

Livescribe Pulse smartpen

It's not often I get my hands on a piece of technology that truly changes the way I work, but the Livescribe Pulse does exactly that. Like most people, I spend a lot of time in meetings, from deskside confabs to large conference sessions, furiously scrawling away in a vain attempt to capture comprehensible notes in my horrendous chicken-scratch handwriting. Of course, writing and listening rarely go hand in hand (hand in ear?). You fall behind, don't hear part of what's said, miss recording a vital bit of info in your notes—all in all, it's a woefully inefficient process.

How does an electric pen solve the problem? First, it captures everything you write down as "digital ink" in a computer file. When you're done with a meeting, you connect the pen to your PC and your notes are automatically uploaded and stored. Print them out. Send them to a friend or colleague. Make backup copies. Keep them organized.

More importantly, though, the Pulse also records the audio that was going on while you were writing, and connects it to your handwritten notes. Use the pen to tap a word in your notepad and it plays back the sound it recorded at that

moment (via a built-in speaker or supplied earbuds). After you've stored your notes on a computer, a click of the mouse does the same trick. And, thanks to a free Web-based service provided by Livescribe, you can share your written and audio notes with whomever you please.

Other companies have tried creating digital pens in the past, with mixed results. While they were effective at capturing a digital record of your handwritten scrawls, they were also as fat as logs, cramping portability as well as handwriting. And nobody ever offered the written note/audio recording combo that's the key to my Pulse-pounding affection for this product. I expected this level of technological sophistication to cost a pretty penny, but it's priced so executives and penny-pinching students alike can afford one, at \$149 for a model with 1 gigabyte of memory and \$199 for the 2-gigabyte version.

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—Steve Morgenstern

