



Flash technology is latest advance in data storage

By MICHELLE KESSLER

Gannett News Service

<http://www.courierpostonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050923/BUSINESS01/509230329/1003/BUSINESS>

Digital music players, camcorders and other consumer electronics are becoming sturdier and more stable thanks to an emerging component that Apple, Panasonic and other tech giants are scrambling to buy.

It's called flash memory, and it's so hot that manufacturers such as Samsung are investing millions in new facilities to meet demand.

Flash memory is ideal for consumer electronics because it's small, uses little power and has no moving parts. Cell phones long have used it to store data, as have digital cameras and tiny music players such as Apple's iPod Shuffle.

However, it has been expensive. Hard drives -- the storage used in PCs and many iPods -- are a fraction of the cost of a comparable flash drive. That's why consumers have largely seen flash drives only in tiny, low-capacity products. But now, flash prices have fallen enough to make flash viable in bigger devices. The wholesale price of 2 gigabytes of flash has tumbled from \$838 in 2002 to \$99 today, Semico Research says.

Consumers can expect to see more flash drives in:

Digital music players: Apple recently issued a major salvo to the industry with the Nano digital music player, which has up to 4GB of flash memory for \$249. Unlike most other flash players, the Nano has a big color screen and can hold about 1,000 songs. And it is more likely to survive a hard fall than full-sized iPods, which use hard drives.

Camcorders: Forget spinning tapes and hard drives. Panasonic recently launched a camcorder that can store about 100 minutes of video on a tiny flash card. The zoom lens is one of the camcorder's few moving parts.

Laptops: Samsung recently announced an internal flash component that can be used to build 32GB drives for tiny laptops and other electronics.

Published: September 23, 2005 6:00AM