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June 5th, 2000

[Review] iMate: Use Your Existing ADB Peripherals With USB Macs Griffin iMate Review by John F. Braun

Introduction

As time marches on, new interface standards are developed, and old ones are phased out. Such is the case with ADB on the Mac. Although the G3 had both ADB and USB ports, the current crop of G4, iMac and PowerBook computers have only USB. If you have an investment in ADB peripherals, you may not want to abandon them, especially considering the quality of the current bundled USB keyboard and (dreaded "iPuck") mouse.

Fortunately, the folks at Griffin offer the iMate, a device which converts a USB port to an ADB port.

Documentation

Other than an insert in the plastic packaging, the iMate comes with no documentation to speak of. Although the installation is intuitive (plug one end into a USB port, plug you ADB device in the other) it would have been nice to have some sort of document explaining what to plug into what, and in what order. There is, however, plenty of information about the device on the iMate Home Page.

Griffin iMate



Contact And Other Information

Manufacturer:	Griffin Technology, Inc.
Product Home Page:	iMate Home Page
Description:	USB to ADB Adapter
Address:	Griffin Technology, Inc. 80 Fesslers Lane Nashville, TN 37210
Price:	US\$39 Retail
Telephone:	615.255.0990
Fax:	615.255.8040
Requirements:	Mac or PC with USB Port
System Used For Testing:	Apple Power Mac G4/450 Mac OS 9.0 AppleDesign Keyboard Kensington Turbo Mouse Gravis Blackhawk Joystick

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For simple devices such as a keyboard or mouse, the lack of documentation isn't a problem, but if you want to support special features of more sophisticated devices, you need to download the iMate driver. This is mentioned next to a little asterisk on the insert.

Hardware

The look of the iMate is right in line with the look of the latest Macs. The USB plug, cable and converter electronics are all made of transparent or translucent plastic. The 16" cable between the converter and the plug is wrapped in metal foil. There is a small green LED on the circuit board that will light up when there is any activity on any connected ADB device. This is a great way to tell if a certain device is hooked up and functioning properly.

Operation

Wanting to test the basic functionality of the iMate, we plugged it into our G4, and plugged our ADB peripherals into the other end. The devices tested were an Apple AppleDesign Keyboard, a Kensington Turbo Mouse, and a Gravis Blackhawk joystick. Kensington MouseWorks 5.3 software was installed for the Turbo Mouse, as well as version 1.0 of the Blackhawk driver.

After a restart, the keyboard and Turbo Mouse seemed to be working fine, with the exception of the Caps Lock being enabled on the keyboard. If you can deal with this, and have only a keyboard and mouse, you are done. But in our case, we wanted to have support for our Turbo Mouse and Blackhawk, so we had to get the driver, mentioned above.

Software

As mentioned previously, unless one reads the package insert closely, you will not realize that the iMate driver is required in order to take full advantage of ADB devices which themselves require extra drivers. Plus, no software is included with the iMate. Although one would assume that everyone is connected to the Internet, or knows someone who is connected, having some physical media, along with some documentation, would help address all user's needs.

Continued Operation

We installed the driver and did another restart. We noticed that the Caps Lock was now disabled after the driver loaded, and also noted that the Blackhawk driver no longer had a red X through it during startup. We could also use our custom settings (button mapping, acceleration) via the Kensington MouseWorks control panel.

During normal use, all of our ADB peripherals performed as expected, with some small exceptions. Our review started when version 1.77 of the driver was current. Our joystick wasn't recognized by driver version 1.8, and 2.0 beta versions would cause Unreal

Tournament to lock up on launch. Fortunately, the most recent version 2.0f2 eliminates these problems. You should probably check with Griffin to see if there are any problems with your specific peripherals.

Conclusion

For simple applications like connecting an ADB keyboard and mouse to a USB Mac, the iMate is an excellent solution. However, for those who have ADB peripherals which require a driver to function, and thus need the iMate driver, you should first check the iMate Home Page for info on possible conflicts. When we had some issues, we found that Griffin's tech support was top notch. Trust me, these guys know ADB and the Mac. However, we would have liked to have seen some printed documentation and software included with the package. Despite this, the overall usefulness of the iMate more than makes up for the lack of documentation, resulting in our 4 Gadgie rating. If you don't relish the thought of buying new peripherals, the iMate is worth a shot.

Final Score (Maximum Score is 5 Gadgies)

4 Gadgies **Pros**

Works great with keyboard and mouse
Cool hardware design
Activity LED
Very good technical support

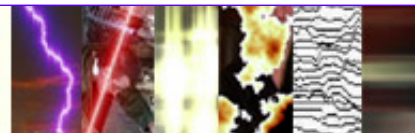


Cons

No printed documentation
No software included
Problems with some ADB peripheral combinations
Force Quit doesn't work with iMate driver

BRAVO & ECHO for iMovie!

Video Effects from **VIRTIX**



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