

GADGETS

# When heat is on, TuneFan is there

By GREGG ELLMAN greggellman@mac.com

The TuneFan from Macally is a great accessory to cool any laptop, whether it's used at a desk or on your lap.

In addition to forming a barrier between you and the computer, the device has a USB-powered fan built in. Just plug it into a USB port on the laptop (Mac or PC) and the setup is complete. The fan generates minimal noise and, after a few minutes, it's like it never existed. Also included is a wall power supply.

The unit works with any machine up to 17 inches.

What sets the TuneFan apart from similar devices is its built-in 2.1 stereo speaker system (including a subwoofer).

The audio is controlled from the laptop, although it does have an input for an iPod or most any other portable media player.

While the audio is stereo, don't expect it to be the life of a party, although the sound is still much better than most laptop speakers.

Users should be aware that when using this device without an AC power hookup, it pulls power from the laptop. A handle is built into the base to make it easy to carry and it's configured so a laptop sits at an angle toward you, making it much more comfortable for typing.

www.macally.com, \$99.99



MCT

## Mouse gel pads

Another item to help make your computer experience more comfortable is PADandCLICK gel pads that apply directly to your mouse.

The regular pads (\$5.99) are recommended for most users who just want a little more comfort with a softer mouse. For those who have arthritis, slightly thicker pads (\$6.99) provide a great angle for the fingers to bend around the mouse in a more ergonomic position.

To apply, first put your hand over your mouse to determine how you position your palm and fingers. Then apply the pads (three in each set) for each finger and the palm area.

Before I pressed them into place, I slid them around for positioning and had no problem. But once you firmly press them, you can lift them off for adjustment with a little work.

With the set of regular pads applied to my mouse, it felt a little different at first but after a few minutes I could sense the comfort.

www.padandclick.com



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LEXAR

Echo SE

## Thumb drives

Mainly because of their small size and portability, thumb drives seem to be a one of the most common storage solutions.

Lexar's newest versions of these pocket-sized devices are the Echo SE and ZE backup drives.

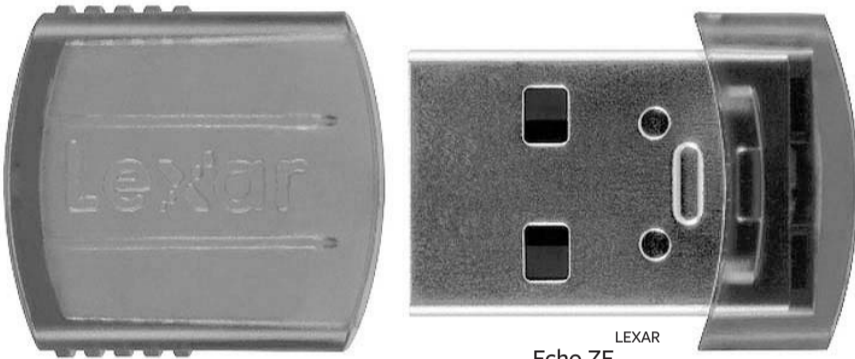
In addition to having an incredible amount of storage, they include bundled software that provides an automatic backup of files on a Mac or PC.

The SE model looks like your standard thumb drive, while the ZE is much smaller. When you put the ZE into a USB port, only a fraction of it is visible.

Obviously, the size of the drives dictates portability and use for a laptop, but they are not limited to that.

The setup for the backup software is simple: Insert the drive in a USB port and the software automatically prompts you for an easy install.

A feature I really like is that it backs up the previous versions of a file and can restore them.



LEXAR

Echo ZE

Lexar advertises the drives as a "plug-and-stay design," ensuring continuous backup anytime the computer is on.

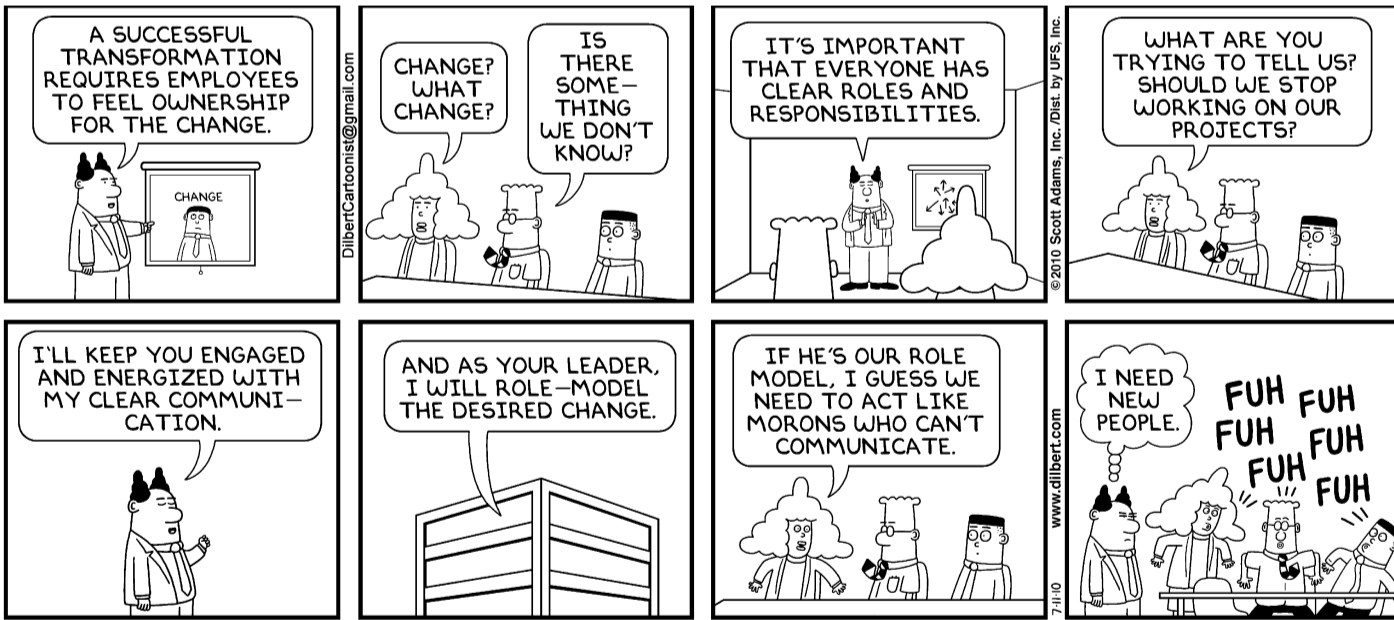
The SE is rated as a high-performance drive with speeds of up to 28 megabytes per second to read and 10MB/s to write, while the ZE is not rated, meaning that it will be a little slower.

