

Reviews

Griffin iMic

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Pros Provides high-quality audio input for USB Macs + Inexpensive

Cons None

Maker Griffin Technology

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Input Devices

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Both the PowerBook and the new Power Mac G4 range have followed the iBook's example: neither of them have a microphone socket. Apple is right in thinking this will have little effect on the majority of users because most speech recognition software is available with USB headsets, and professionals are likely to opt for a sound card for audio input. But anyone who doesn't fit into these categories is left without a solution.

Enter the Griffin iMic, an inexpensive USB audio adaptor which allows you to plug virtually any microphone or other audio source into your input-free Mac. Griffin got lucky with the appearance of the device: its translucent shell and pale grey interior complement both the PowerBook and Power Mac. It plugs in to any powered USB port and provides you with a microphone socket and a spare headphone socket.

The headphone socket doesn't provide any significant benefits over the built-in socket which remains on all Macs, but a Griffin spokesman told MacUser that it's provided simply because the circuitry was already there.

The iMic doesn't require driver software. USB audio extensions are a standard part of Mac OS 9.0.4 or later. When you plug it in, two extra options appear on the Input tab of the Sound Control Panel: External Mic USB and Line In USB. It doesn't matter which you choose.

Then just plug a microphone or any other

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audio device, such as a tape deck or MiniDisc player, into the iMic's microphone port and start recording. Note that the iMic doesn't work with Apple's PlainTalk microphone.

We compared input from the iMic with audio recorded using an iMac's built-in microphone as well as its external microphone socket. Griffin claims the iMic produces better results than Apple's built-in audio, and we were surprised to find this was true. Sound recorded from the iMic was louder and clearer than the other two.

So while the iMic is aimed at users of Macs like the Cube and iBook, which have no audio in, it could also be of use to iMac owners who require better - if not professional - quality sound. And because Apple is likely to do away with analogue audio input from now on, the iMic qualifies as a 'must-have' accessory.

Mike Hirschhorn