

macCompanion

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MACINTOSH

What's NEXT for Apple?

Only Time will Tell...

Inside This Issue

Mac Hints and Tips
CSS Anthology
Grammatica 6.1
Excel: The Missing Manual
and more...

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 3 March 2005

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Masthead

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And our special thanks to those who have allowed us to review their products!

Letter From the CEO

Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words

It is so tempting to jump on the bad-mouthing bandwagon in the computer industry. It is so tempting to do so. What I've found over the years is that it isn't necessary to tear down the opposition, because those who use the product do so well so much of the time all by themselves. Quoting them is much easier than speaking in the first-person-singular mode. So with that in mind, I offer the following:

Nay, Speak No Ill

1. Nay, speak no ill; a kindly word
Can never leave a sting behind;
And, oh, to breathe each tale we've heard
Is far beneath a noble mind.
Full oft a better seed is sown
By choosing thus the kinder plan,
For, if but little good is known,
Still let us speak the best we can.

2. Give me the heart that fain would hide,
Would fain another's faults efface.
How can it please the human pride
To prove humanity but base?
a higher mood,
A nobler estimate of man;
Be earnest in the search for good,
And speak of all the best we can.

3. Then speak no ill, but lenient be
To others' failings as your own.
If you're the first a fault to see,
Be not the first to make it known,
For life is but a passing day;
No lip may tell how brief its span.
Then, oh, the little time we stay,
Let's speak of all the best we can.

Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,
1985, Hymn 233, Joseph L. Townsend 1849-1942.

Here are some special quotes from the BYU Center for Conflict Resolution:

http://ccr.byu.edu/quotes_communications.cfm

Instead of browbeating the competition, we have been busy improving our website at <http://www.maccompanion.com>, adding content and making incremental adjustments for the better. We know we are not perfect, nor do we profess to be, but we do enjoy good products and we will keep progressing forward as we too learn the tools of the trade and put into practice the things we both read and observe.

We have begun putting together an online Macintosh User Group and we have some plans we would like to carry out, stuff like member benefits for software and hardware discounts – and we will be asking for membership dues - so we can also offer “door prizes” each month as we organize iChat sessions and sit at the feet of some great presenters.

Indeed,

Let Us Oft Speak Kind Words

1. Let us oft speak kind words to each other
At home or where'er we may be;
Like the warblings of birds on the heather,
The tones will be welcome and free.
They'll gladden the heart that's repining,
Give courage and hope from above,
And where the dark clouds hide the shining,
Let in the bright sunlight of love.

2. Like the sunbeams of morn on the
mountains,
The soul they awake to good cheer;
Like the murmur of cool, pleasant fountains,
They fall in sweet cadences near.
Let's oft, then, in kindly toned voices,
Our mutual friendship renew,
Till heart meets with heart and rejoices
In friendship that ever is true.

Chorus

Oh, the kind words we give shall in memory live
And sunshine forever impart.
Let us oft speak kind words to each other;
Kind words are sweet tones of the heart.

Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1985, Hymn 232 possibly written by either Elizabeth Foster Lindsay Thomas or Eliza Cook

That said, I re-reviewed Eddie Hargreave's review of the *iMac G5 17"* unit at <http://www.maccompanion.com/archives/november2004/hardware/iMacG517inch.html> and have only this to add to his excellent review:

The 20" refurb unit I bought is so quiet that it makes the *eMac* almost sound like a PC in being so noisy. I got used to the quiet quickly. And everyone was so amazed with it when it was presented to our Mid-Columbia Macintosh User Group meeting in February. A few wanted to lift it to feel the heft. I also gave away my older keyboard because it too became too noisy for my use. And I could hear the tick-tickity noise of the Kanguru QuickSilver external hard drive (reviewed this month) as it moved the read-write arms randomly.

The new generation of *iMacs* speak for themselves, as to quality and value. Thank you Apple for focusing on creating excellent products, instead of putting resources into belittling the competition.

Letter From the Editor

Marching Into Spring

In this part of the world, the mornings wake up to still below freezing and it isn't time to plant gardens yet, but the afternoons are warm and the daylight is lasting longer. That said, it also means the "flu season" is just about over too, so we all should be able to see more reviews from everyone else on the *macCompanion* staff.

Now it is tax season.

We've also been using most of our time revamping the *macCompanion* website and slowly but surely moving legacy pages over to the new format at <http://www.maccompanion.com>.

Our apologies up front to the software vendors and manufacturers who expected to see their products in the March issue. We are spending a little more quality time and digging a little deeper, if you don't mind. Some products just aren't ready for prime time yet and we are honoring the "don't write up the review just yet" kinds of requests. With others, we've just been dropping the ball and haven't taken the time to write up the reviews. This stuff takes time and our resources have been somewhat strained. Please bear with us a little longer. What we didn't get done for March will be seen in April.

We should see more results from fall plantings as the ground warms up and our gardens begin showing some life in a big way. Very much like Apple's January fruits and vegetables "planting" of products that are springing up amongst the weed patches of computing.

We are seeing signs of *Mac mini* bulbs poking their little flower buds up out of the putrefied and fertilized flowerbeds we call the WinTel world. It is really exciting to see closet Mac users coming out of the closet, some of whom have been quietly using them for a couple of years now without telling anybody. There is going to be a rich garden harvest this year. And it already began with the "miracle grow" of Apple stock rebounds and positive press by Wall Street and others.

If you are new to the Macintosh environment, we welcome you with open arms! We hope our little part of the Apple garden is something you are going to want to watch grow too.

Come inside and take a look at what we have been nurturing in the *macCompanion* greenhouse this winter as we March into spring!

Views from the Ivory Tower By Ted Bade

Greetings to all you who read this message. March is here and those of us in the colder regions on the northern hemisphere are beginning to look forward to warmer weather. The forecast for Apple looks pretty good right now. At the end of February their stock did a two-for-one split, after having reached a high in the \$90 range. Not bad considering that only a short while ago I was able to pick up a bundle of them for \$18.

But that isn't all the good news for Apple. They continue to get good press concerning both the iPod family and for their computers. More and more people are realizing that the computer experience shouldn't be something filled with anxiety and fear. Computers should be fun and viruses shouldn't be a daily concern.

You know you're hot when ... - CNET.com recently reported on the VSLive conference, put on by Microsoft, which is a conference for Visual Studio programmers. Guess what the number one raffle item was? Yup, Apple's iPod. Microsoft beware, you will be assimilated ;-). All jesting aside, it appears that a number of booths at this conference were using iPods as raffle items and even some included a gift card for iTunes Music Store songs. It appears that Apple products were very much in demand at this Microsoft users conference! On the down side, one company that wanted to give away an iPod couldn't because they couldn't actually buy an iPod to give away. iPod mania is everywhere.

What is good about this article is the fact that people in general continue to be excited about the iPod and Apple. Every time someone offers an iPod as a raffle item, it is good PR for Apple. The media generally picks up on this and makes it sound even more impressive, which, in general, gets people excited about the item. iPods continue to be exciting.

Read the entire article at the CNET site by visiting:

http://news.com.com/Apple+upstages+Microsoft+at+VSLive/2100-1041_3-5567992.html

Innovation by Medical Mac users - Apple has always been known for its innovation. So it would seem logical that an innovative company would create tools that foster innovation. We find one such innovation in a recent development in the medical community.

Silicon.com recently posted an article showing an innovative new way radiologists are applying the Mac and even the iPod, to replace a more traditional and very much more expensive system.

<http://hardware.silicon.com/storage/0,39024649,39127655,00.htm>

In brief, a Radiologist and a programmer friend developed an open source application that allows teleconferencing with high-resolution images. The program is called OsiriX. Using a Macintosh and this program the radiologists can replace a system that uses workstations that cost around \$100,000. A considerable savings, even if you include the cost of a high-end Macintosh.

And how does the modern Radiologist carry around this very large sized high-resolution images? If you guessed on an iPod, you are correct! What could be better! It's small, has a large hard drive, and connects to the Macintosh using FireWire, which makes transferring even large files very easy! Definitely read the entire article. It's very interesting.

Many institutions save money by applying existing products to fill their needs. What makes any application like this special is the insight of a person willing to look beyond the box. IMHO, people who use a Macintosh don't spend their time fighting with their computer and so they have more time to think outside the box (rather than thinking about ways to toss the box!). Great innovation Dr Osman Ratib, please continue thinking outside the box!

<http://homepage.mac.com/rossetantoine/osirix/Index2.html>

How is the world reacting to the Mac Mini? - At MacWorld last month, Apple introduced the Mac Mini. I felt that it would find some interesting niches to fill, as did other people. It seems that this is panning out. I have heard that the Mac Mini is the fastest selling computer on Amazon.

It seems that people are buying Mac minis for a variety of reasons. Not to replace an existing Macintosh, but to either replace a PC or add another computer to either a Mac or PC location. And of course, there are application like public information kiosks, and the guy who put one in his car. This machine might not be a powerhouse, but at that price it makes a very, very appealing second computer. There are numerous reviews such as this one from Business Week: http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_07/b3920035_mz006.htm

This is a really interesting little machine. Marketing-wise, I think Apple got this one right. The cube was interesting, but just a tad before its time. LCD TVs weren't so prevalent (they usually have the ability to be used as a monitor), and the USB keyboard and mouse was a recent addition. Today these are all common things.

One author actually called the Mac Mini a "Trojan Horse", implying that it will work its way into many places that a Mac wouldn't otherwise be able to enter!

<http://www.fortune.com/fortune/ontech/0,15704,1025608,00.html>

His biggest concern about the Mini was upgrading it, it isn't easy. Well Duh, it's tough to upgrade a common TV, or even a slightly more exotic TIVO player. None of these items were really designed to be upgraded. The Mac mini costs less than a TV I recently bought for my living room and there are no upgrade paths for the TV!

A common complaint and one I must agree with, has to do with the included software package. iWork isn't included (or really done yet) and AppleWorks has some serious problems. But there are still options. Most articles pointed out that the "Student/Teacher" edition of Office for the Mac costs only \$149 (and we all are either students or teachers in some form, are we not?).

Slamming the Window's environment - Columnist Mark Morford recently posted an article called: "Why Does Windows Still Suck? Why do PC users put up with so many viruses and worms? Why isn't everyone on a Mac?" on the SFGate.com website:

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/g/a/2005/02/04/notes020405.DTL>

This article is definitely worth reading, especially if you are in the mood for a good Window's slam!

What caught my attention most was the story about an associate who bought a Window's based PC and started having malware problems very soon after it was put on the Internet. Why this caught my attention was the fact that a work associate of mine has had a similar problem. It took

about a week for his machine to bog down with spyware and other malicious code. But he is a very casual computer user.

As Mr. Morford wonders, so do I, why do so many people put up with this? It is really scary how apathetic people are about all this malicious code. They seem to accept it without question. Is this an acceptance, as that of a downtrodden slave, the blind obedience of a religious zombie, or the confused acceptance of a person overwhelmed by technology?

Whatever the reason, dealing with the extra costs of a Windows PC isn't something I am interested in. Extra costs you ask? But PCs are less expensive than Macs. When you include the cost of the time and software necessary to troubleshoot, remove, handle, and otherwise clean up malicious PC code, the cost of even a higher end Macintosh looks better and better!

As for Mr. Morford's associate, she dumped the Window's machine (probably on his suggestion), and bought an iBook. This iBook has operated pretty well, except for one minor problem, Microsoft Word! (read this article, the ending is a hoot!)

Switching advice - While Apple and perhaps many dedicated Mac users would like to see the entire world switch to using Macs, This probably isn't going to happen for a number of different reasons, some of them actually valid ones. In an effort to convert non-Mac users, many dedicated Mac supporters are often quite *over* zealous; but this often has the opposite effect of scaring people away. (If you know anything about human nature, you know that anytime your "prove" that a person is wrong you have either convinced them they are right or forced them to close their minds to any other viewpoint. IMHO, the best way to convert people to the Macintosh is to coax them gently and to be aware of their concerns, both those that are real (like having to deal with a learning curve or the cost of all new software), and those that are not true (such as there is no software for the Macintosh).

Recently I read an article by Walter Mossberg in which he discusses the reality of switching from Windows to a Mac:

<http://ptech.wsj.com/ptech.html>

(This article was posted on the Personal Technology web site on February 17, 2005. You might need to look into their archive of articles to find this particular one).

The article points out a number of instances where switching to a Mac wouldn't be the best solution for a person. Yes, there are some valid reasons not to switch to Macintosh. However, I believe that as time goes on and more and more people do switch, these reasons will become less and less important. Read his article and keep the information in mind the next time you are working on convincing a person to switch. Wouldn't you rather convince a person that Macintosh users are level headed and informed rather than turning a person completely off to the Mac?

That's all for this month. Have a great March!

Rants, Raves and Revelations

In Search of Perfect Recipe and Cooking Software

by Harry {doc} Babad and Dr Eric Flescher

Edited by Julie M. Willingham

The Problem's Background

I have, as has Eric, long collected recipes, capturing them in many forms and formats. These include those from our families' collected books, pamphlets, and accumulated individual recipes on paper. In this age of the Mac, I've routinely captured recipes in PDF format from many food websites. I've also used optical character reading (OCR) software, directly scanning documents to create editable text versions of my favored recipes. Therefore, by picking and choosing from the all too many cookbooks my wife and I own, I've enriched my electronic recipe collection. I've also entered many hundreds of older recipes by hand, from index cards or yellowed scribbled notes, using Microsoft Word.

However, there is a significant problem with recipes accumulated as individual documents in different formats: Usually you can't search those documents for contents (not their titles) to find that special recipe you want to cook later in the week. The most direct way to allow more flexible access to your large recipe collection is to add, consolidate, and store the recipes in a cookware (recipe) software program's database.

On doc_Babad's system, I've created a top-level "mmmRecipes" folder for storing recipe and cooking tips. I then created about 80 subfolders in which to store my individual recipes. These folders contain about 480 MB of data. Obviously, I have a tough decision: Do I store 'Creole Eggs Sardou' under 'Eggs, Pancakes, and Soufflés', Creole cooking, vegetarian cooking, or another term. How about 'Spanakopita - Greek Spinach Pie?' Where do I catalog it? Main-meal Pies? Greek-Turkish-Mediterranean Food? Vegetables > Spinach?

