

focus on TECH

Portable hard drives, Belkin USB hub in the news

By Art Snyder

With the annual cleaning fever of springtime almost under way, it's a good time to do a few simple things with your computer — a few things that'll save you money, take little time, and help you serve the public better and keep those skaters happy. That may sound like a tall order, but when you read the reviews below of the **Belkin 4-port USB 2.0 hub**, the **DiskGO™ 3.5-inch portable hard drive**, and **Avast! antivirus software** that's packed with value, you'll agree that spring very well may be the best season of them all.

Belkin 4-port USB 2.0 hub

Advances in technology sometimes cost very little. So it is with the **Belkin 4-port USB 2.0 hub**. The veteran company makes several models of USB hub devices that allow you to connect



Belkin 4-port USB 2.0 hub

as many as four computer components — external hard drives, printers, scanners, keyboards, mice, digital cameras and monitors, typically — to your computer CPU. USB-type ports offer simple, speedy plug-and-play connectivity, a boon to time-pressed rink staff. (The USB 2.0 designation on a **Belkin 4-port hub** tells you that the hub is configured to today's fastest digital standards of data transference. Again, this saves your staff time.) As an example of how you might put a **Belkin 4-port hub** into service, you can be at your computer working away on your rink's newsletter and remember that you forgot to connect your portable external hard drive, so you can save your document to a backup location (if your computer's hard drive has ever gone kaput, you know the value of having backup files on an external drive or other storage medium). So, you take the USB connector on your **Belkin 4-port hub** and plug it into any available USB port on your computer's CPU. *Bonus:* The hub is self-powered and needs no additional power cord.

Immediately, the **Belkin 4-port hub** transforms the one USB port into four such ports. Take another few seconds to plug the USB cord on the external hard drive (or any four peripheral devices, in fact) into an open hub port. Complete your task by plugging the power cord of the drive into a socket and flipping the drive's On-Off switch to On. The drive immediately is ready to use. The total time for all of this? *Less than 5 minutes.* A **Belkin 4-port USB 2.0 hub** retails for \$10 to \$20, and almost any tech store (online or brick) carries these hubs.

DiskGO™ 3.5-inch Portable USB 2.0 Hard Drive

The **DiskGO™ 3.5-inch Portable USB 2.0 Hard Drive** is the handy, easy-as-pie answer to safely, reliably backing up all your valuable documents, digital pictures, rink databases, tax records, employee information, fliers and everything else on your computer's hard drive and transporting the information off-site, where you can archive the data or continue to work on any files. Most commonly, this will be at home. And afterwards, you can take the **DiskGO™** drive back to your rink office, for any further tasks. The drive comes in four handsome colors, Titanium (silver), Onyx (black), Ruby (red) and Glacier (white), and discretely fits — horizontally or vertically — on any desk. (See the **Belkin**



The DiskGO™ Portable Hard Drive

segment above for instruction on how to connect this type of drive to a computer.) The **DiskGO™** offers capacities from 80GB to 1TB (1,000GB), and the sturdy outer metal case with all models is 7.5 by 4.25 inches. You can use the **DiskGO™** for daily back-and-forth computer tasks, or you can use it for archiving and disaster recovery, should that fate befall you. And if the hard drive on your rink computer gets too full, you can copy everything from this "stuffed" hard drive to a high-capacity **DiskGO™** drive and then delete unneeded files from your rink computer's hard drive. In fact, a **DiskGO™** drive can save you money with

this strategy, as you won't have to buy an ever-larger computer as regularly and as often as you've done in the past. Retail pricing on **DiskGO™** drives varies with the model you get, but street prices will be a very modest \$70 to less than \$180 for the 1TB model. To sweeten the pot, **DiskGO™** has a one-year warranty and toll-free technical assistance. (And in case you're wondering, I myself recently bought a 500GB **DiskGO™** model for about \$95, and it does everything it should, without a smidgen of a hassle. I had it out of the box and connected and operational in about 3 minutes. Yes.)

HP 60 Series Photo Value Pack

Competition is fierce everywhere, and that includes ink refills for inkjet printers. Ink suppliers range from **Staples** and other chains to "boutique" cartridge-refilling services at the mall. And manufacturers of inkjet printers, like **Hewlett Packard (HP)**, are after this same consumer, especially the small-business operator like you. **HP**, for example has trimmed prices on replacement ink cartridges, and the company is bundling deals like the **HP 60 Photo Value Pack**. This collection includes a tri-color ink cartridge and 50 sheets of Advanced Photo Paper. The message is clear: You and your rink stand to save money and tweak profits up this year — if you shop smart and look for high-value ink offers, 2-for-1 specials and other enticements.

Western Digital 2TB, Passport hard drives

Western Digital is an honored member of the hard-drive club, often in the forefront introducing new drives (the battles for the top spot usually are between **Seagate** and **Western Digital**). One of the latest from **Western Digital** is a 2TB model, and while you probably don't need that capacity, it helps your cause by driving down prices on smaller drives — internal and external alike — to the rock-bottom zone. For competitively priced portable drives, the **Western Digital Passport** portable USB drive is a solid choice, and it's stylish, to boot. I've tested several



Western Digital Passport

of these drive models from **Western Digital**, and they operate much like **DiskGO™** I bought a few weeks earlier (and reviewed above).

Avast! Home Edition Version: 4.8

Avast! anti-virus software is not as well known as **Norton** and others who serve the community of **Windows** users across the land with complete virus protection and overall desktop security. But after extensive testing of the company's software programs that combat Trojans, viruses, spyware and other digital mischief, I must say that I'm impressed. Easy to install, the **Avast!** program is intuitive, and real-time virus (and other) protection starts right away, with little for you to do except bask in the ease of mind you'll have with such broad-based safety. Daily automatic updates ensured continuous data protection for my tested **Windows XP**, and the protection appeared to guard against all types of malware and spyware. *Bonus:* The **Avast!** program additionally monitors the **Microsoft Outlook** e-mail program, should you go with that popular software. Yes, the software is freely downloadable for home use, although the company asks for a yearly fee of \$39.95 if you load the software onto a **Windows** PC that's primarily used for business duty. In any event, you can download and use the software free of charge for a 60-day trial period. You might consider other, business-oriented program services from the company, as well. Moreover, they offer multi-computer use of software for the umbrella \$39.95 price for one license, should you have more than one computer that you need to protect from viruses, spyware and similar challenges. And, they have nicely discounted pricing should you prefer a 2- or 3-year license. For example, the 3-year **Avast! Professional Edition** plan is \$74.16, or about \$25 per year. Most of the company's software is available in **Mac** and **Linux** formats, too, should you juggle operating systems between the rink and home, or elsewhere with a laptop. The **Windows** availability is for either **XP** or **Vista** systems. For more details about **Avast!**, visit them online at www.avast.com and see what 70 million other computer users worldwide have been utilizing.

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