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The Personal Video Player (PVP)

IN May 2002, information about a prototype video MP3 player that was under development at Intel's Emerging Platforms Laboratory in Hillsboro, OR, was heralded in the business world press. The reports indicated that the Intel Personal Video Player (PVP) would be pocket sized and built under an Intel license by a consumer electronics manufacturer for worldwide sale starting in 2003-2004.

Before production would begin, Intel was looking for an agreement with Hollywood that would allow the legal copying of digital movies for PVP viewing.

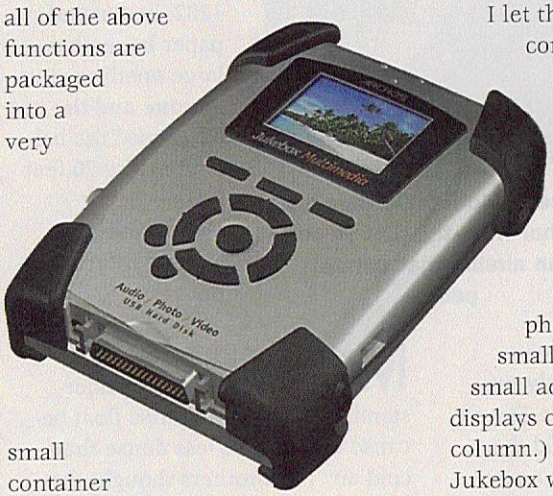
On Wednesday, July 31, 2002 at a New York City press conference, the new PVP consumer electronics product category was introduced. Archos, a company founded in France in 1988 and currently known for its many high-quality, miniaturized electronic products, made this introduction as they unveiled their new Jukebox Multimedia 20®, a product without apparent equal in today's marketplace.

The Archos Jukebox Multimedia 20® is a marvel of electronic miniaturization since it has a 20 GB hard drive, full-color display, and a motherboard with a 500-integrated circuit (IC) chipset. A reporter quickly asked who makes the chipset for the motherboard.

I'm sure that I wasn't the only one wondering if this could be based on the Intel prototype heralded in May. We were told that a nondisclosure agreement currently exists between Archos and the manufacturer of the chipset.

This machine isn't just a tiny Personal Video Player with a recording capacity of 40 hours of video. It is also an MP3 player with a capacity of 5,000 songs, and a still video player with a capacity of 200,000 VGA photos.

If you aren't yet impressed, the unit can also serve as a digital tape recorder that can record using its built in microphone or any other input device of your choosing. Like a Swiss Army Knife, all of the above functions are packaged into a very small container that is less than 4" long.



The Jukebox Multimedia 20® also has an expansion slot for modules. At the news conference we tested the CompactFlash, SmartMedia, and the 1.3 Mega Pixel digital camera modules. A new digital video camera module is scheduled for release next year.

Archos sent credentialed press participants evaluation units. I put the Jukebox Multimedia 20® through electronic hell to determine if it could perform all functions flawlessly. Six full music CDs didn't dent its hard drive capacity, and its MP3 function supplied superior sound quality.

I then used it as a digital tape recorder to see if it could serve as a lecture hall recorder. I also downloaded hundreds of digital images that it reproduced as well on its small screen as it did on my 27" TV. It performed all of these functions flawlessly.

It was obviously time to get tough with this PVP, so I transferred a digital movie to the small player. This involved converting the video of the movie to MPEG4 and the digital sound of the movie to MP3.

Rippack (**www.rippack.com**) is the freeware program that I used for the transfer. The software instructions indicated that I would need at least 5 to 10 GB of free hard drive space to perform this operation.

I let the software do all of the converting using the Archos Multimedia 20® as the storage hard drive. The converted video with perfectly synchronized sound played as well on the Jukebox Multimedia 20® as it did on my TV.

As you can see from the photo, its display is rather small. (I covered what these small active matrix liquid crystal displays can do in my March 2001 column.) The display image on the Jukebox was fantastically sharp, so viewing on the small screen wasn't as much of a hassle as I expected.

A full battery charge gave me three hours of continuous video viewing. Battery life would be much longer when listening to music, and when plugged into an electrical outlet the unit can run indefinitely.

You can learn more about Archos and the Jukebox Multimedia 20® at **www.archos.com**.

Recalling the Facts

1. What makes this unit different from other MP3 players?

2. If you could re-design this machine what would you change, and what would you add?

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