

ROADTEST ADAM TURNER

Unplugged

It's time to cut the ties and break free from that tangle of cables.

AS TECHNOLOGY expands into every corner of our lives, trailing behind it is a tangle of cables threatening to engulf our desks and lounge rooms.

One of the simplest ways to trim back the jungle of cords is to buy a wireless keyboard and mouse. Along with reducing clutter, they also unshackle you from your computer — allowing you to type on a coffee table, benchtop or your lap.

Wireless keyboards come in three types: infra-red, radio frequency and Bluetooth. Infra-red requires line-of-sight, so it isn't always practical, especially if your computer is hidden from view. Radio frequency is the most common type, and Bluetooth, which is more expensive, allows you to connect other Bluetooth devices such as a mobile phone to your computer. This lets you copy digital photos and address books to and from your phone without the hassle of cables. Bluetooth should let you place the keyboard about 10 metres away from your computer, whereas radio frequency may only reach two or three metres.

Today's keyboard and mouse is a far cry from its boring, beige ancestors. Colours now include black, white and silver. They also come

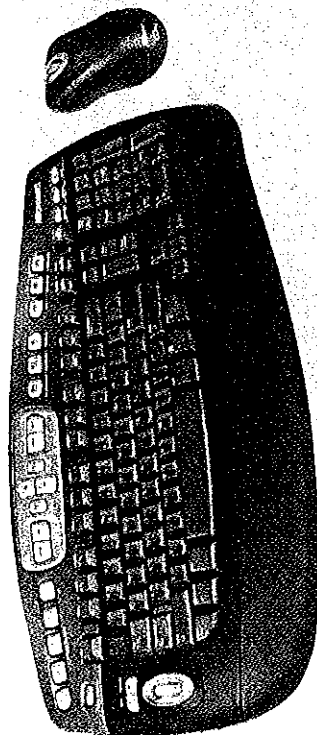
with extra buttons, giving you one-touch access to applications such as email and your web browser. These buttons can also be customised to launch your program of choice. Some include a scroll wheel, similar to that on a mouse.

Fancy multimedia keyboards can launch Windows Media Player at the touch of a button and have dedicated volume, play, stop, fast-forward and rewind buttons — perfect if your computer doubles as a home-entertainment centre.

Most wireless keyboards come with a wireless optical mouse, which uses a light to track movement rather than a ball. Most wireless keyboards and mice have USB and PS/2 connectors and work with Apple and Windows computers.

Other features to look for in a mouse include a vertical (and sometimes horizontal) scroll wheel along with extra, programmable buttons.

If you decide to cut the cord and want to control your computer away from your desk, a better option than a mouse may be a wireless trackball; the base remains still while you use your fingers to move the ball.



Microsoft Optical Desktop Elite

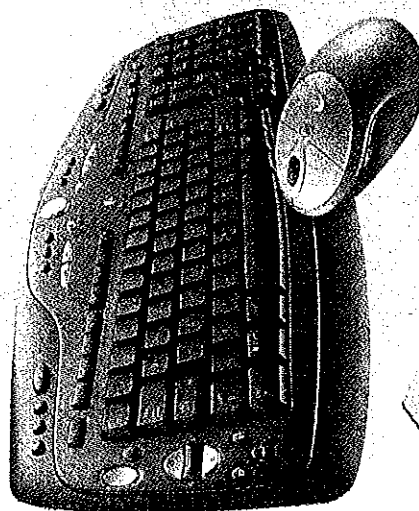
RRP \$180

This keyboard has dedicated multimedia and application keys, browser forward and back, five programmable buttons and a vertical and horizontal scroll wheel. The optical mouse has five buttons plus vertical and horizontal scroll. The keyboard also has a cushioned wrist rest.

Logitech Desktop LX 700

RRP \$180

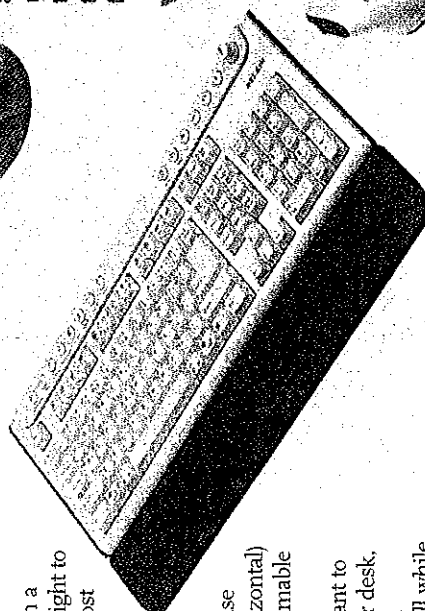
A recharge cradle for the mouse, built into the radio receiver, is a standout feature. The keyboard has all the same buttons as the Microsoft but adds zoom, application toggle and application close. The wrist rest is also detachable, but not cushioned.



Belkin Keyboard/Ergo Optical Mouse

RRP \$90

This keyboard has dedicated multimedia and application keys, but no scroll wheel. The wrist rest is not cushioned, but does fold away under the keyboard. The ergonomic optical mouse has two buttons, a vertical scroll and is suitable only for right-handers.



VERDICT

On a budget? The Belkin is an obvious choice. But if you're after all the bells and whistles, there's little to separate the Logitech and the Microsoft. The battery recharger is a nice touch, but standard batteries last several months. The padded wrist rest might be a deciding factor, but the Logitech is easier to use in a tight space.

