

Belkin GoStudio



Product summary

The good:

The Belkin GoStudio transforms your iPod into a multipurpose audio recorder, complete with stereo microphones, professional cable inputs, and CD-quality resolution.

The bad:

The Belkin GoStudio has a flimsy construction, noisy microphones, and microphone inputs that lack phantom power.

The bottom line:

The Belkin GoStudio is an affordable and convenient tool for capturing lectures, interviews, and music rehearsals directly to your iPod. If quality matters, you'll need to forgo the iPod and spend a little extra on a standalone recorder.

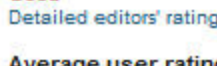
CNET editors' rating:



Good

Detailed editors' rating

Average user rating:



not yet available

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CNET editors' review

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If you're a musician, amateur podcaster, or college student looking for a way to capture CD-quality recordings on your iPod, the Belkin GoStudio is an all-purpose solution with some impressive bells and whistles. The GoStudio is not without its flaws, but at \$120 you're likely to take its shortcomings with a grain of salt.

Design

The Belkin GoStudio's relatively professional features and thoughtful design lay in contrast to its toylike construction quality. Fortunately, placing your iPod in the GoStudio's dock lends the accessory some classiness and reassuring heft. Molded dock inserts are included to provide a snug fit for your fifth-generation iPod, iPod Classic, or third-generation iPod Nano.

The GoStudio measures 4 inches wide by 2 inches tall by 7 inches long, making it small enough to hold in one hand, yet too large to fit in your pocket. The large dial on the face of the GoStudio provides a simple way to adjust recording input levels, which are indicated by dual LED meters above the dial. Around the GoStudio's main dial you'll find various switches for channel gain type (high, low, auto, off), mono/stereo modes, limiter activation, low-cut filter, and input source (internal mic, XLR/TRS input, 3.5mm input). A smaller dial for headphone volume is located near the bottom edge of the GoStudio, along with a 3.5mm headphone input, a power switch, and a built-in speaker.

If the GoStudio has one feature worth fussing about, it's the pair of professional XLR and 1/4-inch audio jacks located on the top edge of the device. The capability to directly record from an external microphone or mixing board over a XLR or 1/4-inch connection without needing bulky, awkward cable adapters is a feat few portable recorders can brag about in this price range. Connections for DC power (adapter not included) and 3.5mm stereo line input are also included on the top edge of the GoStudio.

For those moments when professional external microphones are overkill, a pair of omnidirectional condenser microphones are set into the sides of the GoStudio, which rotate 90 degrees to face forward or backward. The bottom of the GoStudio contains a battery compartment and tripod mount.



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The top edge of the Belkin GoStudio includes the holy grail of audio inputs: combination jacks that support both XLR and 1/4-inch connections.

Features

The Belkin GoStudio includes a breathtaking array of features compared with most recording accessories made for the iPod. When held up to a standalone portable recorder such as the [Zoom H2](#), however, the GoStudio is relatively crude.

For better or worse, the majority of the GoStudio's recording features are controlled via hardware, with very little left to the iPod beyond setting the recording resolution (high/low) and starting or stopping the recording. Unlike iPod recording accessories such as the [Gemini iKey](#), recordings made with the GoStudio can be browsed and replayed immediately over your headphones or the built-in speaker. Unfortunately, the GoStudio's lack of software features makes it impossible to split or edit GoStudio recordings directly, and without a pass-through USB connection it can be difficult to dump recordings to your computer without an iPod cable.

The GoStudio's impressive array of audio input connections make it adaptable for a range of recording situations. Podcasters and musicians will appreciate the capability to connect professional quality passive microphones (such as the venerable [Shure SM58](#)) over the GoStudio's XLR inputs. The GoStudio's XLR inputs also double as 1/4-inch instrument jacks for connecting guitars or desktop mixers, and a 3.5mm stereo input located beneath the GoStudio's XLR combo jacks lets you record directly from an MP3 player or other line-level audio player.

No matter how many cables you hook into the Belkin GoStudio, the end product of your recording will be a 44kHz or 22kHz, 16-bit stereo WAV file recorded directly to your iPod. Even with only two channels of audio at your disposal and a single gain control knob, the GoStudio gives you some degree of recording flexibility. For example, it's possible to record a guitar and a microphone into the GoStudio simultaneously, with independent gain settings (high, low, automatic) for each channel—it's not pretty, but it's possible. You can also use the Belkin GoStudio's settings to create mono recordings, engage an audio limiter to prevent clipping distortion (in theory), or filter out unwanted low-frequency rumble.

When Belkin develops version 2 of the GoStudio, we have a few features we hope they'll add. For starters, it seems like such a shame that Belkin placed professional XLR jacks on the GoStudio, but didn't include phantom power for all the great microphones out there that need a little juice. The GoStudio could also use the option of recording to SD cards, in case an iPod isn't handy or Apple drops support with a future iPod update. It would also be cool if there was a way to blend the GoStudio's audio inputs together to achieve a mix of both built-in and external microphones.

Performance

Despite the Belkin GoStudio's affordable price tag and coveted XLR recording inputs, the product failed to impress us when it came to recording quality. The GoStudio's built-in microphones sound cheap and brittle at any setting, and it picks up a staggering amount of noise from being handled. We could justify using the GoStudio's built-in microphones for recording lectures or interviews that needn't hold up to any scrutiny, otherwise, they should be considered an option of last resort.

Recordings over the GoStudio's XLR or instrument inputs fared better, but often suffered from clipping distortion despite our best efforts to use conservative gain settings and the built-in audio limiter. After some time spent fine-tuning the master input level and monitoring the signal over headphones, we were eventually able to dial in a decent, distortion-free recording. We eventually found the GoStudio's sweet spot for distortion-free recording after fine-tuning the master input level and monitoring the sound over headphones—but it requires some effort. Along the way, we learned that the GoStudio's LED level meter is an unreliable indication of volume peaks, the built-in limiter isn't foolproof, and the low cut filter does more than cut—it decapitates.

As far as battery life is concerned, the Belkin GoStudio is limited by both the internal battery life of your connected iPod, and the two AAA batteries found on the back of the device. Belkin rates the GoStudio's AAA battery life at around four hours of recording. Using an optional DC power adapter allows the GoStation to charge your docked iPod and record for longer stretches.

The Belkin GoStudio's audio quality has many flaws, but if you're strapped for cash and have the patience to monitor recording levels and forgive some shortcomings, the product isn't a bad deal for the price. In fact, for special situations that demand an XLR-connected recorder, the Belkin GoStudio is the only way to go for less than \$200. If you can live without iPod support and XLR inputs, there are several [superior stereo recorders](#) we recommend over the GoStudio.

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