

USB Sticks = Solid-State Disk Drives

Craig Anderton

The time: 3:17AM. The place: An Ibis hotel in Frankfurt, Germany. The mission: Edit a video in Vegas, add narration, and upload it to a server in the US before 6AM. The problem: An underpowered computer, too many files in the project, and a 5,400 RPM drive were leading to stutters, breakups, and generally slow operation that was wasting precious time. In fact, things were so bad that I couldn't record narration without having dropouts that required re-recording. What to do? I couldn't just run out at that hour and buy a fast FireWire or USB 2.0 external drive.

As luck would have it, at the Winter NAMM convention a few weeks earlier I had been given a 1GB Sony Microvault USB RAM stick containing several press releases, and had taken it with me to Germany. The total size of the files in my project, both audio and video, was around 800MB. *What about using the USB stick as a disk drive?*

These days, with USB sticks widely (and inexpensively) available in sizes up to 8GB, it's entirely possible to use them as solid-state disk drives. In fact, I had done this for some laptop-based live music performances where I was remixing multiple digital audio loops in real time. The disk drive couldn't keep up, but transferring the entire project, with loops, to a USB stick solved the problem. I was hoping lightning would strike twice.

The first step was to transfer all the Vegas project files to the memory stick. Next, I called up the .VEG project in Vegas and was delighted that it opened perfectly. I then started editing and narrating. USB sticks tend to be faster for playback and slower for recording, but I had recorded dozens of simultaneous audio tracks to a USB 2.0 stick with another program, and recording stereo narration was not a problem—Vegas not only didn't choke, it didn't even breathe hard.

However, if you're using Vegas and going to record to a USB stick, you must be careful to specify it as your place to store files, because the default is storing any audio you record to the Vegas folder on the C: drive. So before recording anything, create a folder on your USB stick called something like "Audio Files." Then, when you click on an audio track's record button and you're presented with a Project Recorded Files Folder, click on Browse. Navigate to the "Audio Files" folder on the USB stick, highlight the folder, then click on "OK." Just make sure you have plenty of space left on the stick—about 5MB per minute for mono material, and 10MB per minute for stereo.

Although I wasn't able to capture video with the memory stick, being able to record audio was good enough—and being able to play back entire projects without having to use the hard drive was even better. With the prices of USB memory sticks dropping even faster than gas is rising, it's definitely worth adding one to your bag of tricks.

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