

PRODUCT reviews

Hamilton USB Transfer Express

By J.V. Bolkan

There is no doubt that the flash drive is among the most useful personal storage solutions ever. It's fast, rugged, reusable, and almost universally compatible. And with costs as low as a couple dollars per gigabyte, it's no wonder it has become almost ubiquitous in computer environments. Now the Hamilton USB Transfer Express expands the value of flash drives in the classroom by making transfers faster, easier, and almost foolproof. The Transfer Express is about the size of a standard textbook and has inputs for up to 16 USB devices.

It's capable of working standalone (no computer needed), or you can transfer from the source slot to as many as 15 other drives or copy unique content from the 15 onto the source drive. This means that once you place materials for an assignment on your flash drive, you can copy it onto 15 other drives with a single push of a button. Then, when the students complete and save their assignments on their flash drives, you can press one button to copy and collect each of their files. For larger classrooms, labs, or media centers, the Transfer Express can be daisy-chained to another unit to transfer to or from 30 targets at once.

The unit we reviewed came with 16 of Hamilton's versatile 1 GB MP3 player/recorders (\$39 each or \$500 for a set of 16 with the Transfer Express). The MP3 players are USB



The Transfer Express can be daisy-chained for data transfer to up to 30 flash drives with a single press of a button.

Hamilton's 1 GB flash drive doubles as an MP3 player/recorder.

2.0 devices complete with earbuds, built-in microphones, and direct USB connectors. Although \$39 may be a bit spendy when compared to simple storage-only flash drives, the ability to play and record audio is well worth the investment.

I tested the audio playback and recording capabilities, and although you aren't likely to confuse the sound quality with a high-end stereo, the audio playback and recording fidelity is more than sufficient for virtually any use. There is no external microphone input, but the built-in microphone is

very sensitive. The buttons and controls on the players are small and a bit sensitive. The control menus are somewhat cryptic and probably not well suited for younger students. Additionally, the extra features make the devices more complicated and thus much more likely to break than a simple memory stick.

Fortunately, the Transfer Express works well with the company's player/recorders or without them. You can even mix and match various devices. I put an "antique" 64 MB USB 1.0 device on the machine. Obviously,

transferring files larger than 64 MB didn't work, but the larger targets completed the task and nothing bad happened to the old drive; the LED status light merely turned red. Smaller files transferred just fine, if somewhat slower than the transfers to the other drives. You aren't limited to flash devices either. You can use any USB storage device, even a USB hard drive.

Using the Transfer Express is truly easy, but you must follow a few simple rules. The device will transfer files to a folder called *target* that it creates on the target drives. It will copy files only on the source drive inside a folder named *source*. This also works in reverse when collecting files from the targets. The automatic copy works on files only within the specified directories. However, the device can format and delete files, and this will affect all files in all folders. Additionally, during a batch transfer, files can be overwritten to the target directory. Before relying on the Transfer Express, you'll want to ensure that your students understand file naming conventions and how to store their assignments with unique names in the correct folder.

Hamilton's USB Transfer Express is a great concept boosted by solid execution. Any teacher accepting or

giving digital assignments can save hours when prepping and collecting them. If your students also use the company's MP3 devices, they'll have secure digital storage that should work with virtually any system they have at home, in the school lab, or in the library. Additionally, they'll have a serviceable recorder for capturing lectures, notes, or impromptu interviews as well as a personal music and speech playback device.

In schools with one-to-one laptop programs, every classroom should have a Transfer Express (with or without the MP3 devices). For schools with more limited computer access, the Transfer Express might be even more critical, and units should be considered for the computer lab and media centers at the very least.

Hamilton USB Transfer Express

\$899 (no drives)
\$1,399 (with 15 1 GB MP3 player/recorders)
www.hamiltonelectronics.com



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