip —

How would you like to add the complete works of William Shakespeare, the philosophy of Plato, the insight of Henry James, the horrors of Bram Stoker and the adventure of Herman Melville to your library for free (*legally!*).

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