

No. 188: exFAT and Your Flash Drives

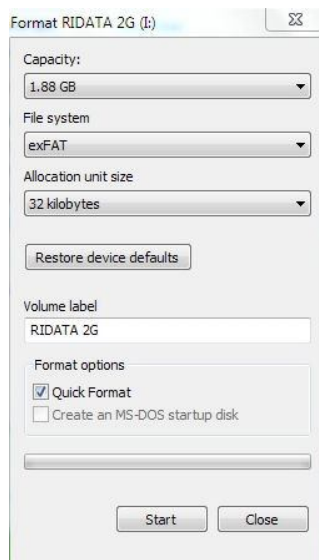
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The exFAT (Extended File Allocation Table) is a Microsoft file system that has been optimized for flash drives, and you might consider using it with your dongles. Why? 1. It is optimized for flash drives, as mentioned. 2. It allows for larger flash drives (256 times as large) than FAT32 (FAT32 or FAT are often used to format flash drives). 3. It allows for larger files (four times as large as standard FAT32) on a flash drive. Free space and deletion performance is also improved. 4. It sports more or less seamless use between Apple and Microsoft computers (Mac users, take note). Mac OSX Snow Leopard 10.6.5 and later can create, read, write, verify and repair exFAT files systems (including not just flash drives, but also external hard drives using exFAT). 5. exFAT is also supported by a number of media devices such as modern flat panel TVs, media centers and portable media players. In summary, it is just a more versatile and portable OS for flash drives. Oh yes, exFAT formatted dongles can be defragged using good software such as Defraggler. Note that defragging is not recommended for flash drives formatted in FAT or FAT32 – they can be damaged by it.

There are a few disadvantages. Although Windows 7 and 8 have support for exFAT built in, your current copy of XP probably does not. However, Microsoft has a quick and easy update (KB955704), that you can download at this URL: www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=19364. Run it, reboot, and thereafter your XP machine will format, read and write to flash drives using exFAT, if you so choose.



If you have a new flash drive (or an old one that you wish to redo), plug it into a USB port, right click it in My Computer and select format, as shown to the left. Select exFAT as shown, Quick Format, click Start and the drive will be prepared in a couple of seconds. NOTE THAT THIS PROCEDURE WILL DELETE EVERYTHING ON THE FLASH DRIVE. If you have files that you want to save, copy them first to your computer, then back when you have finished formatting the flash drive.

Keep this in mind. If you are going to a meeting to give a presentation stored on your flash drive, there is no guarantee that the XP computer you encounter can do exFAT (no problem, though, with Windows 7 or 8, as mentioned above). To avoid the panic of having to install the XP update at the meeting on someone else's computer in order to give your presentation, keep one flash drive formatted with FAT or FAT32, or always bring your own laptop for presentations. Pre-planning for the unexpected is a good thing! Also, if you ever have Windows report that a flash drive is not formatted and it offers to format it for you, think before you accept the offer. If it is an exFAT flash drive and the machine is XP, the flash drive may well have files on it that are not seen by the XP machine. Formatting the flash drive will, of course, destroy those files. Make sure the XP machine has been updated.

Progress marches on! Now you can use your old XP machine to transfer files back and forth between it and your Mac! It won't be long, though, before XP is no longer supported (but that does not mean you can't use it anymore!). Happy Computing!

"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message to be sent to nobody in particular?" David Sarnoff's associates in response to his urgings for investment in the radio in the 1920s.