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review: music man



manufacturer: mireth technology corp.
msrp: \$29.95 boxed, \$19.95 download

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2007/05/11

Mireth Technology states that Music Man is the easiest way to organize, rip, convert, burn and play MP3, WMA, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AIFF, and MIDI (MID and KAR) using Mac OS X. When it comes to audio conversion, Music Man seems to be the Swiss Army Knife for Mac sound. For those of you who find the sound format alphabet soup confusing, just navigate to Music Man's web tutorials for links to explanations.



simple tabbed interface

Music Man sports a simple tabbed interface to help you do its thing. The Organize tab sets up play lists to help you get ready to burn, play, or convert your file. The Play tab lets you listen to audio CDs, DVD, flash media, and hard drive audio files. The Rip tab pulls audio files from commercial CDs and places them on your hard drive. Convert changes one sound format to another. The Burn tab creates audio discs from your iTunes play lists or any other play list and supports MP3 disk burning, as well as high quality audio disc creation. Flash lets you put your sounds on flash media, like a thumb drive. The Music Store tab helps you buy more music from a number of vendors, complete with a button that passes the links right to Safari. Some of the links even offer free music. It is not too tricky for the new user and there are a lot of step by step instructions.

Instead of dropping files into the main screen, a Drop Zone window is accessible in most tabs. This isn't quite a standard interface for OS X, but it works just fine. Other controls, such as a Burn icon, appear as needed in each tab.

handles most audio formats

Music Man plays audio from eight different formats on your Mac, including MP3, AIFF, MID and AAC. This means if you stick in a CD, or DVD or thumb drive, the Mac should be able to play it. If you have a stack of files on your Mac, you can burn them on to a CD or DVD. On the other hand if you need to convert one of eleven sound formats to MP3, OGG, AAC or WAVE files, Music Man is the software to do it. While Music Man converts almost everything, it will not convert Protected AAC files you buy at the iTunes store

If you want to take all of the sound files on your computer and create a music library, with Music Man, it is a snap. To save space, Music Man can also convert your music to AM, FM, or CD quality. The better the quality, the larger the file size. If you want to move your music to a flash drive, you can save four times more music if you record it at AM Radio Quality or save even more space by converting your music to Monaural, although that may be a bit insulting to your ears. Still not enough space, Music Man can save 50 hours of music on a single DVD at CD quality. If you get tired of the same old music, Music Man can erase your rewriteable media and fill it back up, but make note that not all rewriteables work well in all players.

Music Man recommends that you download a couple of free helper programs to assist you. For example, to convert a format to MP3 you must download the LAME encoder, a command line tool that is used by almost every audio conversion utility available. Music Man makes this easy by providing a link and simple instructions in their preferences.

compresses music well

I used Music Man to convert large WAV sound files made by the software that came with my new USB turntable. The converted MP3 files are so much smaller. A full side of a record as a WAV file is almost 200 MB, but Music Man converted it to a 14MB MP3 file. Ilene notes it took an 11MB piece of harmonica music and created a 288KB MP3, which is quite a difference in size from the 1MB file she got when she used the free Audion from Panic, Inc. The lack of a progress bar while converting is a bit disconcerting, but a dialog appears warning you that "This can take a bit of



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time, but not too much. Please wait." Dialogs in general seem lacking, and when a damaged file was mistakenly put in to convert, the program seemed to process it, but nothing was saved to disk. An error dialog should be added for such problems.

requirements

The system requirements are a bit more complex than other programs, as Mireth states, "You MUST have Mac OS X 10.2.3 or later to use Music Man," plus, it requires Mac OS X 10.4 to burn an audio CD. It does have some of the best help and tutorial files on conversion I've seen to date. There are even links to other sites for explanations of the different audio formats. A demo version that works for 30 days and only converts one file at a time, gives you a good overview of the program.

This program does a tremendous amount of work for not a lot of money. It is easy to use and the instructions that come with the package are very easy to understand. If you need to convert sound files, it is likely that Music Man can do it.

Reasonably priced. Easy to use.
Works for many sound formats.
Excellent documentation.

No progress bar when converting.
Dialogs are not very good.

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