Using a large number of hierarchical sets of folders is dumb, but it was all I had to work with at the time—Apple's 'Find' feature is not exactly designed for doing multi-attribute searches. Even if you index all the text documents on your hard-drive, as we were able to do under Mac OS 9, the contents are still not available for multi-attribute searching. A flexible solution to a recipe collector's problems would be to store their entire collection in a recipe-oriented database. Such software would allow you to easily enter recipes (old and new), and to search your collection by using a broad variety of keyword criteria. It would allow you to rapidly find just the right recipe when you need it.

Database-oriented software is the only way to go

The designer of a flexible cooking tool built on a robust database engine-database would provide you with the tools to store, find, sort, and specify categories of information from all the recipes you add to it. Think of it as a set of simultaneously and instantly searchable 3-D set of index card-style filing cabinets that contain all the information in your vast recipe collection.

A database is a superior tool for recipe collectors because it allows you to search your recipe collection by multiple criteria all at once. In a flexible database, you can search not only by key ingredients, but also by cuisine, cooking method, or information type.

The reason for using a database program is that you can define (categorize) your recipe's information contents and create searchable fields that define that recipe. Such data containing fields cover all of the *kinds* of information you might want to search for that could be contained within the thousands of recipes you've accumulated. In the recipe below, I've highlighted items I'd likely search for within that recipe or similar ones. Such items fall into distinct categories that we later illustrate in Table 1. Each category, such as ingredients contains the subcategory information you will need to be able to select tidbits of data that are important to a particular recipe.

Thai Black Pepper-Garlic-Shrimp Sauté with Asparagus

Serves 3--Barely! [Created by HB and RN On 02-21-02]

Background: This recipe was created when I got tired of paying too much for too few shrimp in a great Thai restaurant in Spokane, WA. I added the asparagus to the recipe a few years later.

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 1 to 1-1/2 Lb | Large Shrimp |
| 12-16 | Asparagus Stalks, trimmed and cut into 2" pieces |
| 2-6 tsp. | Peanut Oil |
| 1/8-1/4 tsp. | Red Crushed Japanese Chili Flakes |
| 1 Tsp. | Crushed Coarse Black Pepper |
| 4 Tbs. | Thai {not Chinese or Japanese} Soy Sauce |
| 2-3 Tbs. | Fish or Oyster Sauce (Chinese or Thai) |
| 3-5 Tbs. | Chopped fresh Garlic |

Take the shrimp (cleaned and deveined) and marinate them for about 1 hour in a small bowl in the refrigerator, using all ingredients except the oil.

Steam the asparagus for 2 minutes on high in the microwave to tenderize them.

Heat the oil (medium-high heat) in a wok until it smokes slightly.

Safety Hint: Make sure the fan over your stove is on because the cooking fumes are

very sharp smelling and may have a bite when you breathe.

Add the shrimp mixture rapidly, being careful of hot oil splatters. **Stir-fry** (sauté) the shrimp until they are cooked to a light golden color (2–3 minutes). Do not overcook! Add the asparagus to the spiced cooking oil, stir until they are coated and heated through, and are a bit tenderer. Combine the asparagus with the shrimp.

Serve immediately!

Serve the shrimp with rice and/or anything else you'd like. The remaining oil–sauce mixture in your wok can be used either as dipping sauce or poured over steamed rice.

Warning: these shrimp are very addicting. Dip bread in the sauce if you have no rice.

Alternatively, pour the shrimp over Chinese pan fried soft white noodles cooked with a whisper of shredded vegetables.

For the shrimp recipe, Harry has provided the selected *important* ingredients including black pepper, garlic, shrimp, asparagus, and chili flakes. He could have also added Thai soy sauce, but chose not to. In another recipe, in which the instructions called for adding black pepper to taste, black pepper would not be an important ingredient.

| Table 1: Categories and Subcategories to Make Searches Easier |
|--|
| Cuisine [e.g., European, Chinese, Mexican, Island] |
| Main Ingredients; Select up to 4 or 5 items |
| Food Genre [e.g., Appetizer, Beverage, Snack, Side Dish, Desert, Sauce, Dressing, Sandwiches, Soups] |
| Primary Cooking Method [e.g., boiling, braising, stir fry, bake, broil, grill, pan fry] |
| General Applicable Meal [e.g., Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner] |
| Category [e.g., Cooking Hint, Formulary, Recipe, General Food Article, Menus] |
| Special Cooking tools: [e.g., Steamer, Wok, Smoker, Panni Press] |
| Other |

The need to flexibly define categories and subcategories is illustrated by a very partial 5–column matrix table [Table 2] that serves to show the complexity of knowing where to store a given recipe when using a flat file folder–oriented collection organization as I, Harry, presently does. The need to flexibly define categories and subcategories is illustrated by Table 2, which shows only some of the many choices one has when deciding where to store a given recipe using a folder–oriented style of organization that I, Harry, presently do.

That's why databases with searchable category fields are the only way to deal with all but a very small collection. For greater completeness, more than one

main ingredient field is helpful, but it may be limiting if you can only use 5 fields and you need 6 to capture your important ingredients.

In a quality-cooking database, selecting the proper top-level categories and then populating them with appropriate (subcategory) options, provides the basis for finding and retrieving any particular recipe. Harry's favorite way of dealing with the large number of alternatives in any category is to create a pop-up list that you can choose from to select items important to finding that particular recipe. This practice is called creating a data dictionary for each category field. For example, with respect to the category, *primary cooking method*, I could select boiling, braising, stir-frying, baking broiling, grilling, stewing, sautéing, pan frying, or other terms that would likely change from month to month. A data dictionary locks you into a selected set of subcategories to choose from, at least until you formally change the list, say, by adding the term "steaming".

If your database is versatile, you should be able to annotate (e.g., select a key word for each important ingredient) your recipe, as I did in the recipe for Thai shrimp. You process your raw recipe by selecting one or more of these defined terms for ingredients or cuisine to the few that make that recipe unique. By then searching for one or more of those words in your database data fields, the recipe(s) you want, will appear when you search for them. Too many found recipes, add more criteria and search again. Too few delete some search criteria. All it takes is selecting a few words and few clicks of your mouse.

To a software developer, keeping track of individual ingredients is the biggest challenge. In several attempts to create a database in Filemaker Pro, that was restricted to the name of the recipe and an ingredients list from which I created a mere 5 fields for cataloging the *main* ingredients I got bogged down in overlapping data dictionaries. Therefore, I'll leave the development up to someone who both cooks and is more knowledgeable on creating multi-attribute lists than I am.

Since a database is flexible, you search for many 'key word' characteristics at once. Since there are a myriad ways to search for and find that special item you want to cook, if you've flagged it, you'll find it. Of course, all of these category choices need to be limited to the 'names' of items within that category. Therefore, the best software has a built in data dictionary you to build a data dictionary for all individual fields within it; and to expand (edit) it as needed. By slightly constraining what you call the items, you've flagged item, that built-in editable part of the database structure called the data dictionary provides you consistency of data entry.

| Table 2: And in which folder do I file it or what categories does my database need? | | | | |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Cuisine | Meal Type or Category | Main Ingredient [1] | Main Ingredient [2]... | Cooking Method |
| Chinese Mostly | Appetizer | Pork | Rice Barley | Deep Fry |
| Jewish & Israeli | Salads Dressings | Shrimp | Pasta | Braise |
| Greek & Turkish | Soups Chowders | Chicken | Breads | Grill |
| Indian Subcontinent | Vegetarian | Fish | Vegetable by Type | Oven Bake |
| Island-Tropical | Spices-Rubs Condiments | Beef | Eggs | Stir Fry |
| Latin America | Cooking Hints | Eggs | Seafood | Sautee |
| Mexican & TexMex | Deserts | Vegetable by Type | Fish | Pan Fry |
| Thai | Stews Casseroles | Lamb | Cheese | Steam |
| European | Sandwiches | Rice Barley | Flour | Microwave |

Relocating Your Recipes

There are a few fundamental issues when dealing with an existing and growing complex recipe collection of individual documents. Your collection is likely to be either in traditional formats (e.g., text, MSW, PDF) or in proprietary formats tied to specialty cooking software that no longer serves you well. If you've found the perfect software, you are faced with the awesome problem of transferring your collection to that product. (Note: neither Eric nor I have found a perfect product, although some are quite good, and most continue to evolve. More about what a 'perfect' product should look like later in this column.)

To start with, let's think about the format your recipes are now in, and how to potentially transfer ALL that information into your new and shiny recipe software. If you want to import your collection, you must convert it to a format that the software can handle, which is usually text. Table 3 illustrates how to convert alternative formats to text.

| Table 3: Inputting Your Existing Recipes into Your New Recipe Software | | |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| <i>PDF or Graphic Forms</i> | <i>Word Processor</i> | <i>Text</i> |
| Downloaded 'captured' recipes: In Acrobat, select the text and C&P/D&D | Export contents directly, a piece at a time, by C&P/D&D | Export Directly by C&P/D&D |
| Downloaded 'captured' recipes: Use PDF2Office X to convert the document to Word format | (Not Applicable) | |
| Existing scanned magazine or book recipes: OCR the file and C&P/D&D. | Export as text and C&P/D&D | |
| Scan recipes directly to your OCR Program and work with the resulting text. | | |
| C&P Cut and Paste D&D Drag and Drop OCR Optical Character Readers Software [e.g., OmniPage or Read Iris] | | |

To reemphasize the long-term recipe collectors problem

How does one take a collection of thousands of recipes and convert them into an easily searchable format with lots of search alternatives? First, find the perfect database engine-driven software.

In a downloaded PDF, using Adobe Acrobat, the individual words can be captured, copied, or dragged-and-dropped, and entered into a specialized software recipe record. Home-typed recipes give you a data entry advantage compared to recipes downloaded as PDF files on your Macintosh. They can be processed as text to allow you to cut and paste information into a database's fields. However, items scanned from books or your other paper recipe collections must be OCR'd to become anything but a plain uneditable page. (If you are also a PC user you can avoid the OCR problem by using Acrobat Capture, a tool I've not tried.) For me, time isn't money, but at just 69, I'm slowly running out.

I need to batch convert

Ideally, by sorting your individual recipes by the format you've captured them in, it would be nice to have a way to process more than one recipe at a time. One way would be to create a number of recipe records (remember your index cards) and add that text into a special edit field associated with each new record. Then, one at a time, you can fill the individual fields in that record (your individual recipe) not only with the text information you extracted, also to

designate some key items into your defined categories, using your data dictionary.

Existing Products

For those who like reading about recipe software, check out macC's Dr. Eric Flescher, who has written reviews of other 'cook's tools' for the recipe collector. A quick MacUpdate search turned up a number of cooking software products, a few of which were reviewed in macC. Some that caught my eye are listed below.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>BusyCooks RecipeDB 4.2.1</i> | <i>Computer Cuisine Deluxe X 4.0</i> |
| <i>CookWare Deluxe 2.1</i> | <i>iCuistot 1.1, Cookware</i> |
| <i>i-Recipes 1.3</i> | <i>Kitchen 1.0</i> |
| <i>MacGourmet 1.1</i> | <i>Recipe Analyzer 2</i> |
| <i>The Recipe Manager</i> | <i>Shop 'n Cook 3.0.1</i> |

Relative to this article, perhaps the most interesting to those of you have large numbers of recipes in older organizers, could be a new entry, still in beta form, called *A Cook's Books* 0.9.4. Just search for the term *recipe* on the MacUpdate site.

Although we have not reviewed most these products, reading about them on the developers' sites maintains the impression that cooking software is alive and well on the Macintosh and covers the range of simple to feature-rich. One of these products, *A Cook's Books*, shows signs of simplifying moving your recipes from an existing software product to it. Check these out and write a review for us at macC if the software meets your needs.

Conclusion

All of the otherwise fine software products listed above suffers from one or more shortfalls that make it difficult for compulsive collectors to enter their vast collections into the new software tool.

If I, Harry, were pessimistic, I'd say, for those of you with a collection that is larger than a few hundred recipes, *don't bother!* However, if you have time and patience, you can make the contents of your large recipe collection more accessible and useful. Check out one of the products list above and see if they suit your needs. Almost all of them come in a demo mode that allows you to briefly experiment.

We think that the main features of great cookware software include:

- The ability to sort, file, and arrange individual recipes (database records).
- Allowing you to maintain a consistent format for your entire collection. It needs to be simple so that you need not spend a long time converting your existing recipes to the proper format.
- The ability to rapidly and simply find one or more kinds of specific information from within a recipe(s).
- The ability to easily print or eMail individual or collected recipes.

We keep thinking that between the recipe gems found on the web, and those we've obtained from books and magazines, that there ought to be a perfect, database piece of software that will, with minimum labor, allow us to enter all of our stuff into an easily searchable format.

So, to you, our readers, we wish you joy in the search, not only for new recipes to cook, but for software that allows you to find them again, in seconds rather hours.

[**Editor:** See the review of TheRecipeManager in our January issue as the main feature at <http://www.maccompanion.com/archives/january2005/feature/recipe manager.html>.]

Guest Editorial

From GUI-Avoider to Mac OS X by Mary Stamper <mailto:mstamper77@mac.com>

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Part I - The History

Motivation

There is a school of thought out there that seems to think that there is little difference anymore between a Mac and Windows. Given that as a core belief, it is easy to see how those same people can dismiss the claims of Mac users that they are, in fact, more productive on their Macs. I'm going to tell you why I AM more productive on my Mac, and hopefully, give some concrete reasons why.

I am also going to say that I believe that workflow preferences are probably dependent upon a complex matrix of background, understanding of the software tools, the specific tasks that must be accomplished, and brain wiring. Others may have different preferences than I voice here. I'm only telling MY story, in the hope that it will inspire someone, somewhere, to "think different(ly)".

I'm also sick of "one day/week/month with a Mac" stories. Some switchers just want to see how much they can get away with NOT relearning. If you can do everything that you did before, the same way that you did before, then why switch? And you'll inevitably reach the "there is no difference" conclusion. Some things about the Mac took me more than a month to get used to, ultimately to find that I liked the Mac way better. Some things struck me as better (at least for me) right away. Some things did not even occur to me until I read or was told about them, and their discovery turned out to be very significant to my computer-using habits.

Bottom line, if you switch to a Mac or are contemplating a switch, you should spend some time and effort learning how it is different in order to see why cost shouldn't be the sole determiner in choosing a platform.

