



## USB powers up for market thrust



**Office World News**

September 1, 1998 | Anonymous

USB technology prepares to take off in the consumer computer, peripheral and cable markets.

MUSCATINE, IA-Those in the computer industry have been hearing a lot about Universal Serial Bus (USB) technology over the past few years but have yet to see the standard take off in terms of the consumer computer, peripherals and cable markets. Well, according to Curtis Connections, USB is heading toward Main Street, USA in the next several months, propelled by Microsoft and Windows 98.

As one of the first cable companies to get involved with USB, Curtis Connections is an expert in this area, with knowledge of both the potential of USB technology and the ramifications of recent and upcoming events to make this category expand aggressively. In 1995, Curtis Connections was one of the first cable manufacturers to participate in the USB Implementer's Forum, the regulatory group that acts as a governing body for the USB standard. The vendor has had USB cables and hubs in its line for about three years but is now actively marketing them to retailers.

"What's really driving the growth and potential of USB is that now operating systems support it," said Brad Bullough, technical director at Curtis. "The release of Windows 98 last month kicks off a new era in the life of USB. Whereas the latest upgrade of Windows 95 only had limited support of USB, the new version of the popular operating system now supports it for all basic classes of peripherals."

Before, peripheral makers looking to design a USB product had to develop their own driver; now Microsoft has done that for them with Windows 98.

Microsoft has also made it mandatory for computer manufacturers to make their new computers with a USB port in order to be "Microsoft PC compliant." Microsoft PC compliant means they can use a logo on their packaging that tells consumers that the equipment meets the standards for running Microsoft operating systems on it. This platform statement has helped propel a switch of nearly all computers to include USB ports, Bullough explained.

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Apple Computer will also support USB on its newest computer, the iMac which was slated for August release. The iMac will come equipped with only USB ports-no serial ports, Apple Desktop Bus, or SCSI ports, which have been standard on Macintosh computers for years. The new computer fully supports USB and comes with a USB keyboard and mouse.

### USB makes it easy

USB eliminates many of the headaches that PC owners endure. "A lot of the voodoo about adding peripherals to your PC will be eliminated with the use of USB," Bullough said. "In the past, you had to be somewhat sophisticated in order to install new devices. With USB, you don't even have to crack the case. It is truly plug and play."

Bullough explained that until USB, different peripherals-such as a mouse, joystick, modem, printer and scanner-required different cables and connectors because they communicated to the computer in their own languages. This made trying to install and use several peripherals on the same system a fearful task. Often the devices would have difficulty performing together. USB standardizes the language that these peripherals use to speak to the computer so that a PC owner can simply plug a peripheral into his computer, download the necessary software and begin using the new device immediately.

Another limitation with the current setup of serial parallel ports is that a PC user was limited to four serial devices and three parallel devices. With USB, a person could hook up as many as 127 devices to the computer through a series of USB hubs. "This is important as consumers buy more and more peripherals, such as an Internet access device, scanner, digital camera and zip drive," stressed Bullough.

USB also breaks a speed barrier imposed by serial ports. With a serial port, the fastest one could transfer data to and from an external modem is 56,000 bits per second. With USB, one can communicate 12.5 million bits per second.

### Impact on cable market

"USB is probably the biggest cable technology to come down the pike since SCSI cables," noted Bullough. He sees the market of cables for low- to medium-speed devices being the most affected by the potential growth of USB. "Cables for keyboard, mice, modems, and joysticks will probably become obsolete as USB gains prominence among consumers and peripherals that were traditionally serial devices are offered more in USB form.

"Cables for parallel ports may take longer to be phased out because printer manufacturers have invested heavily in the 1284 parallel standard and may be

reluctant to change until USB becomes more ubiquitous than IEEE1284. However, once USB takes off in volume, we will see parallel printers switch to USB."

Curtis Connections is supporting USB with a growing line of products. Sometime in the fourth quarter of 1998, Curtis intends to launch a USB converter. The company is also developing USB network cables that will be available by the end of the year or the beginning of 1999.

For more information, call (800) 272-2366 or visit Curtis' web site at [www.curtiscp.com](http://www.curtiscp.com).

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