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## Neat Things You can do with a Flash Drive

By Vinny La Bash, [vlabash@comcast.net](mailto:vlabash@comcast.net), Member and Regular Columnist, Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida

[www.spcug.org](http://www.spcug.org)

vlabash (at) comcast.net

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By now you're probably tired of reading about how much better Windows 7 is than Vista. Me too, so let's spend some time examining some of the things you can do with a flash drive other than mere data storage. A USB flash drive consists of a flash memory data storage device integrated with a USB (Universal Serial Bus) interface. USB flash drives are easily removable, and much smaller than a floppy disk. They are rewritable, and usually weigh less than an ounce. There is a wide range of storage capacities with the most common being from 2 GB to 32 GB. Higher capacities up to 256 GB tend to be pricey.

One of the most useful things you can do with a flash drive is to run portable applications. Open Office, for example, is a free suite of programs that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, data manager, presentation tool, and drawing package. You can store the suite as a portable application, and run it on any computer that supports Windows. Firefox and Thunderbird are also available as mobile applications.

Having office applications, email, and an internet browser all pooled in a portable drive you can carry on a key chain is a powerful combination. If you want more go to [www.portableapps.com](http://www.portableapps.com) for an open source platform that works with iPods and portable hard drives in addition to flash drives. The platform is not only free, but it's a full function site. You are not limited to a trial period or a limited function subset. There is no sign in requirement, and no necessity to provide even an email address. Go for it.

Everyone wants a faster system. With either Windows Vista or Windows 7, the built-in ReadyBoost feature can speed up your computer with a USB flash drive. ReadyBoost takes the storage space on a USB flash drive and converts it into an additional memory cache that supplements the main memory cache on your primary disk drive. It can do this because flash memory is faster than regular disk drives. It's faster because it has no moving parts, and you can get a noticeable improvement in response time. Implementing ReadyBoost is simplicity itself. Insert the USB flash drive into the USB slot on your computer and follow the configuration prompts.

If you work or live in an environment where other folks have physical access to your computer you can use your flash drive to lock everyone else out of your PC. There is no built-in utility like ReadyBoost for this, but you can download a free tool called Predator

from [www.brothersoft.com](http://www.brothersoft.com) that provides this function. Predator uses a standard USB flash drive as an access control device. After performing a short installation and configuration process, your flash disk becomes a key that will lock and unlock your PC. When you leave your PC remove the USB flash drive. This causes the screen to go blank while disabling the mouse and keyboard. When you ready to resume, put the flash drive back, and everything returns to normal. Move over, Mr. Bond, Predator is here.

All the preceding capabilities are very convenient, but how would you like to carry around a portable operating system? If you are willing to expend a little time and energy you can configure a USB flash drive to be a bootable Windows 7 drive. You will need a flash drive with a capacity of at least 8 gigabytes, and of course a Windows 7 installation disk. Start out by inserting your flash drive into its USB socket and inserting the Windows 7 installation disk in the optical drive. Please make a note of the drive letters. This is essential for successful installation.

Preparing the flash drive is the next step. Click on the Start orb and type: Diskpart

Pressing Enter opens a command window. (After typing a command at the command prompt always press Enter to execute the command.) At the prompt type: List Disk

You will see a list of all your hard drives, partitions, optical drives, card reader drives, and flash drives. Identify the optical drive that contains the Windows 7 installation disk and the flash drive you're working with. For this example we'll assume the flash drive is disk #4, also designated as G and the optical drive is disk #2, also designated as D.

At the command prompt type: Select Disk 4

Run the following commands:

Clean

Create

Primary

Partition Select Partition 1

Active Format FS=FAT32

Assign

Exit

This series of commands erased extraneous material from the flash drive, created an active primary partition, and formatted it with the FAT32 file system. The next step is to copy the Windows 7 installation files to the flash drive.

At the command prompt type: `Xcopy D:*.* /S/E/F G`

In this example D is the drive housing the Windows 7 installation disk and G is the USB flash drive. The command copies the installation files to the flash drive, and when it finishes you have a bootable Windows 7 flash drive. The last thing you need to do to make this work is go into the BIOS and make the first bootable device the flash drive.

Carrying a flash drive around is obviously far more convenient than carrying a DVD, and has the additional advantage of being faster than a DVD. This procedure also works for Windows Vista, but why bother when Windows 7 is here?