I'd also like to try to convince people that there is utilitarian value in the attention that Apple pays to details of UI appearance. It is not merely "eye candy" (how desperately I wish that that term would go away).

Who the Heck Am I?

I'm a professional programmer and Oracle database specialist of over 20 years. I've written in C, JAVA, Fortran, Perl and God help me, even COBOL. I started my career on IBM mainframes, and then went on to HP, AT&T and IBM Unix machines. I didn't own my own computer until 5 years ago. Having used only REAL computers, it struck me as mind-bending that PC's had to be rebooted just to install software, and that they froze, often several times a day and needed to be rebooted to regain usefulness. What an incredibly stupid waste of time! And heck, what would I actually do with a computer at home? I already spent 10 hours a day in my office programming.

Shortly after I got my first job, they put Windows 3.x machines on everyone's desk at work. Those horrid GUIs made my head spin. All of those icon things looked the same to me. I seemed to spend more time scraping up and down the rows of icons looking for what I wanted, than actually doing anything productive. I KNEW what I wanted...why couldn't I just ask for it...you know...like on the command line, only perhaps with less typing? Since my primary programming tool was the VI editor, my PC was quickly relegated to reading company Email and hosting tons of terminal emulation windows into all of our various Unix boxes.

I got away with this behavior for a good 11 years, until I started to do data modeling and had to learn to use a "visual" modeling tool And you know what that meant...Windows...every day. An upgrade to NT at least made the horrid thing mostly stable, but those awful blotchy icons were still there. And menus! UGH! It took so much time to navigate them, and so much precise eye-hand coordination to avoid slipping off of them all of the time, or accidentally arcing your mouse a bit and starting up the wrong program. I successfully limited my use of GUI

programs to only two for at least a couple of years, while hiding in the safety of the command line for programming.

Now, fast forward to 5 years ago. The Internet was getting to be a pretty cool thing, and I was finally accumulating some possible uses for a computer. What kind to get? No Windows box would ever darken my doorway, period. My boyfriend was a Mac-devotee, starting with the OS 7 days. The GUI was allegedly better, but the rebooting for all kinds of ridiculous reasons plagued that platform as well.

I had heard about how great Linux was and how many useful applications there were, so I bought a machine and a copy of Red Hat Linux and loaded it up. It was clear that I needed to commit to learning to use a GUI for real. I'd had a little experience with CDE on AIX, but had disabled it and fallen back on the command line. I tried out Gnome, KDE, and a few more minimalist window managers and finally settled on KDE. Eventually, I switched to the SUSE distribution. (By the way, my choice(s) of Linux distributions and desktops are out of scope for this discussion.)

The extreme configurability was good, and I went about taking full advantage of it. In general, there was some excellent functionality, albeit crudely implemented. For three years, I used Linux as my only computer at home.

So what made me look in other directions? For one thing, I 'm a compulsive upgrader. Sorry, I can't help myself. The "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mentality is simply not me. I'm always looking for ways to use my computer more efficiently and for more things. I'm concerned not only with the presence of functionality, but how efficiently I can work with its implementation. Suffice it to say that I find most implementations of most things lacking.

So I was always upgrading either the desktop or the OS. And KDE upgrades come bloody fast. Every time I upgraded, it was a long process of carefully checking dependencies (served me right for choosing an RPM distribution, but I wanted to run an Oracle server, and Oracle only certifies on Red Hat and SUSE). Something always broke, and I'd have to spend time tracking down the problems. I always got it fixed, but after awhile that got old. The third time that the antialiased fonts that I had spent a bunch of time installing broke, it ceased to be amusing. And most incredibly annoying...sometimes applications broke for no apparent reason, and the consensus solution seemed to be to delete the application's configuration in the .kde directory. Uh, sorry, but when software touts its configurability, and invites the user to customize to the hilt, it's darned uncivilized when crude upgrade procedures cause a carefully worked out, complex configuration to have to be thrown out and re-implemented. And why in the world is configuring a network printer with built-in lpd such a pain in the lower backside? That was another thing that managed to break with every single upgrade. I always fixed it, but sorry, I don't think that I should have had to. The installers, even recent ones (I haven't tried anywhere near all of them to be honest), have yet to be able to detect it. And I've still had to tweak my monitor configuration even on very recent installs. There are many details about the implementation of KDE that I find very crude. However that is also out of scope for this discussion, except to say that crude as it can be, it's still far less distasteful than Windows.

Then something insanely great happened....

I bought my boyfriend a copy of Mac OS X Jaguar for a gift. After seeing it installed, and starting to get jealous about how the printer just worked, the scanner just worked and most things seemed so neat and clean, I started to think seriously about switching.

"But hold on!", I said to myself, "No virtual desktops, no first mouse button simultaneous select/copy or second mouse button paste". And no Konqueror! These were serious usability items to me. But the more I saw of Mac OS X, the more I liked it, and one day, after wasting a ton of time on another upgrade, I declared that enough was enough, and ordered me a G4 867 dual processor tower.

It has been two years, and I haven't looked back.

It's probably also relevant to mention that I use a Mac only at home. I still use Windows at work, five days a week for eight hours a day. If my company didn't have a "Windows-only-on-the-network" policy, I'd have bought a Powerbook long ago. I also still maintain a Suse Linux box running KDE and an Oracle server.

Part II - Why I am More Productive on a Mac

Icons

Historically, I hate icons because:

1. My visual memory isn't really very good. Visuals have to make a huge impression in order for me to remember them.
2. Unless pictures are rather literal, I often don't attach meaning to them instantaneously (or at all). Most icons on other platforms seem like hieroglyphics to me, and ultimately all look like the same indistinct blotches. The results are the time-wasting games of charades and icon-scraping.
3. Icons smaller than 1.2 CM are simply too much effort to see.

For some reason, I don't hate icons on the Mac like I *still* do on other platforms. Why Not?

1. On the Mac, the icons are so crisp and clear and realistic, that most actually convey meaning to me. The ones that don't immediately convey meaning are easy for me to remember due to their sheer impressiveness.
2. Their sizes are also "elastic" over a full range of sizes, rather than being limited to small, medium and large versions. This allows me to set the icon size to what's *exactly* right for *me*, not some approximation.
3. It *astounds* me how fatiguing it is to use Windows after my Mac, and one of the primary reasons is the filthy-dirty icons. KDE is getting some better icon sets and has more sizing choices than Windows, but it is nowhere near OS X.

Finding Files

When it comes to locating files, I have to say that Windows simply sucks. It is cluttered, inconsistent and inefficient.

1. Start Menu

- I can drag and drop to the left hand side from the All Programs menu, but from nowhere else. Why not? I can't remove stuff by dragging it off either. Why not?
- The right-hand side has to be configured by a separate properties menu, and only a limited set of directories that MickeySoft deems useful can be displayed. What if I want some other ones that are not on the "approved list"? Sorry, no can do!
- Personally, I find the Start Menu to be completely useless. And for the record, I didn't like the Apple Menu, so beloved to OS 9 users either.

2. Windows Explorer

- Seeing Desktop and My Documents at the top of the hierarchy, above My Computer, still sends my brain into tailspins. My Documents and My Computer at the same level...huh???? This is the result, I believe of Windows trying to represent some sort of logical hierarchy and the physical hierarchy at the same time on the same view. It gets truly absurd when you have to open the Documents and Settings folder and realize that while D and S is deep down in the physical hierarchy, its notorious subfolders, My Documents and Desktop are the same ones that are showing at the top of the visual hierarchy display in the sidebar. I once again say huh?????
- The tree view causes more useless motion and mouse clicks than anything else in the whole interface. You can use the Favorites feature, which is analogous to the Mac Finder sidebar, but I've found no way to make Favorites the default in the XP sidebar (if it can be done WITHOUT hacking the registry, would someone PLEASE tell me how), thus you have to click Favorites on every Explorer window that is opened. What an annoyance !!! By the way, you CAN make the folder that contains the Favorites be the default opened folder when an explorer window is opened, however that is not the same because it does not reflect the user-defined ordering that I specified in the Organize Favorites. Rather it is just a standard folder display in ASCII sort order.

3. File Selection Dialog Sidebar

- Again you are limited to showing bookmarks/shortcuts to the five MS-blessed directories. There is a hack available called TweakUI that lets you change the directories that appear in the file search dialog, but you are limited to only seven slots!!!!!!!!!!

4. Searching

- Why do I need this moronic , multi screen wizard just to find a file????? Why does it ask me what type of document I'm searching for? More unnecessary decisions to make. There are some variants possible, but none as simple as the OS X omnipresent search field (for finding files by name) and the straightforward, non-verbose find dialog for more complex searches by content.

Mac OS X saves me from insanity! It is simple, concise, consistent and logical. Why should finding files be anything else? Verbosity is not needed here; just clear labels for the input parameters.

1. Sidebar

- Though basically analogous to the Windows Favorites in that both are nothing more than bookmarks, it acts differently in several important ways.
- It is powered by pure drag and drop. When I drag stuff off of the Finder Sidebar, it goes away. On Windows, a useless link is left on my desktop that I've got to get rid of. Bookmarks are abstractions on a computer. Why should a bookmark materialize itself? This is one opportunity where a computer can be better than real life. When I read a real, dead tree book, I usually have some sort of dead tree bookmark that ends up laying around my house, unless I bother to throw it out or store it for reuse. It is not necessary to imitate that on a computer. I should be able to tell the computer to create a bookmark and not have to care about how it does it. Then I should be able to tell the computer to get rid of it. I suspect that some of the issue here is that Apple has made a commitment to a pure drag-and-drop paradigm (intelligent gui) with the sidebar. Windows can't make up its mind whether it wants to be an intelligent gui, or just a point-and-click version of a command line. There is a huge difference. And sometimes big problems when you try to mix the two.
- If I choose to make the sidebar visible, Finder remembers my choice. On Windows, I have to click the Favorites button on every window that I open.

2. File Selection Dialog Sidebar

- The sidebar EXACTLY mirrors my choices on the Finder sidebar. I can't think of any good reason why it should do anything else OTHER than look and function like a Finder window. This to me is a HUGE, HUGE point of blatant superiority of the Mac over Windows.

3. Searching

- I just enter my search string and away it goes. No questions, no wizards, no dialogs, no thinking. And back it comes with everything that qualifies, regardless of document type. I can't wait to see what Spotlight adds to what is already powerful and simple.



Thankfully, there is no Start menu. The computer shutdown/restart functions are on the Apple Menu, where they belong, since they have nothing to do with finding files, and they are not files to be found. Again, thankfully, the Mac OS X menu no longer has anything to do with finding files, since the Finder does that job quite well.

The absence of a Windows-style tree view bothers me not a bit. I don't even think about using it on my Mac. I know my directory structure and I've bookmarked all of the important places in the Finder sidebar. No need to ever waste time navigating up and down the tree. Actually, the List view in the Finder can behave as a tree. I don't really use it, but others who prefer a tree in a single pane would find it useful. It is more sensible than the tree in Windows in that it is the pure representation of the logical hierarchy as exposed by the mac gui. It doesn't play with my mind by trying to represent both the logical and physical hierarchy at the same time.

The clumsy file location system on Windows is reason enough on its own to get me to switch. The simple, straightforward, logical system presented by OS X is one of the reasons why I can say that I AM more productive on a Mac. I spend a lot less time navigating around on my Mac. Here again, the difference in my fatigue level after using Windows compared to using the Mac is nothing short of astonishing.

Finder however isn't perfect. There is one thing that I can think of that Windows got right...the ability to choose a default setting for the appearance of all folders. The folder-by-folder "this Window Only" / "all Windows" scheme adopted by the Mac OS X finder is a real brain fart, and its logic continually escapes me. Also, why can I change the background color in icon view, but not in any of the other views? Alternating pale colored stripes would sure be nice for readability purposes in the other two views. And what is that weirdness that happens occasionally, when all of my Finder windows suddenly lose their View Option setting and I have to go back and fix them all? I have a lengthy explanation of this behavior somewhere that I'm been meaning to read, but come on folks, this shouldn't happen.

Fonts

Not much to be said here. They simply look cleaner on a Mac and are therefore easier to read. And any font that I choose looks great on a Mac. I can choose fonts for their aesthetic characteristics, rather than based upon the quality with which they render, a common problem on Linux. Microsoft Clear Type has never impressed me as being all that clear either.

The Mac makes use of heavier, almost bold fonts in many places in the UI, especially on menus. I find that this makes content easier to read, and therefore filtering for relevancy less stressful. This, in spite of the spacing and number of menu items being similar to Windows.

Also, because of the heavyweight fonts, grayed-out items recede even more, thus reducing the clutter, and again, speeding relevancy filtering.

It may make sense to divulge that I never use fonts smaller than 12 point. It's too much work for me to see them.

Spring-loaded Folders

These took me awhile to discover and get accustomed to. If you drag a file over a folder in any Finder window, the desktop, or in the Finder sidebar and hesitate momentarily (exact time is configurable), the folder or side bar item will open. You can continue to drag the item over further folders until you reach the one you want and drop the item into it. Every folder that opens has its contents displayed in the right side of the Finder window, regardless of the style of Finder view that you use. The fact that you can see the entire contents of the file as it springs open makes it very unlikely that you'll accidentally put something in the wrong place.

Windows XP has a similar feature, but it's useless, due to the fact that the folder opens only in the tree in the sidebar and is not reflected in the right side of the screen. You cannot see the contents of the folder that has just sprung open (except for sub folders, since they show on the tree - a guarantee that you'll eventually put something in the wrong folder).

I'm not aware of any similar feature on KDE.

Since the Windows implementation is largely useless, most people resort to moving files by old-fashioned cutting and pasting with the usual climbing around the file system tree. This can take a lot longer than the Mac's spring-loaded folders feature, used in conjunction with a thoughtfully configured Finder sidebar. Anything that eliminates the time-wasting tree navigation that Windows forces, improves my productivity.

Configuration/Preference Dialogs

I'm one of those people that forgets things instantly if I don't use them constantly. Therefore it's important that things be easily and logically discoverable (or I should say RE-discoverable). Things on the Mac are USUALLY where I expect to find them. If I want to do something that I rarely have need for, it's usually easy to figure out how to do it. Six months later, when the need for the same function arises, and I've inevitably forgotten how to do it, it's just as easy to re-derive the solution as it was to figure it out the first time.

