



bravo!

PRIMERA TECHNOLOGY'S AUTOMATED CD/DVD DUPLICATION AND PRINTING SYSTEM BRAVO DISC PUBLISHER (HEREAFTER REFERRED TO AS JUST "BRAVO") EARNS A "STANDING O."

By R. A. Lindquist

Simple, uncomplicated, no-brainer, piece of cake. These are all terms that seldom appear in conjunction with anything related to computers. There are exceptions to that rule and high on the short list is Primera Technology's Bravo. Open the box and you are greeted with a friendly three-page "Quick Start" guide that takes you from unpacking to burning your first high-quality, pro-looking CD.

INS AND OUTS

Bravo is a fast and easy way to burn a stack of 25 CDs (50 with Kiosk Mode), with full-color artwork, right on your kitchen table. The unit itself is not much larger than a typical ink-jet printer.

Under the cover, there are two bins, one for blanks (in), and one for the finished product (out). Between the bins is a high-revving single disc recorder and a high-resolution ink jet printer. A robotic arm picks a disc from the "in" stack and places it in the recorder. A few moments later, it picks up the freshly burned disc and transports it to the printer which prints directly onto the surface of the disc (not a label). While one disc is printing, the next is loaded into the burner.

PICK, BURN, PRINT

As with most everything in life, the first time is always the most challenging. Unpacking

the Bravo reveals the main burn/print unit, a power cord, USB cable, FireWire (IEEE 1394) cable, and a packet containing the Discrite software and a detailed instruction manual. Installing the software was an uneventful and successful experience. Setting up the hardware was equally stumble-free. In under 20 minutes, we were ready to burn disc 1.

Clicking on the Discrite icon launches the program and opens a window where you can choose to build a Data CD, Audio CD or to duplicate a CD or DVD. Our first project was to author a data disc containing our *Singer Magazine* media kit, which is sent to prospective advertisers.

The first step was to pick the files we wanted on the disc. In this case, they were all .pdf files created in Adobe InDesign. Assembling the files for the disc is a brainless routine of dragging and dropping them to a window called "Picker."

When you click on "Robot Write," a third window opens. At the top, you have options to "choose image" or "design image." We clicked on the latter, launching Discus, the included disc-design software. If you have any experience at all with graphic design software, even something as basic as MacPaint, you'll find the Discus software as enjoyable as grade school recess.

Start by selecting one of the many colorful backgrounds (called "canvases"). Then add

your text. Choosing a font, a font color, sizing, and placing is all done on one simple palette. If you have artwork to add, click "photo" and "new" and then just choose your file and place it on the mock-up disc. With Discus you can select almost any file type (jpegs, tiffs, picts, pdfs, gifs, bmp, Macpaint, Photoshop, png, etc.) except eps, which (Murphy's law) ours happened to be. That was fixed by making a quick side trip to Photoshop and converting to tiffs. When you are satisfied with your design, name it and save it (and remember where you saved it).

Next, go back to the "Robot Write" window. Check the "Print Image on Discs" box and choose your image. Now just select the number of discs you want to write and click start. A confirmation box will then open asking if you really mean it or were just joking (paraphrased); click "yes" (knowing full well that 25 CDs is a pretty big commitment) and go for a cup of joe. By the time you return, there'll be a stack of fresh-from-the-oven CDs with beautiful, professional-looking artwork ready for distribution.

PRESSING YOUR ART

For the independent recording and performing artist, the value of the Bravo simply can't be understated, especially if your music is still a work in progress and you are not yet ready to commit to a run of 500 or

1,000 units. With the Bravo, you can make short runs of your best work to date, with all your contact info, your photo, and some tasty artwork, to sell at shows or use as demos.

Burning an audio disc is as easy as a data disc, you just need to make some different, obvious selections. For example, on the opening window, choose "Audio CD" instead of "Data CD." Picking the tracks is—oh no!—our first glitch. The disc we've selected to copy is a compilation of live performances from the *Singer Magazine* Indie Artist Showcase™ recorded at Summer NAMM (International Music products Trade Show) in 2002. When selecting the tracks, a box popped up that said our tracks weren't Stereo/16 Bit/44.1 Khz. The first thought was, "&@#%!, we recorded them wrong!" But then, with a modicum of hesitancy, we cracked the User's Manual. Whew! All we had to do was hold down the option key while dragging them to the picker. The software converted the tracks to meet the burner's requirements. (Tip: Select your tracks and start the drag before holding down command, otherwise the tracks deselect).

With the tracks picked and our design completed, we loaded the blank media, clicked start, confirmed, and headed back to

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SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS (MAC)

G4 PowerPC, 700Mhz or higher running OSX (10.2 or higher), 256MB RAM, 2GB free space on your hard drive

Note: For this review we used a 2001 Apple iBook, 500Mhz Power PC G3, 256 SDRAM, 20Gig hard drive (at least 2GB free) without any problem. (Maybe we just got lucky!) There's also a version for Windows 2000 and XP, as well as a model that duplicates DVDs.

DON'T EVEN GO THERE

You may, as we were, tempted to see if your typical office store recordable CD will work in the Bravo. After all, the surfaces sure look the same. Well, that option only gets you into big trouble. We ended up with a stack of CDs covered in gross wet black drops of ink that got all over everything. Make sure the discs you use are "Ink-jet Printable." Maxell, Mitsui, Verbatim, Taiyo Yuden, and Imation all make ink-jet printable surface media.

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Starbucks. While your enjoying latte #2, the Bravo was hard at work knocking out high quality disc's with that "major-label" look. There's no question from our experience that presentation has a huge effect on getting airplay and reviews, and with the Bravo you'll be able to create discs that have the look it takes to get the "listen."

ORGANIZATION IS EVERYTHING

The most important thing to remember in getting the very most out of the Bravo is to organize your projects fully before hand. The most helpful advice is "Keep all files for each project in a separate folder." This is paramount if you are planning on burning/printing particular projects again in the future. When you drag files into the picker, you are really only dragging links to the actual file. If by chance a file has gotten corrupted or lost, you'll run into problems when you try to do a second run of that project in the future. That can be easily fixed if all the original files are in one folder.

Another essential point of consideration relates to maximizing the number of discs you can print by utilizing the print quality options under print settings. The default setting is "Presentation 1200," which gives

excellent quality while providing acceptable ink cartridge life. You can, however, greatly increase the life of your cartridges (which aren't cheap) by selecting "Normal 600" or "Best 600" and dropping the intensity down to 40%. We found the quality to be almost as good as the default setting, and it prints considerably faster. For the highest photo-quality print, we recommend using 2400 dpi.

Overall, according to the Primera, you're ink costs should run about 23 cents per disc on average. Shop around on the Web (search: "Ink-jet printable media") and you may find discs at about a buck each, or better. Assuming you keep spoilage under control (wasting very few discs in set-up), you should be able to knock out your own recorded and printed CDs for about 50 cents each. Still, when you compare these costs to some of the fantastic deals offered by mass duplicators like Oasis, Disc Makers, Groove House, and the other majors and you'd be loopy to press 500 or 1,000 copies on the Bravo. It would not be economical, time-wise or dollar-wise. But when you need a quick stack of 25 high-quality, flashy-looking CDs in under an hour, Primera's Bravo is the hands-down winner, getting it done fast, easy, and headache-free. (For more information: www.Primera.com). Prices: MSRP \$1,995 (CD) / \$2,495 (DVD), estimated street price for CD version \$1,500.