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MGL Reviews:
iMate

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Reviewed by: [Christian Franz](#), MGL's Flight Sim Expert

Product Information:	Minimum Requirements:
Title: iMate	Processor: any PowerPC without ADB input
Category: hardware (ADB-to-USB converter)	Reviewed using: G4/400 MHz
Publisher: Griffin Technology	Price: \$45.95

Overview:

[Griffin Technology](#) has a whole lineup of Macintosh accessories, of which the iMate is probably the most famous, if not most universal. The iMate is a little device that lets you connect any [ADB](#) device (or chain of devices) to any [USB](#) port (note that this *does* include Wintel PCs with USB ports, too!). There's no catch - the thing works as advertised. This device has been out for some time now and we thought we would run it through its paces to see how the iMate can be employed to enhance your gaming experience.

Hardware Demands:

The iMate consists of a small translucent box that has a female ADB plug and a short iMac-style translucent cable that ends in a standard USB plug. The box contains a little light that flashes when data is being transmitted through the device, thus making troubleshooting very easy. Sadly, I never had to troubleshoot anything with the iMate, so I can't comment on the usefulness of this particular feature. It *looks* cool, though.

Background:

A long, long, time ago, in a galaxy not far away there used to be a race of Macs that came equipped with a revolutionary technology called "[ADB - Apple Desktop Bus](#)". It enabled these Macs to connect any low-bandwidth input device (keyboard, mouse, graphic tablet, joystick, throttle, rudder pedal, dongle, monitors, you name it) and even some output devices (label printers, etc.) to a standard port (which, creatively enough, was called the "ADB Port"). While people over on the Wintel side took years to see the advantage of having a standardized input/output Method (at that time, people where not afraid of calling it a "bus"), Mac users where quick to embrace this technology. Of gaming relevance is the [Thrustmaster](#) FCS/WCS/RCS setup, which - as many people will agree - has so far not been supassed by *any* other input device with regard to general feel and functionality.

As time went by, the people on the dark side finally got saw the light and introduced a revolutionary technology they called "[USB - Universal Serial Bus](#)". Generally speaking, USB is a faster (and more versatile)than ADB (ok, *very* generally speaking). Since ADB was showing its age and more and more USB peripherals where coming out every day, Apple decided that it, too, should embrace this technology (which I think was a good move). However, this left people owning older ADB devices standing in the rain. Enter Griffin Technology's iMate that provides ADB-to-USB compatability.

I myself, owning almost every ADB gaming device ever produced (including some very obscure - but working - PC-Joystick-to-ADB adapters, e.g. the "MacEnjoy") decided on buying the B/W G3 a few moons back - simply because it provides ADB and USB ports. It enabled me to keep my investment in ADB devices (most importantly, it allowed me to continue to use my ancient ADB Thrustmaster setup) while playing with G3 power.

A few days ago, however, I was idly browsing through Switzerland's (pityful) Mac offerings when I stumbled across the iMate. Curiosity got the better of me and since there was nothing else that interested me (did I mention that Switzerland's Mac offerings are poor?) I bought it. I figured that since it will only be a few more months before I'd be getting a G4 (or better) I might as well insure *now* that I'd be able to continue to use my favorite joystick and other assorted devices.

The Device:

Installation and Set-up:

You take the ADB device and plug it into the iMate. You take the iMate and plug it into the Mac. That's it. Optionally, you can download some drivers in case you need to support some arcane dongles (which I don't). So much for the iMate setup.

However, in order to use the ADB device (or devices, since you can daisy-chain up to seven ADB devices) you might have to install the software that came with it. While almost any keyboard or single-button mouse will work without any additional software, some multi-button mice and most joysticks usually rely on additional software (usually calleda 'driver'). I mention this only because some of this software comes on 3.5" disks that are not supported by the newer Macs anymore...

The iMate at work:

In order to use my ADB Thrustmaster flight controllers suite (joystick, throttle controller, rudder pedals), I installed the (old but incredibly powerful) drivers. For those who don't remember or never had the fortune of owning a TM setup: the drivers are the high watermark of flexibility and utility (they are also the high watermark of clumsy interface design - but that is a different story). Thus, getting the drivers to work with an USB adapter would be an incredible feat -- and one I was quite sceptical about.

So, I connected the TM (full setup) to the iMate and loaded up A-10 Attack! (a flight sim which is notorious for its non-support of Input Sprockets). If there is a game that could fail then it's this incredible flight sim

(which IMHO still beats Falcon in terms of realism and fun). A-10 reads the input devices directly, and thereby breaks almost any rule in the (numerous) books. I held my breath and selected "configure input device". I was stunned to see that not only was I able to use the TM setup over the iMate -- I was also able to access and use all the Macros I had developed over time for the setup (the software lets you assign actions - macros - depending on the setting of a rocker switch in the Throttle - thus tripling your available commands. I have a set each for up (air-to-air combat), middle (navigation) and down (air-to-ground combat) positions)! Incredible.

Next, I tried some other games ([Falcon 4](#), [Fly!](#), [X-Plane](#) - another interface violator, and [Hornet](#)). Without fail, these games recognized, and correctly used the TM setup.

OK, I thought, let's go for double or broke. I daisy-chained the TM Setup, my favorite two ADB keyboards, a [Gravis](#) MouseStick, a Gravis Firebird, a Gravis GamePad, and my MacEnjoy (the PC-Joystick-to-ADB-Adapter) to the iMate (note that even though it is not required with USB devices I thought it prudent to power-down the Mac). Additionally, I had my USB keyboard connected and my [Logitech](#) USB Pilot mouse (I love all things containing the word "pilot" - with the possible exception of the 3Com Palm Pilot).

I re-booted and tried running the gauntlet consisting of my five favorite time-wasters:

- X-Plane (<http://www.x-plane.com>)
- Unreal Tournament (<http://www.unrealtournament.com/>)
- Half-Life (more on that later) (<http://www.sierrastudios.com/games/half-life/>)
- A-10 (again) (<http://www.parsoft.com/games/cuba.html>)
- Total Annihilation (http://www.wizworks.com/macsoft/total_a/total_a.html)sds

All games worked without problems (initially I had some problems getting all those pesky ADB drivers to work together correctly). Not all games recognized all controllers - but then they didn't either when using the ADB port instead of the iMate.

Furthermore, this means that you now can mix those devices that previously you couldn't: CH Product's Pro Pedals USB (with toe brakes support) and Thrustmaster's FCS and WCS (I always wanted to do this).

But wait - did I say something about Half-Life? Yes, I did - don't get too excited, though. I was playing Half-Life - on my (blush) Wintel PC. However, it's a USB-equipped PC. And I was using my Mac Extended II ADB keyboard and ADB Mouse. Connected, of course, through the iMate. And yes, it did work. The iMate is a truly remarkable piece of engineering. Not that anyone would ever need to use ADB devices on their PC (at least I hope not) - but it surely is nice to know that you can.[]

Conclusion:

Nowadays I doubt that all that many people have the requirement of using ADB devices on their USB Macs. Those that do, however, should definitely look into using the iMate. It's relatively cheap and incredibly versatile. It places almost no restrictions on using the software that came with your ADB device (and, let's face it, Input Sprockets, although nice in concept, can't compete in sheer functionality with dedicated drivers) - which is an astonishing fact. Installation and setup can't be any simpler - with the possible twist that you maybe need to install software that originally came on a floppy. But that's something Griffin Technology can't do anything about.

[]

On the PLUS side:

- Works flawlessly
- Lets you retain your investment in ADB devices

On the MINUS side:

- None.

Overall Score (out of 5):



reviewed: 8/3/00

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