At work, where I'm chained to Windows, the so-oft-repeated-that-it-makes-me-sick scenario is this:

1. Spend a ton of time looking all over the place for the dialog that will let me do what I want to do.
2. Try the Help system, only to find that every word on which I think it logical to search, yields nothing.
3. Ask someone or do a lengthy internet search, only to realize that it wouldn't have occurred to me in a million years to look for what I was looking for where it actually turned out to be.
4. Fix my problem.
5. Four months later, the same need arises, and I can't remember the solution.
6. Repeat this series of steps from number 1, and realize that not once, but twice, I've wasted hours trying to solve a simple problem.

That then gives rise to the long term side-affect of not even BOTHERING to solve problems on Windows, because I know that I'm in for hours of distraction from my REAL work.

It's as if my Mac WANTS to encourage me to use it. And it's equally as if Windows is sadistically designed to defeat me. When I discuss this with Windows people, they frequently agree with me, and inevitably they utter the phrase, "but once you DO figure out how to do it.....". Yeah right. They've missed the point entirely. It shouldn't take so long to figure it out, and no, I'm NOT likely to remember it, no matter how hard-won the answer was. And frankly, I shouldn't have to remember it, It should be obvious, or at least logically derivable.

I'm more productive on a Mac because most things just make sense to me, and being able to do things easily the second time is less dependent upon sheer memorization of a series of steps. That takes less time. Less time making my computer work is more time for productivity elsewhere.

Services Menu

The Services menu is one of the OS X concepts that simply has no equivalent elsewhere. Many Mac people don't even know it's there, and it took me awhile to actually start to use it to the max. It's so USEFUL that I think that Apple should put it where it is more easily seen. The Services menu allows developers to connect applications together in arbitrary ways without having to go through the effort of opening all of the applications involved. Usually, you'll have one application opened, select some text and via the services menu for the open application, feed that text to another application, which you need not open yourself. It's reminiscent of Unix pipes. The bad part is that services don't work in all applications.

Some services that I find useful are:

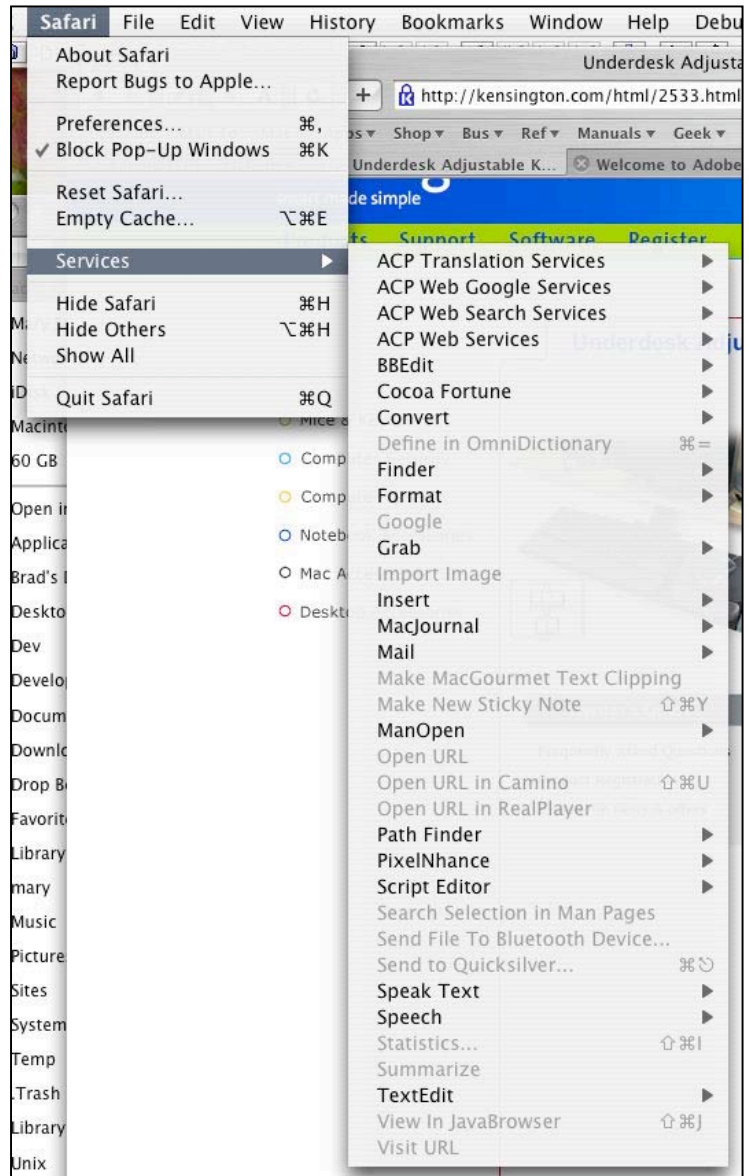
1. QuickSilver's magnification service, that will magnify into huge letters that I can see across the room, any text that I select, similar to what Address Book does with phone numbers. I like this because the phone is across the room rather than on my desk, and it saves me from memorizing or setting up speed dials on rarely used phone numbers when they appear in textual form in an Email or web page (my phone dialer only works on numbers that are in the address book).
2. TextEdit service that will open any selection of text from any application in TextEdit. I believe that if you own BBedit, something similar exists.
3. WordService from Devon Technologies - lots of text-handling functions accessible from any application.

I've got so many third-party services installed, that I no longer know what the default ones are. I also agree with people who say that the Services menu should be more user-configurable. This is a potential powerhouse of usefulness, and Apple should definitely call more attention to it. I can think of tons of Services that could be written that would create a new level of interoperability between programs.

Drag and Drop of Text Selections

On the Mac, I can select any piece of text or image in ANY application and drag it to the desktop, which gives the effect of having infinite clipboard slots. I can even drag it to the Dock. Try this in Windows. I dare you. Now, this also took me awhile to discover, since initially, I couldn't think beyond the select-copy-paste via the second mouse button or Ctrl c/v paradigm. To really appreciate a Mac, you need to "Think Different(ly)".

Text drag and drop unfortunately doesn't work with X11 applications, and this is one of the reasons why I seldom use OpenOffice. Yes, I can open my text clipping and select copy off the Edit menu and hit ctrl-v, but why? More



keystrokes, more effort, out of step with the way the rest of things work, and therefore more stressful to use. I've looked at Neo Office/J and it doesn't work any better. Works fine on MS Word 2004 though, as well as AppleWorks, in which I'm writing this document.

Colored Folder Labels

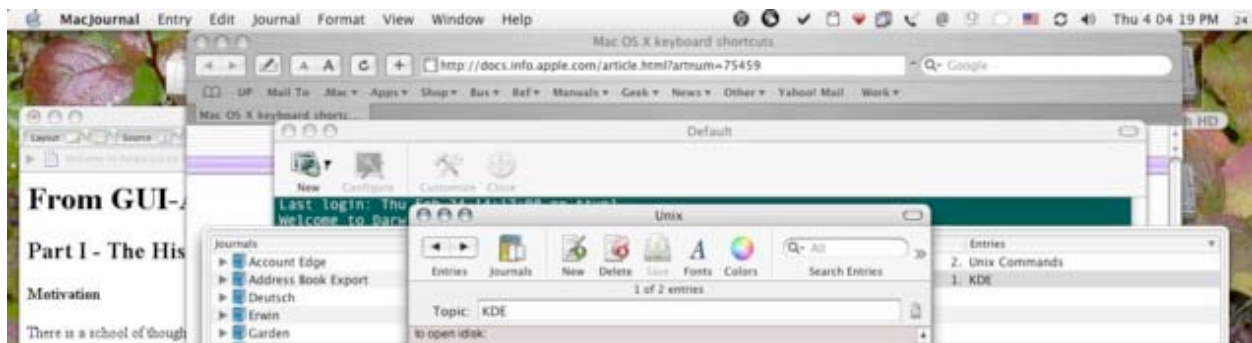
Initially I thought this was silly...until I started to use them. Just another way that I can get to my files faster on a Mac. If such a thing exists on Windows, I've never been able to find it. I use it to make folders that are not accessed enough to book mark directly, but that I occasionally need to get to more visible. Cuts down on the time it takes to do relevancy determination.



The Menubar

People seem to either hate the menubar or love it. I love it. All too many times, on other platforms, when I've had lots of open windows, haphazardly stacked on top of each other, I've intended to do something to the topmost window only to accidentally click on a control for a lower level window. On the Mac, the menubar is always in the same place, and leaves me never in doubt about what the topmost application or where its menu selections are. Time is saved when there are lots of windows opened because you don't have to analyze the mess and sort out which window you have to aim your mouse at. It's always at the top of the screen.

I also like the way I can run little apps from menubar icons. I'm interested in seeing the effect of Tiger's Dashboard on the concept of menubar apps. It's likely that some menubar apps could make equally much sense or more, as Dashboard Widgets.



Tabs on Preference Dialogs

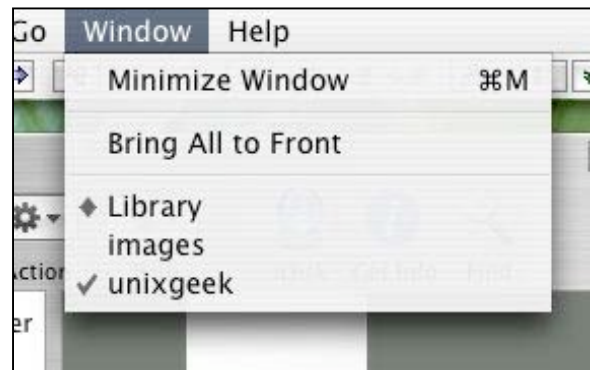
Some of the most utterly evil things about the Windows UI are those diabolical multi tabbed preference windows, where each time you click on a tab that is not in the front row, the whole set of tabs shifts, leaving them all in a different position. It is this sort of senseless thing that makes me seriously wonder if the designers were purposely trying to drive me to insanity. Try the System Control Panel for an illustration.

Mercifully, there is none of that on the Mac. Apple abandoned tabs due to the difficulty of getting rid of above-mentioned nonsensical behavior and still making it clear which one you are on.



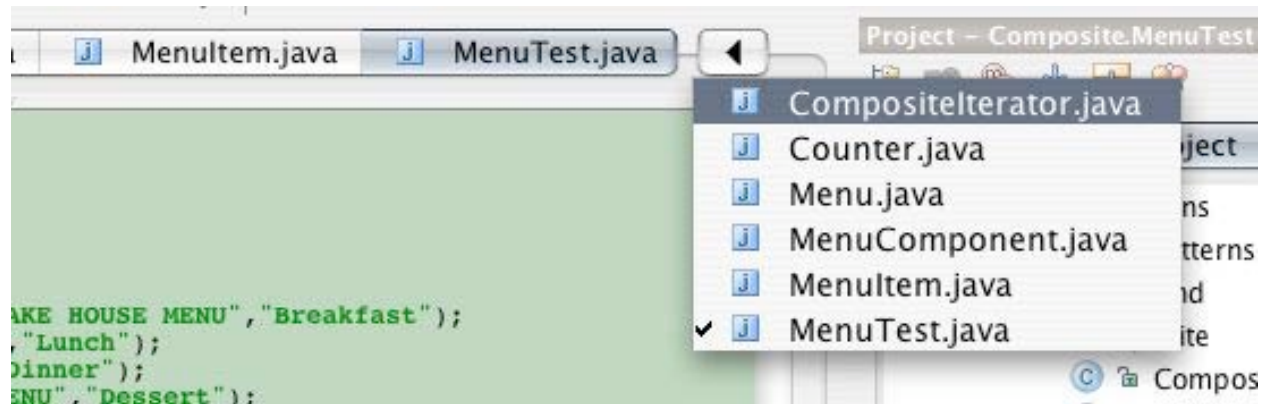
Shadows in the UI Elements

I've often wondered why, when cross-platform programs have identical functionality implemented identically on Windows, Linux and Mac OS X, I always manage to notice things when using the program on my Mac that I never noticed in MONTHS of using it for hours a day on Windows. A good example is Java IDEs. IntelliJ, Eclipse, Netbeans and JBuilder all run on the Mac now. I use IntelliJ all day, every day at work, on Windows. Sometimes I use it some more on my Mac at night. All IDEs are cluttered messes with tons of functionality crammed onto a screen that is never, ever big enough.



But things never seem so bad on the Mac. There are in fact real reasons for this. I'm convinced that it is due to the intense three-dimensionality of the Mac UI elements (buttons, windows, menu text). Take window shadows...the shadows are VERY deep and appear on all three sides of the window, thus making the window appear to float quite high above the window beneath it. All windows, whether menus, sheets, dialogs or standalone, are shadowed.

On XP, the shadows are very subtle and appear on only two sides. As far as I know, they are only available on menus. You don't even notice them if you aren't looking. In fact, they are largely worthless, because of their subtlety. Everything on XP still looks flat, in spite of the big fat start button and menu bars.



The result of the deep three-dimensionality of the Mac ui elements is that it is much easier to determine what information is relevant. This saves time, brain cycles and visual stress. That in turn increases my productivity. This is not "eye candy" as some folks pejoratively label it...it really does have serious utility.

On Dock Poofs and Genie Bottles

Do I need 'em? Nope. Do I like 'em? Yup. Not only is my Mac easier and less stressful to use than my Windows box, it's lots more fun. I'm not fond of people with boards up their butts, so why do want my computer to act like a stuffed shirt? My ancient dual 867 G4 handles it all just fine, so why not?

.MAC and iSync

This is a really cool thing. I prefer to keep my address book local in order to take advantage of integration with other programs. But it's nice to be able to access it from the web as well (I like to have my cake and eat it too). I once developed a procedure to sync my Yahoo address book with my local m

Mac one, but that was just one more thing that I had to remember to do, and needless to say, it didn't get done often enough to actually keep perfect synchronization. With a .mac account, every time I update my local address book, my .mac address book is updated as well. Always perfectly in sync and available to me anywhere. And so USEFUL...like at christmas time when I spent my lunch hour sending iCards.

I have hundreds of carefully organized bookmarks, and I'm always wanting to look at a page-that-I-know-I-bookmarked-at-home, from work. With .mac, my Safari bookmarks are exported to my iDisk, and viewable via an html page from any computer that is on the internet. Very useful, and always up to date

I do hope that Apple decides to lower the price a bit, and I'd like to see them generalize sync into a back-up tool that I could use between any files and any discs, rather than just a small selection of files to my iDisk.