The SE comes in four sizes: 16GB for \$47.99; 32GB, \$89.99; 64GB, \$175; and 128GB, \$349.99.

The ZE comes in 8GB, \$28; 16GB, \$56; and 32GB, \$89.99.

www.lexar.com

## DILBERT | BY SCOTT ADAMS



# Schnurman: Gas drilling debate has political edge

CONTINUED FROM 1D

fear and fear-mongering. But now we also have to decide whom to believe and whom to trust.

The Environmental Protection Agency came to Fort Worth last week, holding a public meeting as part of a new study on gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing. About 600 people turned out to hear stories about "fracking," and many implored the EPA to ride to the rescue because they felt betrayed by their state.

The day before, Gov. Rick Perry went to Dallas to unveil an effort to pull together all of Texas' resources on energy, including programs at major universities. Perry was responding to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, but part of his mission is to stay on top of fracking — and keep the natural gas flowing in Texas.

There was nothing coincidental about Perry's timing or the EPA kicking off its study in the home of the Barnett Shale. The conflict within the conflict: Who's going to run Texas?

Perry wants to reassert the state's primacy over all things oil and gas, and extend his vision of states' rights. The federal government, through the EPA, wants to show that it can make meaningful progress in even the most hostile territory.

On the political front, this clash has been at a high pitch since President Barack Obama took office 18 months ago (although Perry knocked heads with the EPA during the Bush administration, too). Perry rejected more than \$500 million in unemployment insurance funds, saying too many strings were attached. He passed on the chance for federal education grants and pushed Texas to be among the states suing over the healthcare law.

Oil and gas should afford more room for a middle ground. Texas has a long track record developing and monitoring gas drilling. And Perry, like many local leaders, has experience balancing the economy and the environment.

At the EPA, the focus is solely on the environment, so it seems that both sides could learn from the other.

Instead, the debate over fracking could devolve into one more battle between Washington and a conservative Southern governor. That could generate more heat than light, at a time when communities want to get a handle on the true threats of drilling and protect their residents.

In North Texas, the Barnett Shale has been a huge boost to jobs and income, but more people are worrying about the long-term risks. The Gulf oil spill has become a reminder that serious dangers can lurk beyond public view.

The oil and gas industry wants states to manage fracking, fearful of new federal standards. Officials from the Texas Railroad Commission, as well as representatives from Oklahoma and Louisiana, were quick to defend their regulatory records at the EPA hearing.

The EPA didn't criticize the states directly. Plenty of citizens did that, telling stories of contaminated water, polluted air and dying cattle — and alleging that state agencies had ignored them. Many also believe that businesses and their lobbyists have too much clout with state legislatures.

The scope of the EPA study is a bit unnerving, given the amount of fracking that's already occurred. Plus, it won't be completed for 2 1/2 years.

Some questions listed by the EPA: How are well casings constructed? How is dirty fracking fluid managed? What are the gaps in current knowledge?

Sounds like basic stuff — facts that really should have been settled long ago.

The Barnett Shale has about 14,000 gas wells, and we're now asking what we don't know about the environmental impact?

Parker County Judge Mark Riley, one of dozens of speakers at the hearing, blamed the states and the gas industry for the current crisis in confidence.

"The states just haven't been responsive to citizens," Riley said.

The gas industry stirred fears by refusing to disclose chemicals used in the fracking process, he said. And states lost credibility by considering exemptions on air permits. If state regulators and industry had been more aggressive on safety and the environment, federal intervention would be unnecessary — and Riley wants to keep the feds out.

Mark Brownstein, deputy director for energy at the Environmental Defense Fund, said the nuclear industry took its own aggressive steps after the Three Mile Island accident. One bad player damaged the entire industry, so companies set higher standards and posted annual rankings.

Investors watch those scores closely, and Brownstein says that people get fired if performance drops.

He says states and industry have legitimate reasons to police the gas drilling business. They have more experience, more staff and can tailor regulations to their geology.

"But if they fail to make sure that it's being done properly, this will be a self-fulfilling prophecy — the federal government will step in," he said.

Reach that point, and even a Texas governor won't be able to push back.

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