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Using Technology to Make Travel Time Fly

In the real world, time never stands still. Yet we have all discovered that time seems to fly by when we are doing fun things and run slow when we are bored. For this column, I decided to take a look at new technologies that one can use to remove the monotony of a long car, train, or plane trip. My goal was to test them during a recent trip. If the new technologies that I found at a recent press event could make time fly by while sitting in a coach seat for 18 hours, it would definitely be something worth writing about.

During preplanning for the trip, I used www.seatguru.com to make certain that our seats on the plane would have electricity. I also had to make certain that I would have the correct power adaptors to be able to plug into the airplanes that our carrier would use for these intercontinental flights.

With the PlayLater program and service that I downloaded from the Internet, we would be able to take with us most of the TV shows that we normally watch at home. We started the trip with over 50 hours of TV loaded onto my Netbook computer.

The PlayLater software works as a computer digital video recorder that is married to an Internet browser. You need an Internet connection to record your shows, but you don't need a connection to watch them. I downloaded the software to my home computer and my Netbook computer. I recorded the shows on the more powerful machine and then transferred them to the Netbook for us to watch on the trip.

I recorded the TV shows from the CBS and Hulu+ channels, along with one movie from Netflix. Some of the channels in their listing require you to be a subscriber to use them. (See Photo 1.) For example, Playlater includes Hulu, but to access Hulu+

and Netflix I needed to perform a onetime membership sign-in to my Hulu+ and Netflix accounts in PlayLater's settings channels dialog box.

The PlayLater service is free to try for two weeks after which it will downgrade to a less robust free service unless you start a \$4.95 monthly subscription. You can download the program to try it out at www.playon.tv/playlater.



Photo 1—PlayLater is a PC DVR that is married to an Internet browser. It lets you record shows from all the channels shown in this photo. Some of the channels like Netflix are subscription based.

The video recordings that you are making are legal because you are performing the same type of time-shift viewing that has been around

patible, you need to download the free Wi-Drive app from the iTunes store or the Android Marketplace. You can then wirelessly stream

Photo 2—The Wi-Drive is about the same size as an iPod Touch. It is a private Wi-Fi network and lets you supersize the storage capacity of your handheld devices. It can broadcast content to up to three different-brand handheld units at the same time.



since Sony introduced the Betamax VCR in 1975. When this column went to press, PlayLater could not record shows to an Apple computer and they could only be played back on a PC running the PlayLater software. Tracy Burman, my contact at the company, told me that they are cur-

content to your iPod, iPad, iPhone, or Android tablet. At press time, an Android smartphone app was still

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under development. What is truly cool about the Wi-Drive is the fact that you can stream, to a mix of Apple and Android devices, different videos, pictures, or other files to three devices at the same time.

I had hoped by flight time an Apple app would have been ready

The Wi-Drive shines in its ability to let three different handheld devices access it at the same time.

so we could watch our TV shows on both the Netbook and an iPod Touch. The iPod could play all of the streaming content that I downloaded to the Wi-Drive except the PlayLater shows. When I tried to run a PlayLater recording, the iPod responded that it did not know how to open the file. For these two products to work together PlayLater needs to complete their apps for handheld devices.

Educators, students, and other travelers could use this device to carry lots and lots of files, way beyond the storage capacity of iPads or tablets. According to *USA Today*, "It costs airlines \$100,000 to equip an airplane with Wi-Fi technology"—and you can bring your own aboard for around \$100. The Wi-Drive only streams the content that you loaded onto it and cannot be used to give you access to the Internet.

Remember that Wi-Fi and cellular are not the same systems. If you are using the Wi-Drive with your cell phone on an airplane, your phone still needs to be in airplane mode (cellular off). It became legal to use Wi-Fi on airplanes only after the airlines determined that a Wi-Fi network will not interfere with the operation of the airplane. They then started installing their own system to establish a new rental funding stream.

On our recent trip, the Wi-Drive

gave us the capacity to bring along lots and lots of movies. It shines in its ability to let three different handheld devices access it at the same time. I remember not so long ago Jessica, Michael, and Samantha (three of our five grandkids) arguing over whose video would play on the drop-down DVD screen in our daughter's car. Now, with their own iPhone and iPads in hand, they get to select their own shows which makes for a much more peaceful ride. Since they started using the Wi-

Drive, our daughter and son-in-law haven't once heard one of the kids ask, "Are we there yet?"

You can find related videos at www.technologytoday.us/page13.html.

Recalling the Facts

1. What do you see as the positive and negative characteristics of these new technologies?
2. What does your family do to keep long car, train, or plane trips from becoming boring? ☹



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