A Few Words about the Dock

I know that the Mac OS X dock takes lots of heat, and some of it valid. But I use the Dock and I like it. I have only a very few application launchers left in my Dock, just the ones that I use almost every day. All other apps are launched via QuickSilver.

I turned off the magnification because I think it's bad UI design. It causes icons to dynamically change their positions and that makes it hard to aim accurately for something. Cute, but every miss causes time wastage, and

since I use relatively large icons anyway, it's kind of redundant.

I pin the Dock to the right hand corner of the screen and show dim icons for hidden applications using an application called TinkerTool. Pinning the Dock in the lower right has the added advantage of pinning the trashcan into the lower right-hand corner.

I like that you can put just about anything in the Dock, application icons, folders, links etc. I do wish that when objects that do not have unique icons are dumped in the Dock (folders, links), that a permanent label, rather than just a disappearing tool tip could be affixed to it. For something that you really, really want there permanently, it is possible to change the icon. I think it's too much trouble, and since I mostly use QuickSilver (and hopefully eventually Spotlight) to launch things, there's not a lot of benefit to loading up the dock anyway.

If you drag a folder to the Dock, clicking opens a finder window to the folder, click and hold opens the folder contents in menu style.

Anything that you drag to the Dock becomes a link and dragging it off the Dock results in the disappearance of a link, not your original file. Logical, just the way it should be. See my comments about the Finder Sidebar; they apply here as well.

Among the most on-going frustrating aspects of Windows, is the time that I waste trying the Windows taskbar to cooperate with me. I could write an entire paper on what a horror of interface design that piece of rubbish is.

Have you ever tried to find the grab handle to drag it from one edge of the screen to another? That will send you on an adventure that'll make you wish you never touched the thing.

The lock feature is the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen. Isn't that why we save a configuration?

And why, with the taskbar on the left of the screen, manually widened and locked, does it revert to its original width upon reboot?

Here again, dragging an icon off the taskbar, leaves a link on your desktop that you then have to clean up. Again see my comments about the Finder Sidebar. They apply here as well.

Icons come in only two sizes: small and large. And why on earth is the icon size changed as a toggle on a primary menu entry called "View" instead of on the properties tab???? Does anyone really change icon sizes on the fly? If they do, I bet they are few and far between. Every time I set up a new machine, I have to hunt for this setting.

If you want to open a folder as a menu, you have to create a new toolbar with the folder on it. Otherwise dragging the folder to the taskbar and clicking on it opens an explorer window. Behaviorally, the same as the Mac, but implemented with two different configurations, one of which is totally unintuitive.

No wonder when I look at Windows users around me, few have changed their taskbar to anything away from the default (other than to put some launcher icons onto it). Plenty don't even know you CAN change it.

Built-in Fax and PDF Output

I have actually used both of these features. They both work fine and are conveniently located on the print dialog. The logic behind putting them both on the print dialog makes sense to me in that they are both output forms. Some users may not think to look for faxing on the print dialog though, and perhaps a case could be made for them belonging on the context menu.

Windows XP has built-in faxing, but it's not installed by default. I know of no built-in way to print PDF output.

Some people say that faxing is basically useless, but it isn't. Plenty of businesses have required either faxed or snail mailed hard-copy documents from me, but were not willing to accept an email document. Don't know why...I only know what people require me to provide.

Some Things that I Needed to Change

OS X is not perfect so I needed to look to third-party software for a few things that I can't live without.

1) Virtual Desktops- I bought CodeTek VirtualDesktop Pro this within a week or so of getting my Mac. I can't live without this functionality. Exposé even works within a virtual desktop.



2) Window shading, Always-on-Top, Maximize Vertical and Maximize Horizontal window controls. - WindowShade X from Unsanity provides the first two. Haven't found the others anywhere yet. I also think that the current maximize scheme sucks. There should be an option to maximize to full size, no matter how much space it wastes. Wasting space or not should be my choice.

3) Even my cat looked at that one-legged mouse and said "WTF"? No problem, OS X works great with any multi-button mouse. Button two maps flawlessly to ctrl-click. I do miss the Unix ability to simultaneously select and copy on the first mouse button. It would be nice if I hadn't had to pay for the Apple mouse in the first place. Now I'm using a 5 button Contour ergonomic mouse and it has been splendid. Two of the buttons are programmed to control Exposé.

4) Menus - I still hate menus, especially since I have so many programs on my machine that the menus can get rather long. Just more scraping and scanning and that adds up to wasted time. I could open a terminal window and type "open whatever.app". But why? Besides, I'd like to have browser bookmarks included in menus where relevant, and when opening a document, I only want to concern myself with its name, not the application that will open it (unless other than the default). There are a number of fantastic launcher apps available. I use QuickSilver. It indexes all of my apps and bookmarks and with a hot key I can bring up the dialog, type a couple of letters of the app name or file or bookmark description that I want and it shows up on a list. Hit return and it opens. Much faster than scraping a menu or opening terminal. I've recently read the full PDF from upcoming Spotlight, and I'm getting more and more that Spotlight will replace QuickSilver once the Tiger marching in!



5) Terminal sucks due to lack of tabs and the ability to store logon configurations. It's scarcely better than the Windows command prompt in that respect. I like KDE's Konsole application for its tabs and stored configurations, which include not only the server name, but the login directory and whether I want a login shell or not, but wanted an Aqua application. So far, iTerm seems to do the job.

6) Address Book needs a phone dialer (another reason why I want my address book to be local). There are some plug-ins available, but I've had trouble with them all. I use a menubar application called iAddressX. Now, once Spotlight comes, and lets me search my address book without opening it, I'll be looking again for a dialer plugin (unless Apple decides to provide it).

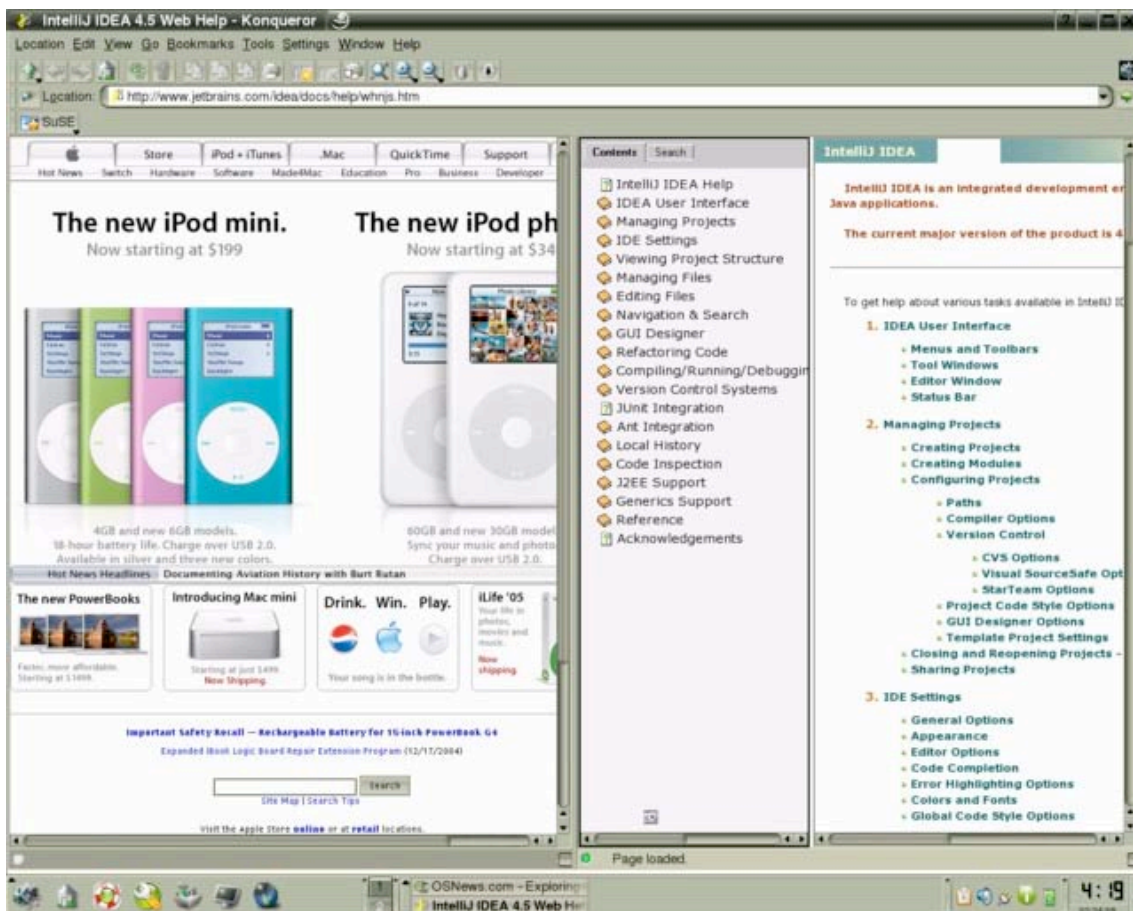
7) Safari is nice but not adequate. I still use it as my default browser because:

- It opens faster for me than any of the others.
- .Mac bookmark syncing is too useful to live without.
- most of the sites that I frequent work fine.

I have trouble sometimes with sites that have coded some nonsense in the pages to restrict usage to the few browsers that the writer wanted to bother testing on. The User Agent changer (available via the Debug menu, which you can enable in TinkerTool) doesn't always solve the problem.

I wish the toolbar were user-configurable. I've recently discovered a hack on VersionTracker called SafariButtons that adds a new tab and a print button. I'm trying it out now. It's preferable to the manual plist hacking that I've been doing to get a new tab button. I've also added some JavaScript bookmarks for MailTo and Up (chop off the last piece of the URL and go to the resultant url). I know that Up can also be accomplished by command-clicking the window title and selecting the desired parent, but my Up hack is faster.

Frankly, I wish Apple would just dump KHTML and install Gecko and be done with it. I received a comment from a programmer that there are some feasibility problems with this. OK, I haven't seen the code. I just wish that I didn't have to keep multiple browsers around.



Though I like Firefox a lot on Windows, I don't care for it much on the Mac. The UI is inconsistent with the rest of OS X, and it has some extremely annoying quirks. If I need an alternate browser that works, I use Camino.

I still miss the split-window browsing that Konqueror had. If the Camino folks want to win me back at least part time, all they need to do is implement this feature. I doubt that we'll see it from Apple, since they probably deem it too complex for their "target audience". There's nothing like it if you want to have multiple pages open for side by side comparisons, or have one page open as a reference while working in another one. Flipping back and forth between multiple tabs is too much work, and so is the alternative of opening multiple windows and manually resizing them to fit on the screen. I've been told that Opera implements this feature. I'll check out the recent version. I've had too many crashes with Opera in the past and have always ended up throwing it off my system. But maybe things have improved....

Some Concerns

Apple has always concerned itself with making computers easy to use. I hope that now that more of us geek-types are using Macs, that they won't ignore the possibility of adding features that power users need/want. Why, after all, can't, or more importantly, why *shouldn't*, interfaces to advanced features be well-designed and easy to use?

Consistency and integration between applications has always been a prime concern of Apple users. At one time, applications that didn't conform to the traditional "look and feel" were more or less shunned by the user community. Now, with the advent of Unix-based Mac OS X, we are being flooded with X11 applications, and cross-platform java and even QT applications (not in itself a bad thing of course). However, virtually none of these applications interoperate truly well (or at all) with many of the features that I described above. Text clippings seldom work, or they work in only one direction. Drag and drop is severely limited. The services menu is nonexistent or if present, nothing, even general purpose items, are actually available. Either these applications will be shunned like their predecessors were, or people will start to ignore the features that make a Mac unique, in favor of the least-common-denominator features that applications constructed in these disparate tool sets share. Both possibilities are unattractive. The only hope that I can see is for Mac users to learn how great the features of the UI are and demand consistency. Then we need for Macs to become pervasive enough, that developers will see value in making Mac versions of their applications that truly "fit in".

The Mac IS different. To get your money's worth, you have to "think different(ly)". How many people will actually bother? Especially if they get a Mac for home just because they've been told that it doesn't get viruses, and have to continue to use Windows at work. If people don't learn to use the unique features of the Mac and pressure software manufacturers to make their Mac versions conform to the UI requirements, then what ultimately differentiates a Mac from everything else out there? Or more directly, will Apple themselves pay less attention to these features in a possible quest for mass appeal? An alternative to Windows is absolutely necessary, and Apple has a great shot at it. But we want something that is truly different from Windows, not just Windows sans viruses (for now anyway).

Everyone at sometime can benefit from a good help system. Pre- Mac OS X users often rave about how great the Help system was. Not anymore. The Mac OS X help system is an abomination, of which Steve should truly be ashamed. It's slow, it crashes, and most damning, the information that it provides is more often than not, completely useless. What exactly does this mean?

Conclusion

I'm sure that everyone has heard the old saying, "*Mac for Productivity, Unix for Development, and Windows for Solitaire*". My experience has shown me that at least for my needs, the Mac is not only for productivity, but for development as well. Windows? Well, some things never change.

