

Stealthy surfing

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by Bob and Joy Schwabach

You can hide your identity while browsing the Web using a tiny thumb drive with built-in stealth software. It's called StealthSurfer, and when you plug it into the USB port of a PC with WIN 98 or later, the computer recognizes it as a disk drive and you surf from there. The device itself is about one-third the size of a pocket pen.

The StealthSurfer also provides password protection so no one else can read where you've surfed or what you stored, and a lock-unlock switch that can prevent anyone, yourself included, from erasing what you stored.

The tiny flash drive, sometimes called a mini-drive or pen drive, comes in capacities of 64 to 512 megabytes, ranging in price from \$70 to \$299. In most ways it is similar to thumb drives on the market from Sandisk, Lexar, M-Systems and others, which also allow data storage on these tiny devices that can fit on a keychain. They all plug into a USB port on a PC or Macintosh and are able to store large amounts of information.

That similarity ends with the onboard protection contained in a tiny chip and circuit board at the plug-in end of StealthSurfer. It comes pre-loaded with the Netscape 7 Web browser and the privacy routines. At the other end of the thumb drive is an almost invisible lock/unlock switch. This acts just like lock and unlock tabs on floppy disks. The switch can be set to allow the recording of new data or to block recording. If you set it in the locked position after you've downloaded whatever you want from the Web, no one can wipe that out later by overwriting it.

The storage capacity can be changed. In short, the StealthSurfer's stealth and password protection circuitry is built into a holder that allows you to swap memory chips. So if you want to remove a chip full of data and store it, you can pull it out and replace it with a new chip. You could have chips that each contain only a certain type of data. The only other thumb drive we've seen that allows you to do that is the Cruiser from Sandisk.

It's a little tricky to use the StealthSurfer at first, and several tries will probably be required before you get the hang of it, but it definitely offers features not found in other thumb drives. Web site: www.stealthsurfer.biz.

WOULD YOU PLEASE REPEAT THAT?

One of the problems with the proliferation of wireless systems these days is their limited range.

The problem has been around for nearly a century, and the solution is almost that old as well. The required devices are called "repeaters," and what they do is simply take in a radio signal of a predetermined frequency, amplify it and kick it out again. In other words they repeat it, only stronger.

Two new repeaters are out for home and small business users: the Air-Plus Extender, \$70, from D-Link, and the AirStation Compact Repeater Bridge, \$87, from Buffalo Technology.

These repeaters roughly triple the range of the popular 802.11b wireless protocol used for many devices currently on the market, and they can usually "punch through" areas that

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had dead reception before. Both companies have been around for decades and you should check their Web sites for full specifications: www.dlink.com for D-Link, and www.buffalotech.com for Buffalo systems. You can do a Web search on radio repeaters to find repeaters for other frequencies or longer-range output.

LONG IN THE BLUE TOOTH

For \$30 you can buy a Bluetooth wireless broadcast device from Belkin that plugs into the USB port on PCs with Windows 98 and up. This lets your computer communicate back and forth with other Bluetooth-enabled devices like PDAs, cameras, phones, etc. The range on this is up to 100 meters (a little over 100 yards).

This is a quick and easy solution for not much money. The list price for a new Belkin Bluetooth adapter is \$60, but the company sells "refurbished" ones for \$30. We've written about refurbished computer equipment before and have bought refurbished equipment several times over the past few years. We have never had any problems with it. Buy from reputable, well-known manufacturers and save some money. Web site for Belkin is www.belkin.com.

INTERNUTS

For the Cliff Clavin in your life, www.primitivism.com is a huge number of essays, book excerpts, musings and collections of odd factoids that should keep you occupied well into the wee hours. For example, there's an essay on why we should all stop working something Cliff perfect on the show Cheers. There's a chart showing decreases in brain weight for animals that have been domesticated versus the same animals in the wild. Lots of illustrations. All in all, charmingly bizarre.

Quick who's Florence Nightingale? Who's Madame Curie? Who's Mildred "Babe" Didricksen Zaharis? Well, at www.historyswomen.com, a Web magazine that highlights the achievements of women, you can find out who these remarkable women are. Lots of categories, from mothers to rulers.


In a new take on the phone cops, www.computercops.biz is mostly about computer and Internet security. It has news, forums, free tools and free security checks. If you give them your e-mail address, you will receive a notice back informing you whether or not you have a self-replicating worm or virus.

If you type in this URL (<http://ippex.pppl.gov>), the odd grouping of letters, which stands for the Interactive Plasma Physics Education Experience, will give you a virtual "Tokamak" to learn about fusion power and the efforts to achieve it.


GAMES

Battlefield Vietnam from Electronic Arts; \$40 for Windows. This is the latest in EA's popular Battlefield series of historical action games. It just came out, and early players are saying it has all the makings of game of the year. Of course, it's pretty early in the year. But nonetheless, it's a good one.

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 Back

 Back to Top