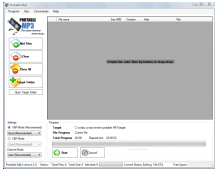


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Portable Mp3 main window.

Size Does Matter

Quality vs. size. Is it worth it?

Every person that uses a computer is familiar with the term of MP3 or Winamp. The reason I relate these two terms is because Winamp was among the first players that could reproduce this kind of compressed audio format. In case you didn't know, MP3 is the "compression" term for MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3. Among the developers of the digital audio compression, two German scientists achieved to create the main basis for today's performance. In 1991, there were two digital music compression methods available, ASPEC (Adaptive Spectral Perceptual Entropy Coding) and Musicam (Layer 2) but the latter was found to be simpler and more error reduced so it was adopted. A group of European engineers inspired from Musicam and ASPEC put their heads together and managed to achieve the same quality at a 128 kbit/s in a MP3 compared to a 192 kbit/s in a MP2. Winplay3 was the first real-time .mp3 player and since then (late 1995), there was a constant rush to store music on computers. Thanks to Winamp and Napster, PC users could download and listen more of their favorite artists for .mp3 files enabled more space on that period's small HDDs. Major record companies stood against all this music sharing and invoked copyright law against every person who engaged in file sharing. But all these illegal activities had a good side and that is spreading this popular audio format all over the world. Rarely can you see other music files than .mp3 on someone's HDD. Licensed or not, MP3 files are still used with great success in the IT world. Taking advantage of one the most used file extensions and the low space requirements, large companies managed to create portable MP3 players. These mini-walkmans, designed more or less for the young generation, were extremely successful and in no time, you could see them everywhere on the streets. The MP3 portable player was "defeated" eventually by the Apple iPod which can store up to 80GB of media. But with all this increased capabilities, some of us just want to store more music on its player. The solution is Portable Mp3. This application is able to reduce the size of an .mp3 file thus making possible more MP3 files using the same disk space. It is designed to be used by every newbie for most of the process is done by the software. The 3 Click feature enables you to reduce the size of a file at half or even more. Just add a file, select the target folder, press start and the work is done. That's easy. The application has three major settings that one can use. The first two ones are about Bit Rates. VBR(Variable Bit Rate) and CBR (Constant Bit Rate) modes refer to the amount of output data per time segment. The developer recommends VBR mode because in this way, more complex segments are assigned more space, less complex segments result in less space so the quality of the resulted sound is better and the file size is smaller than in CBR mode. At each setting, you can choose four levels of compression Low, Medium, Good (recommended in both cases) and High. However, the highest level, during our testing, did not make the file smaller. So I recommend you the Good level too for the developer apparently knows what he is talking about. The third setting is about Channel Mode. Here, you can choose the sound output mode between Mono, Stereo, Joint Stereo and Auto (recommended). The author has great confidence in his application for it is able to recognize the output mode of the original file and so it will apply the same setting to the modified one. It's like if the original one is like this, who made it knew what he was doing. Portable Mp3 is a good looking software and extremely easy to use. It supports batch conversion so you can actually add all the files you want to resize. Taking into account that for a 11,5MB .mp3(256kbps) file the application took 41 seconds to turn it into 4,4MB(VBR Mode) file, this program moves quite fast and most of all, it does a really job. I must not add, I guess, that this application is not targeting only portable MP3 player owners, but all those

who are interested more in space than in quality. Even if the quality gap is unnoticeable over regular headphones, a trained ear could easily spot the difference. **The Good**It is a great application, extremely easy to use, it resizes the file fairly fast reducing it at more than half its original size and the quality of the sound is almost unnoticeable for the common listener. **The Bad**The price is a little bit spicy and it could use some more extras like turning off the computer when the job is done. **The Truth**It is an application that proves very useful in reducing the size of an .mp3 file, with little loss of quality, the price can be an issue and some features could be added. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*