Books

Leo Laporte's 2005 Mac Gadget Guide Reviewed by Eddie Hargreaves



Author: Leo Laporte

<http://www.quepublishing.com/authors/bio.asp?a=0a77f06d-5b2b-4bc3-93a4-10f70ab660cf>

Todd Stauffer

<http://www.quepublishing.com/authors/bio.asp?a=0eae0a5c-6a72-4cf4-b7fe-0e835b26bfa5>

Publisher: Que Publishing

<http://www.quepublishing.com>

Booksite: <http://www.quepublishing.com/title/0789731746>

Published: November 2004

Pages: 290

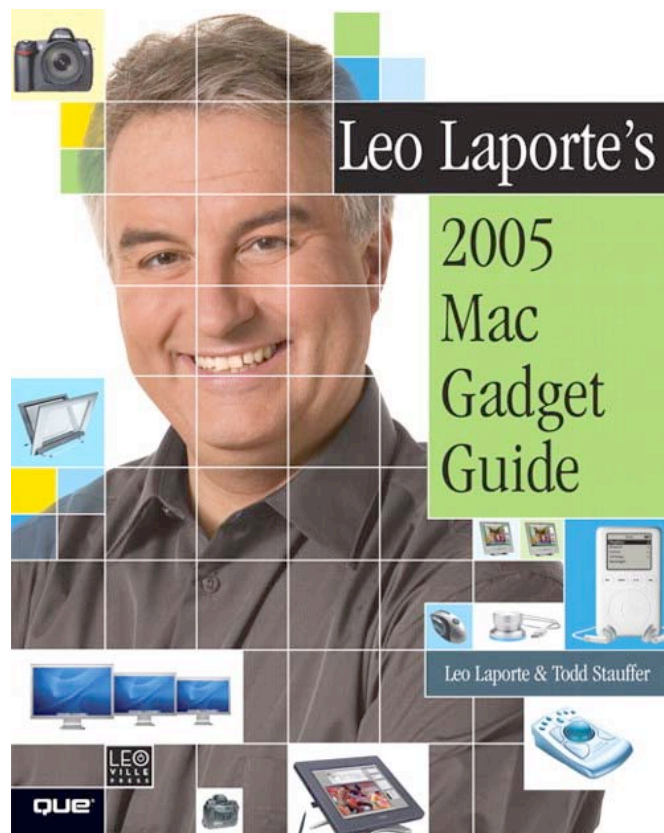
Price: \$25 USD, \$36 CND, £22 GBP, €20.50

ISBN: 0789731746

Level of experience: Beginning to Intermediate

Strengths: Gives Mac users an idea of what the best products in any given category are; beautiful full-color pictures; pedigreed authors.

Weaknesses: Likely to be outdated quickly; some gadget recommendations not too Mac-friendly.



There are a lot of gadgets in the technology world. Some work well with Macs and others don't. Some companies advertise their products' compatibility despite poor implementation while others wash their hands of the platform even though their product actually works quite well with it.

Leo Laporte's 2005 Mac Gadget Guide aims to not only help Mac users determine which gadgets are good, but which ones will work well with their computer of choice.

As the former host of TechTV's "The Screen Savers" and "Call for Help," and "The Gadget Guy" for "Live with Regis and Kelly," Leo Laporte knows his gadgets. And co-author Todd Stauffer has written many Macintosh-related books and contributed to numerous Macintosh publications. Although everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, Leo's can definitely be respected as an informed one.

The full-color book is organized into 12 chapters that represent categories for all the devices. Each is color-coded to allow readers to easily flip through the book to a specific section:

- Input Devices - keyboards, mice, trackballs, etc.
- Storage
- Video and Audio
- Printers and Scanners
- Networking and Wireless
- Digital Video and Accessories
- Digital Cameras and Accessories
- Webcams and Spy Cameras
- PDA's and Smart Phones
- Audio Players and iPod Gadgets
- Gadgets for Portable Macs
- Desktop Mac and Home Gadgets
- Home Audio/Video Gadgets

Along with a photo and description for each gadget, its manufacturer's web site is listed, along with the product's MSRP. Peppared throughout each category are "Leo's Picks," which are rewarded with a slightly longer description.

The descriptions are useful, if short. Don't expect even the length of a Macworld magazine review, much less ArsTechnica. The photos are often larger than their accompanying text, but they are high-quality and full color, so the book is quite enjoyable to look at and easy to flip through quickly.

Due to the rapid pace of the technology world, a gadget guide can get outdated quickly. New models are announced often, with more features and/or lower prices. As of this writing, Apple has announced new iPod mini and iPod photo models with adjusted pricing. So although this book is labeled 2005, I wouldn't pick it up any later than July.

And although this is called a Mac Gadget Guide, there are a number of products listed that don't have great compatibility. Leo's Pick for Smartphones is Samsung's SPH-i500, which doesn't offer Bluetooth connectivity and doesn't have great Mac-compatibility. It is noted, though, when gadgets require 3rd-party software for compatibility.

Overall, if you're a Mac user (you're reading this, right?) that's interested in gadgets, and don't want to search out lengthy reviews online, you'll enjoy this guide. At least for a few months.

The CSS Anthology: 101 Essential Tips, Tricks & Hacks Reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Rachel Andrew
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Booksite: <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/cssant1/>
\$40 USD, \$58 CND, £21 GBP, €32

Published: November and December 2004

Pages: 376

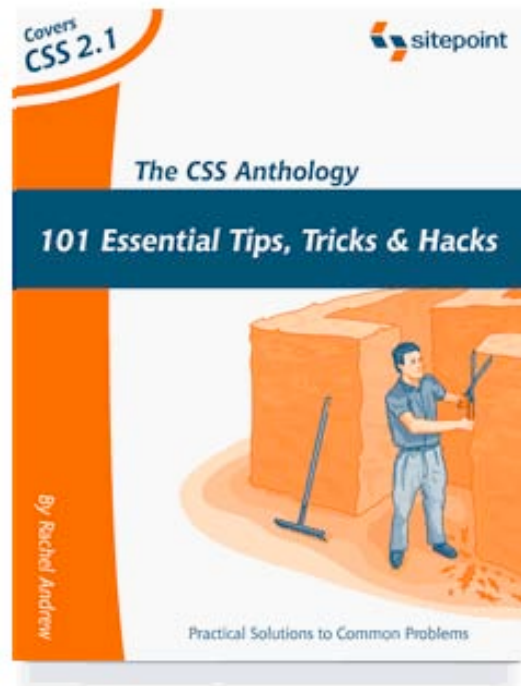
ISBN: 0957921888

You will need to know Cascading Style Sheets somewhat, before opening this book up.

There is a code download site for chapters 2-9, but you have to buy the book to get the code.

Strengths: Easy to understand and follow. Cross-platform.

Weaknesses: None found.



The CSS Anthology: 101 Essential Tips, Tricks & Hacks by Rachel Andrew is a book designed to meet the needs of those who produce websites using – or who would like to use - Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) as part of their Web design.

An anthology is either an assortment or collection of selected literary pieces or passages or works of art or music. Rachel Andrew has collected a couple of year’s worth of “lessons learned” and compiled them into a book and apparently it has become quite popular because it is in its 2nd printing of the first edition with very few typos and all the examples work.

If you want to download the sample code for each of the chapters 2-9, then you will need to purchase the book and basically register to and use a word from a chapter in the book as a key to download the samples.

The CSS Anthology is, as the footer says, Practical Solutions to Common Problems> Rachel Andrew does this by making practically every entry a “How Do I...?” – and then proceeds to answer the questions with both a

knowledgeable approach based on work she has done in the past – and shows meticulous examples of how to go about completing the how-do-Is.

As we are revamping our website and using CSS, I have marked quite a number of pages in this book already. I haven't come across all 101 or 103 tips tricks and hacks yet, but I'm on my way.

The book is not intended for a sit-down and read late into the night kind of book. It is more of a practicum process – but I went through it as if it were a sit-down kind of book, because most of what is in the pages is new to me.

Rachel Andrew can guide me through the web jungles any day. This is a great book that can be put to use immediately by those of us who have been around awhile but are not afraid to learn something new every day.

I found most intriguing the discussions on who things work on different platforms – and how to get around them so CSS will work even on cantankerous old browsers. That alone is worth opening this book for.

For me, the meat is located back in Chapter 8 on Positioning and Layout. After all, that is what CSS is all about, isn't it?

Learn how to make standards-compliant CSS that plays nice with just about any browser. The last chapter even has some neat workarounds where things work well in Mozilla but has to be coded for just about all the other browsers.

But you have to get the book to find out more about it. Only the first 4 chapters have been PDFed for download.

If you do any web design at all, this book will be of immense use and becomes useful right after the introduction.

Excel: The Missing Manual Reviewed by Robert Pritchett

POGUE PRESS™
O'REILLY®

Author: Matthew MacDonald

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/836>

Booksite:

<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/exceltmm/index.html>

<http://www.missingmanuals.com/>

\$40 USD, \$58 CND, £28.50 GBP, €36 EU

Published: December 2004

Pages: 792

ISBN: 0596006640

For anyone who uses Excel for a living.

Strengths: Comprehensive coverage of Excel 2003.

Weaknesses: None found.



Excel: The Missing Manual by Matthew MacDonald is intended for those folks who use XP Pro and Excel 2003. The “Mac version” is in *Office 2004 for Macintosh: The Missing Manual*, which I have not received yet. But don’t let that put you off. I spent nearly 1 and ½ months going through this book. There is a lot of great information covered here – and that is indicative of one of the most successful applications ever developed first on the Mac and then ported to the WinTel environment – and Mathew MacDonald acknowledges its roots – before he goes on to discuss why certain bugs are intentional (Lotus 1-2-3 compatibility) and the differences between the beginning dates in 1900 between the Mac and Wintel versions of Excel.

I really hope the Mac-based version in the Office 2004 book is as good as this one. I marked quite a number of pages and just kept saying, “Wow!” with everything I was learning. There is almost a David Pogueish sense of humor also spread throughout the book that just makes this approach so “un-stuffy”. I love it!

The book may be heavy, but the contents are not heavy reading. There are eight parts including the Appendix. As in most well-written books, we begin at the beginning with Worksheet Basics, then migrate into Formulas and Functions, Organizing Worksheets, Charts and Graphics, Advanced Data Analysis, Sharing Data with the rest of the World, Programming Excel, and in the Appendixes, the 3 parts consist of Getting Help in Excel, Customizing Excel and a Quick Menu Reference, before ending with a hefty Index.

By all means, take time to get into the Missing Manuals link above and check out the “rest of the book”.

A career could be made just by being expert in most of the chapters – come to think of it, many have! What I discovered was learning how to use the Analysis ToolPak, how to manipulate text, understanding how Excel interpolates dates and times and how to figure out how it knows how to sum days between dates. I learned the differences between comparing Groups vs. comparing Lists and using both at the same time and how to use automatic subtotaling. I found out about using Office Online to add templates and protecting my spreadsheets at the workbook and worksheet levels and on how to **not** use password protection. I now know how to properly add pictures and resize them without distortion. I also learned how to use Excel with Access and other databases and I discovered a whole chapter on how to get Excel to interoperate with eXtensible Markup Language (XML) and another on how to create worksheets so they can be webified and interactive online.

One section I found most curious, and that is on how text can be manipulated in formulas to either hide or obfuscate information. This kept throwing me back into encryption-think mode. Maybe there could be more on how Excel is used in intelligence circles.

The last part of the book gets into automation using macroing, and programming using Visual Basic for Applications.

I found this book to be masterfully done and Matthew MacDonald is an excellent instructor, if his authoring is any indication – and I think he is.

This book is definitely a keeper.

Google Hacking: For Penetration Testers Reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Johnny Long

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/1918>

Authors site: <http://johnny.ihackstuff.com/>

Syngress Publishing

Booksites:

<http://www.syngress.com/Help/Press/?prid=34>

<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/1931836361/index.html>

\$45 USD, \$67 CDN, £20 GBP, €37 EU

Published: December 2004

Pages: 524

ISBN: 1931836361

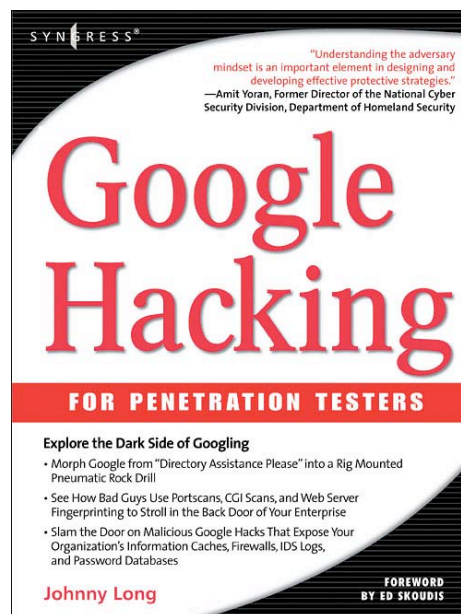
For anyone interested in keeping his or her computer-generated information secure.

Strengths: Exposes how Google can be used maliciously – and what to do about it. Contains incredibly balanced (not too little or too many) revelations.

Weaknesses: None found – except for maybe the "missing" Appendix C.

Dig Deeper: Google Hack Honeypot -

<http://gh.sourceforge.net/>



Google Hacking for Penetration Testers by Johnny Long is a book intended for Security personnel that are supposed to be protecting their computer systems from intrusion. What it provides is a known process for finding vulnerabilities via the Internet into both web pages and Intranets and discusses methodologies to stave off intruders.

Johnny Long did a great job cleansing his graphics, being careful not to reveal too much detail, yet exposing the weaknesses (or strengths for crackers) of the Google search processes using simple *filetype*, *inurl* and other search procedures.

How tight is your system from sensitive information leakage? Find out quickly, using Johnny Long's book on whether you have exposed Social Security Numbers, credit card information or other social engineering data (config files, Email boxes, registry keys, password files, etc.) that could be used to penetrate and expose your system to the world.

There are tools available such as Sensepost's Wikto that can be used to automate reconnaissance activities using the Google query API (Application Program Interface). And James C. Foster has a chapter in there on automating Google searches.

The Appendix has two articles by Peter Herzog on Professional Security Testing and an introduction to web application security by Matt Fisher. Appendix C is missing, but is referred to in the Table of Contents as the Syngress Solutions Site at <http://www.syngress.com/solutions> as a location online to access penetration tools – but registration is required - and buying a book gets you in.

Every chapter in this book follows the Syngress Publishing format with a Summary, Solutions Fast Track, and Frequently Asked Questions. Many have Links to Sites for digging even deeper. Most chapters also have sample listings of queries after discussions on a topic.

There are 12 chapters covering; Google Searching Basics, Advanced Operators, Google Hacking Basics, Preassessment, Network mapping, Locating Exploits and Finding Targets, Ten Simple Security Searches That Work, Tracking Down Web Servers< Login Portals and Network hardware, usernames, passwords, and Secret Stuff, Oh My!, Document Grinding and Database Digging, Protecting Yourself from Google hackers and previously discussed, Automating Google Searches. Oh and I did bookmark the heck out of this book. There is a wealth of information here and I feel this book will become another Security Classic.

Using the protection techniques published in this book should also help protect you from other search engines as well.

What did I learn? Google maps our environments pretty well. Probably too well. Using this book I have learned how to limit Google's far-reaching fingers and how to keep it out of the information cookie jar.

This is a "must have" book if you have any concerns whatsoever regarding your system's exposure to the Internet.

