KICKING the TIRES

by Frank Petrie, MaMUGs, Technology Specialist

Product: Fire Connect for Notebooks
Company: Adaptec <www.adaptec.com>
Requirements: G3 PowerBook with 400
MHz Processor or better;
available CardBus-enabled PC card
slot; Mac OS 9.04 or later;
128 MB RAM; CD-ROM drive
Retail Price: SRP (US) $99.99
Test Rig:TiBook G4/500/768 MB RAM
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As the axiom says, "You can never have enough money." Ask Mike Tyson. The computer equivalent, I guess, would be that 'you can never have enough ports.' In this instance, we're talking about FireWire ports on your PowerBook.

One not enough for you? Then perhaps Adaptec has provided you with a solution; Fire Connect for Notebooks. Fire Connect is a PC card that provides you with an additional three FireWire ports.

The Good

I found that the three extra slots enabled me to make my PowerBook much more versatile. I use my PowerBook as a desktop computer as well as a road warrior. So when I'm at home base, I can plug in my external drives (one for my video and MIDI work and one for backup and general flotsam) by simply inserting the card and getting to work. I keep on my Ti4's internal drive only my applications and any files that I will need on my trip.

Install the Mac driver from the CD-ROM or better yet, check either Adaptec's site or VersionTracker for the latest version. No fuss, no muss. And it's hot-pluggable. I plugged in my powered external drives and they popped up as soon as I fired them up. And if you should have a PC that is port-challenged, this card will work on that machine, as well (provided that it meets the minimum requirements).

Also, if you're using it for DV production, it also comes with 6-pin to 4-pin FireWire cable. In fact, Adaptec pushes this card as a DV solution. And Adaptec's Support site on the web is comprehensive.

The Bad

Unfortunately, unless you purchase a power transformer for the card, you should only plug in devices that have their own power supplies. My experience with my iBot webcam and my iPod bore this out. The .pdf manual from Adaptec's support site describes how to work around this. If you daisy-chain your powerless devices through a powered device (i.e., external drives, burners, etc.), even if said device is shut off, you'll was able to use your powerless devices with the PC card. (Actually, Adaptec recommends that you place the powered device at the end of the chain. But as both the iBot and iPod do not have this ability, I happened upon my solution.)

The Ugly

The biggest downside is the surprise that you need a transformer to use your powerless devices. There is no mention of this in any of the ad literature. I first became aware of it when I plugged it in and noticed a transformer port. Then I looked on the box at the photo and sure enough, it is there.

As I said earlier, you can easily work your way around the situation with some daisy-chaining. Still, a fair warning would be welcome.

The Close

For me, this serves my purpose very well. It functions as a docking device, basically, for my FireWire gear and half the price of a BookEndz station (I know that Bookendz provides other ports; that means I have to unplug my Ethernet cable, power cable and headphones on my own – I think I can handle that).

All-in-all, I highly recommend purchasing Fire Connect for Notebooks, particularly if your number of peripherals continues to grow. And don't kid yourself. It will.