Home Hacking Projects for Geeks Reviewed by Ted Bade



Authors: Tony Northrup

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/1798>

Eric Faulkner

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/1797>

Author's website: <http://www.homehacking.com/>

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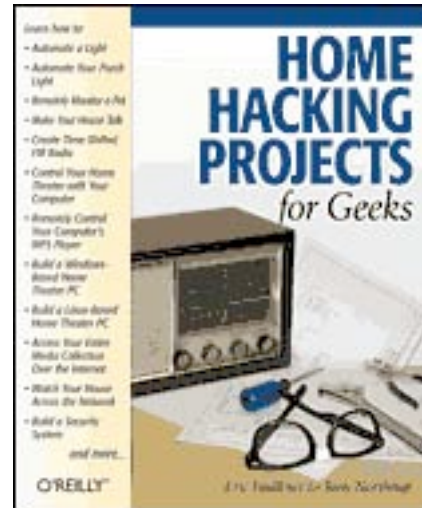
<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/homehpf/index.html>

Published: December 2004

Pages: 336

\$30 USD, \$44 CND, £21 GBP, €27

ISBN: 0596004052



Experience needed: Some electronic skills (such as soldering) and some computer programming and coding skills. This book is for the real geek who can (and is not afraid of) doing things to and with their computer. Since the coding examples are done for Windows PCs you will need to know how to translate the code to Mac or find a suitable canned solution.

Strengths: Interesting projects, great pictures, tables, and coding examples that make doing the project simple.

Weaknesses: Really not written for the Mac. Doesn't discuss the variety of already made software solutions. Some of the projects can be a bit tough for the average geek!

Home Hacking Projects for Geeks is just what the title says. With a heavy emphasis on “for

Geeks". This book provides a number of useful home automation projects that can be built and used in any home. While the information is useful, you will need to have some solid coding and hardware experience to do all the projects.

This book provides detail instructions on how to build and implement a variety of home automation and security projects. This book explains not only how to build the electronics, but also how to code and/or setup your computer to access the hardware. Code examples usually are presented in both Window's and Linux versions. You don't have to write code or build all the projects components. Many of them are off the shelf type items.

You'll find instructions for about 13 projects in this book. The projects are broken into three sections: Home Automation, Home Entertainment, and Home Security. Projects include things like automating a light, monitoring a pet, remotely controlling your computer, building a Windows or Linux-based home theater PC, time shifting (aka recording) FM radio, accessing your home media via the Internet, and home security systems.

Each project is presented in a similar fashion, with an introduction (including information on the cost, difficulty of the project, and approximate time to complete), overview, directions for how to do the project, how to do the coding (with sample code), and finally a wrap up. The descriptions are well written and easy to understand. There are loads of pictures and diagrams to help familiarize the reader with information they might not be familiar with, as well as many tables of information.

The projects presented in this book range from pretty basic, to quite complex and elaborate. Although I was hoping to find a few projects in this book that would tantalize me into building something, I didn't. Several of the basic projects I have already implemented or have considered doing. The more elaborate projects I found interesting, but not something I would want to spend my time and money building. Your opinion might be a lot different, especially if you are interested in building projects for yourself.

The book is an interesting read. If you are interested in home automation or home security, you will find lots of information that can add to your education in this book. I would recommend this book for anyone who want to play around with home automation/security and doesn't mind doing a little of the work. Again, for Mac users, I must stress, the examples aren't for Macs, so you'll need to know how to convert the projects to the Macintosh environment. But if you are really a geek, this shouldn't pose any real problem ;-)

Internet Annoyances: How to Fix the Most ANNOYING Things about Going Online Reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Preston Gralla

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/1202>

Booksite:

<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/internetannoy/index.html>

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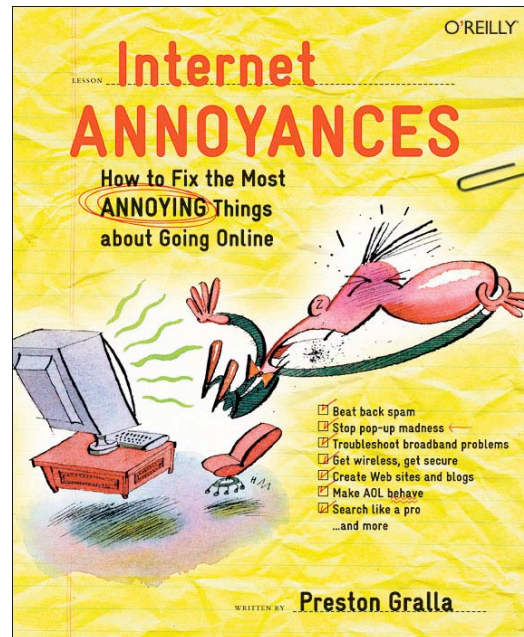
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Strengths: Pretty much covers everything wrong with the Internet.

Weaknesses: Wintel-centric.



Internet Annoyances: How to Fix the Most ANNOYING Things about Going Online by Preston Gralla isn't just a diatribe against all things wrong with the Internet, but a "fix -it" kind of book for those who are suffering from WinTellian systems that go online. Yes, that's right, this book doesn't say much about issues a few Mac systems might face (there just aren't that many). It most definitely comes flavored from the Wintellian aromatic experience (it really stinks).

The book is a compilation of around 300 Annoyances and Fixes garnered over years (or months) of issues either Preston Gralla has experienced personally, or submitted to him by a vast readership of his magazines, columns and online activities.

After reading this book, no wonder many folks in the Wintellian crowd are not going online anymore! It would appear that just about every way known to man to keep people offline has been cataloged here. Preston Gralla shows how to work around these nuisances – and yes, even the Mac environment can learn a thing or two from his efforts in making the online experience less stressful.

The mangled paperclips on many of the pages add atmosphere to the issues faced by those who attempt to use the Internet without adequate protection. The book is designed with the intent of helping us tool up with the proper body-armor before we step out into the wild west of the web.

There are 10 chapters covering Email and SPAM, Making the Connection, Wireless, Web Hosting Design and Blog, Browser, AOL, IM, Searching, Security and finally Shopping and Auction annoyances.

I personally discovered two processes for shortening URLs – snipurl and tinyurl, why it is not a good thing to accept Email in HTML format, how to track down SPAMmers, what hash-busting and SPAMmerwocky is, learned what my true Internet connection speed is, how to move favorites and bookmarks from one browser to another, how

Trillian and Gaim (for Macs) works with IM applications as universal Instant Messengers, Google toolbar alternatives, and how to turn off password memory in Internet Explorer so passwords don't get hijacked.

If you use a Mac (and I hope you do), most of these issues go away. A few still affect Macs, however, so I find this book on my "high-value" list.

Hardware

Chill Pak™ Reviewed by Marcy Aunspaugh and reported by Robert Pritchett



Developer: Dean Haglund

http://www.sci-fi-online.50megs.com/Interview/04-01-29_DeanHaglund.htm

Geek Chic

<mailto:chillpakbydean@chillpak.com><http://www.chillpak.com>

Released: December 22, 2004

\$20 USD PayPal purchase

Strengths: Low tech solution to high tech problem.

Weaknesses: Lasts about 1 hour with a hot WinTel portable.



When was the last time you used a portable that was too close to your privates? Did it yearn to burn? Did your flesh begin to smell like crispy critters? And was the portable too hot to pick up? Looking for a cool solution to a heated problem?

The Geek Chic Chill Pak is a modified blue-ice knee pack (see <http://www.painreliever.com/Knee+Ice+Packs.html> for example) designed to take the heat off the CPU through a gel-filled, moisture-proof “sweat proof”, white covered sealed-sleeve bag that sits under a portable computer and through thermodynamics, takes the heat off for a while – until the gel warms up in about an hour or so. So 2 hours in the freezer nets about 1 hour of possibly overclocked CPU relief.

Thankfully this test was done with a portable WinTel unit that really cooks the lap of a gal that really uses it around the clock. The tester was convinced to put the Chill Pak to use, but she found it to be rather – um – unchic. Even frozen, it tended to act as an unstable base on a surface because of unevenness in the flat-pack bag itself and she was not amused. She claims it also only lasted about one hour. I told you she had a hot machine! And she has burned her lap with it in the past.

We didn't test it with Mac portables because they tend to be considerably cooler by far. 100+ Watts for a PC portable vs. 40 or so Watts for a Mac portable. That is a big whoppin' difference!



That very well could be her machine here and that is exactly how we had to keep the Chill Pak. Why? Because the vents were being covered if we moved the pack further under the machine. And it did cover the hottest part of the machine and she did notice that it was considerably cooler – for a while.

Did the machine run any faster? No, it still sat in the same place cooling its heels.



Notice how the machine really cannot be used on a flat surface when the pack is applied like this? Used as in the first picture the front edge of the machine can be on the tabletop, but because of the Chill Pak dynamics, the computer wobbles. That kind of distraction is not good for a programmer.

The unit really needs some kind of device to hold it in place. Velcro pads maybe?

Anyhow, the Chill Pak is a blue-ice invention inspired by - you guessed it - a knee injury - and reports of male sterilization caused by too much heat in those special private parts. That wasn't so much of a concern for our tester. She was more concerned about burning her lap again.

The claim by the inventor is that the machines run faster when their ambient temperature is lowered. Good in theory and temporary in real practice, but it is the thought that counts. Let's say you want to keep cool too and then have the Chill Pak in your lap with the portable riding on top of it? This would be very nice during the hot months of the year. But if you have a portable on your lap for long hours, you too need to get out more.

Look, the idea makes sense and off the shelf ice packs make good technology even better with them being in moisture-proof bags. And there are instructions on the bag that do say not to cover battery casings or cover vent openings. If your battery pack is packing heat, you have other problems that may entail returning the battery unit to the manufacturer!

Does the cooling action really help the CPU to run faster and jump higher? Well, maybe. Think of it as a modified cooling tower designed to keep the owner cooler. And if you go beyond the

30-day return guarantee, you can always use it as an ice pack, not so much for an injured portable, but for an injured person. You just won't get freezer burn!



DISC DAMAGE CONTROL

d_skin™
PROTECTIVE
DISC SKINS

d_skin, llc
2500 W Higgins road
Suite 1050
Hoffman estates, IL 60195
800-363-6064
<mailto:scratchfree@d-skin.com>
<http://www.d-skin.com>
http://www.d-skin.com/product_demo.html
\$6 USD for 5 in a tin. Also in 20, 50, 100-
packs.



Strengths: Nice protection to the vulnerable “scratch” side of laser-disc media.

Weaknesses: Too thick/wide for slot-loading systems. Intended for one-time-“permanent” use. Handle with care.



“End Disc Death forever” by Salespeak.

Derek Meier told me about this CD condom that protects discs and I laughed. He thought they were a great joke! I had an idea. Then we got CDs that were being damaged in shipment and I figured I ought to contact these guys and find out if their product would protect our shipments. The short story - the tins would work great! More on that later.

Now for the longer story. At first glance the d_skin™ sounds like a great idea. The unit protects the reading surface of a CD or DVD with one layer of see-through .005” thick film or Skin™ (yes, that’s correct, d_skin, llc trademarked the word “Skin”!) fused to an orange ring that snaps onto the edge of a disc with 8 LipLock™ snaps that grab the outer rim of the CD or DVD to hold on tight. They are intended to be “permanent”, and are not intended to be removed and installed on another CD or DVD after first use.

The d_skin disc protector does fit snugly as a 6th layer to an optical disc.

The downside is that these devices **can only be used** with tray-loading optical disc drives and **not** with slot-loaded systems. The added girth of the ring makes it a very tight fit and the tolerances on the slot machines are too close, so the protected discs won't get sucked

The market for these disc protectors would be for gamers, or music CD swappers. Apparently there is a *huge* market for these devices right now, and the company has created a multi-million dollar advertising campaign and distributed these \$1 USD-a-piece units the retail chains. This is relatively cheap insurance – unless you duped your CD to begin with.

The DVD-Rs and CD-Read-Writes are a little more sophisticated than the diagram shown to the right. (They have even more layers.)

The “killer –app” for the d_skin is, that perhaps these units will do a better job of protecting the CDs or DVDs from contaminants that could get into through the edge of the media and eat one or more of the other layers present in a CD or DVD. This warrants further study.

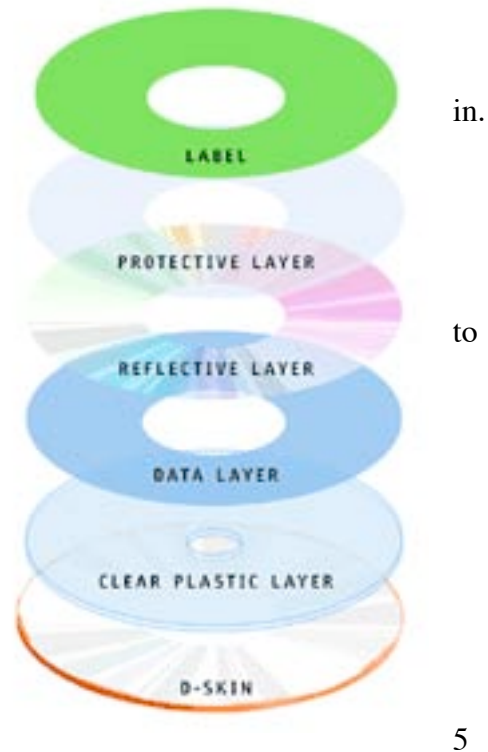
Now wouldn't it be smarter for the CD companies to make the CDs scratch-resistant to begin with (see the clear plastic layer to the right)? SONY and TDK have, on some of their media.

Your other choice is to purchase a scratch remover like the one I reviewed a few months ago, or learn to not put your CDs read-side down on any surface, and be sure and keep them in a cellophane-lined CD sleeve when not in use or use them as Frisbees™.

Maybe, just maybe, these CD condoms will protect a CD from being torn up in a CD carousel when they jump out of their seats – at least the first time. But then again, how much are those CDs worth to you?

And how utilitarian are these for the Macs? That depends on which generation of CD drives you own and use. Tray drives, no problem. Slot-loaders, forget it.

Because our CDs get shipped out via US mail, and the local post office just got a new mail-sorter, apparently made of 300-pound guerillas with baseball bats that beat the heck out of our CDs and/or run over the ink-covered surfaces (direct-print CDs) so they bubble due to heat issues (a hotplate maybe?) as they are run through the post office sorting gauntlet, this product will not do us much good there. An investigation is underway as to why this is happening to our CD distributions (not *macCompanion* CDs by the way). Maybe bubble-pack CD mailers might do a better job protecting them since the regular cardboard mailers apparently do not survive well going through this new mauling machine. (We got back an official US Post Office “Sorry”



envelope full of a half of a shredded mailer and two small pieces of a CD. Luckily the shredded letter inside had the name of whom the mailer was supposedly going to.)

Anyhow, back to the review. Use d_skins if you need to, for CDs that travel a lot. Occasional-use CDs won't need the disc protectors. However, a lot of these "Practice Safe CDs" are going to sell.

I've done a little research into other things that can also go wrong with CDs and DVDs. Stuff beyond scratches, like CD bronzing (heat and cold separation and bad chemistry), "Laser rot" and fungus that eats out all of the aluminum or other metal layers. As Officer Spock used to say, "Fascinating".

Dig Deeper

Caring and Feeding of CDs

<http://www.pcworld.idg.com.au/index.php/secid:3;id:461315701>

Scratches?

http://www.discgopod.com/information_repairguide_1.html

DVD Reflection Test

http://www.discgopod.com/information_repairguide_5.html

Media Physics and Characteristics

<http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node=CD-ROM>

They Won't Last Forever

See this link for media longevity issues:

<http://www.cd-info.com/CDIC/Industry/news/media-problem.html>

CD Bronzing

<http://foetusized.org/cdrot.html> (Pics)

<http://members.cox.net/surround/uhjdisc/bronze.htm>

Fungus eating CD and DVD Laser Rot

<http://www.lists.ufl.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0110&L=recmgmt-1&F=&S=&P=43207>

http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_328113.html?menu=

Other Possible Solutions

For surface enhancer sprays, try these:

<http://www.mapleshaderecords.com/tweaks/cdtreatments.php>

<http://www.photodon.com/cddvd.htm>

<http://www.cdplayright.com/Reviews/Burnworld/review.htm>

Corrosion Interceptors

<http://www.archivalsuppliers.com/news.html>

Or put the CDs in something like these:

<http://www.avery.com/uk1/main.jsp?action=product.Product&bct=1&bcn=01894080&pid=01894080>

http://www.proactionmedia.com/cd_dvd_sleeves.asp

Or when the CD or DVD is “beyond repair”, use this:

<http://www.maccompanion.com/archives/october2004/hardware/DVDCDRepair.html>

And for the label-side, try this:

http://www.riverproaudio.co.uk/riveracatalog/CD_DVD_COATERS.html

Kanguru QuickSilver 3.5" 120 GB High Speed External Hard Drive Reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Kanguru Solutions
1360 Main St.
Millis, MA 02054
508-376-4245
Fax: 508-376-4462
<mailto:sales@kanguru.com>
<http://www.kanguru.com>

Product:

<http://www.kanguru.com/comboquicksilver.html>

Released: February 3, 2005

Range from \$140 US (for 80GB) to \$600 USD (for 400GB)

Comes with: Carrying pouch, stand, USB cable, FireWire 400 cable, external power supply. Installation CD for Windows (Toast add-on for Macs).

Weight: 2 pounds.

Warranty: 1 year on parts, 90 days on labor.

Strengths: Cross-platform. USB/FireWire combo. Steel-cased. Horizontal or vertical.

Weaknesses: Requires external power supply.

Reviewed with iMac G5.

The revamped Kanguru QuickSilver High Speed External Hard Drive is a whisper-quiet FireWire drive that also happens to have a USB port sitting along side two FireWire jacks. What sets this unit apart from the competition is that it is advertised as a 7,200 RPM device instead of the usual 4,500 RPMs.

The CD that comes with the device has a backup software package from NDI for PCs, along with a nice carrying case, a USB and also a FireWire cable and the external power supply. With the NDI backup package I can go through a 3-step process to do backups using VPC7 and XP Pro and use the Kanguru QuickSilver as a dedicated external hard drive for that application if I wanted to.

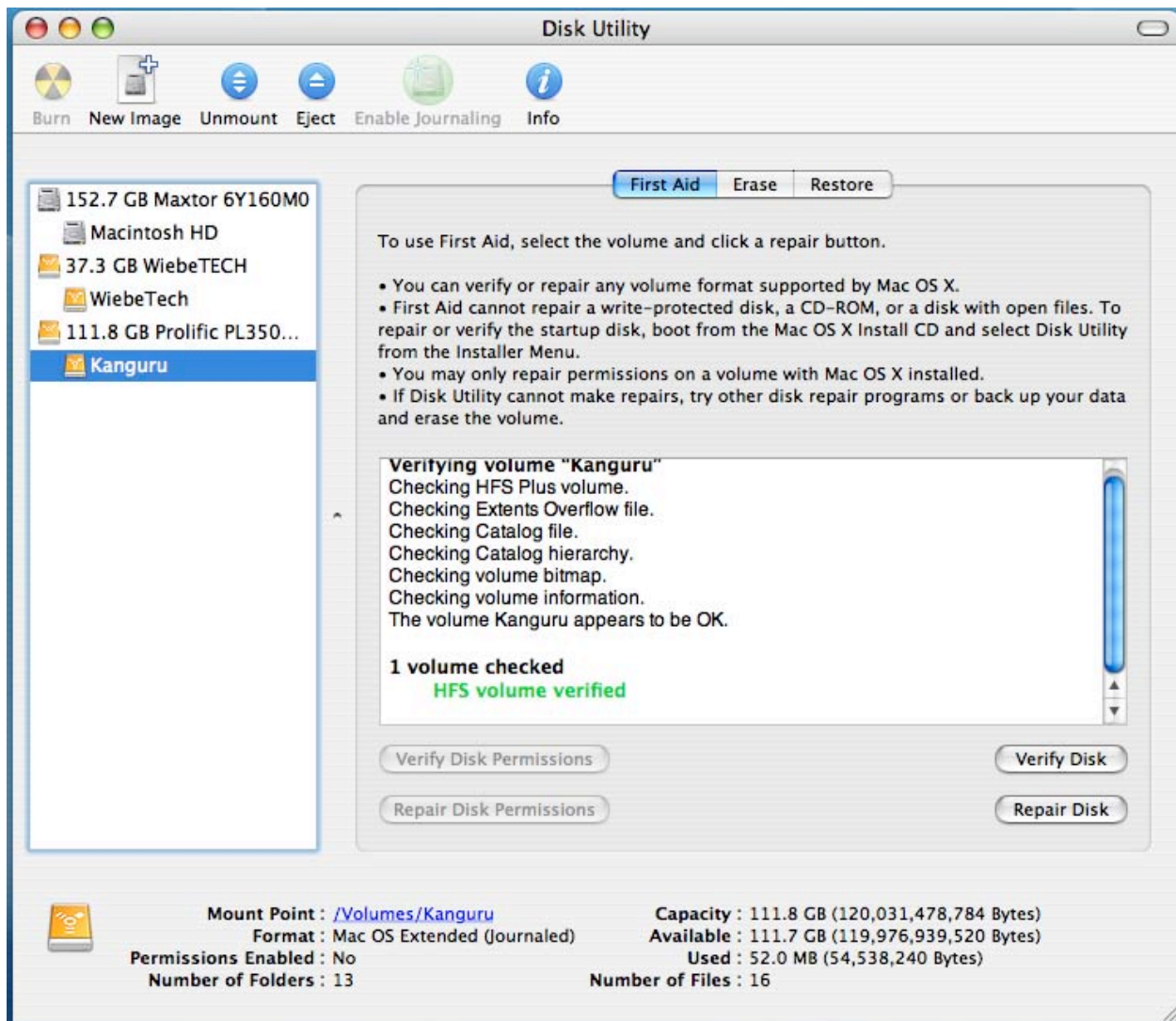
I noticed that the steel case has nubs for stacking.

The blue logo on the front of the drive is a blue LED faceplate.

The unit works with various Windows flavors, Linux above kernel 2.4.1 and with the Mac OS 9.1 and later.

The Kanguru Quicksilver also can handle 200 Gs of shock, but I wasn't going to test that. Suffice it to say that it is designed to handle light bumping. Just don't toss it across a room! Next, I show what comes up when I plugged the unit in and it wouldn't run for me out of the box. It had to be initialized first for Mac OS X.

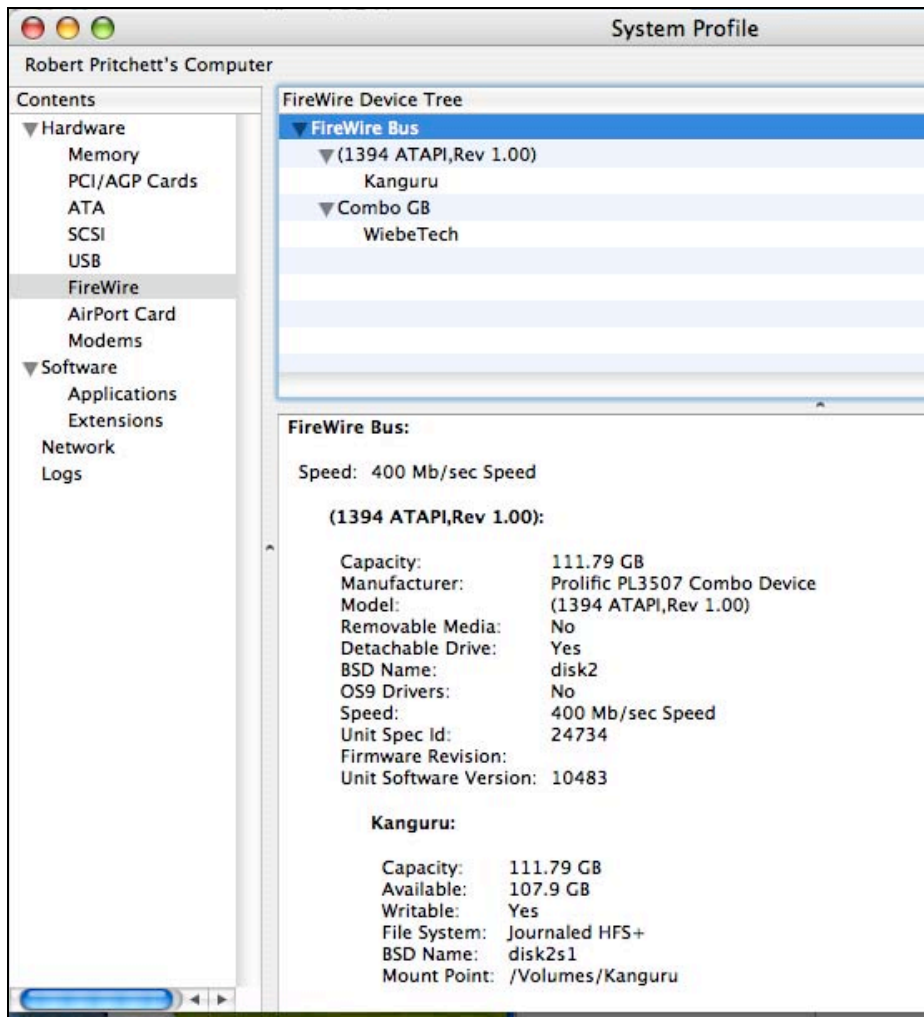




The Kanguru QuickSilver is backward-compatible to USB 1.1 with units with capacities from 80 GB to 400 GB and all running at 7200 RPM. Access time is 9ms with a transfer rate of 700-800 MB per minute with USB or 800-900 MB per minute with FireWire (based on a 1.75 GHz, PC with 256 MB RAM and 400 MHz bus). It took approximately 36 minutes to transfer 11+ GB from the WiebeTech drive over to the QuickSilver using the 400 Mbps FireWire ports using the copy/paste function. (Well, that is what the Copy dialogue box said. And I found a file that refused to get copied, so that stopped the transfers dead.)

After using the relatively lightweight 40 GB WiebeTech (see <http://www.maccompanion.com/archives/june2004/hardware.html#1>) I found the 2-pound, 7-3/4" x 5" x 1-1/4" 120 GB QuickSilver to be rather heavy in comparison. And unlike the WiebeTech that runs power off the FireWire port (and also can operate with FireWire 800), it requires the external power to operate.

The metal case really does do a nice job dissipating any heat.



If you are looking for an external drive that is not intended to fit in a pocket, but does handle FireWire 400, I think you will be as pleased as I am about the Kanguru QuickSilver.

Beholder 2.0 – Internet graphics image searches made easy.

Developer: Danny Espinoza of Mesa Dynamics

Contact: <mailto:info@mesadynamics.com>

Website: <http://www.mesadynamics.com/beholder.htm>

Shareware: \$20 USD; A trial version limited to one image saved per launch can be evaluated free of charge.

Freeware: Beholder Lite 1.01. [Not Tested]

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2 or later. Size 1.5 MB



Introduction

Although my graphic needs are not great, when I need an image I need it yesterday. <http://www.novadevelopment.com/Default.aspx?countryField=us>

Then, last year, my daughter told me about using the graphics search feature of Google to find images. It worked, but the selection (images, not resolution) was less interesting or useful than I liked. However, that wasn't all bad: the logo for this tips and shareware column was found in a Google search of the term *juggler*. Other software that I often use, such as my disk labeling tools, also come with sets of graphics, but all too often tied to a hard copy book with illegible thumbnail images that have document titles arrayed in an arcane alphanumeric sequence. Deciphering them is usually a waste of my time!

I not slamming such images; indeed, I see many of them effectively used in flyers and announcements around my community. Nevertheless, they are, for the most part, not for me! Over the last three or four years, most of these 'physical' graphics sources have left me dissatisfied. I've only found a few items that met my needs for visual richness, good taste, and my eclectic fancy for 'appropriate' design.

What I needed was an easier way to look for the graphics I needed for my reviews, non-technical documents, and to support my volunteer projects. Therefore, I welcomed the idea of being able to search the Internet, with a specialized graphics oriented search tool. So, behold, Beholder 2.0.

For purposes of this mini-review, prior to using this easy-to-install software, I decided that I would look for images...

- An image by the great artist Salvador Dali—dripping watches are great;
- A good image of a chef and images representing recipe collecting (my hobby); and
- A few 'better' images of a helium atom and wizards for my various business cards.

I confess I also browsed a lot.

What Beholder does...

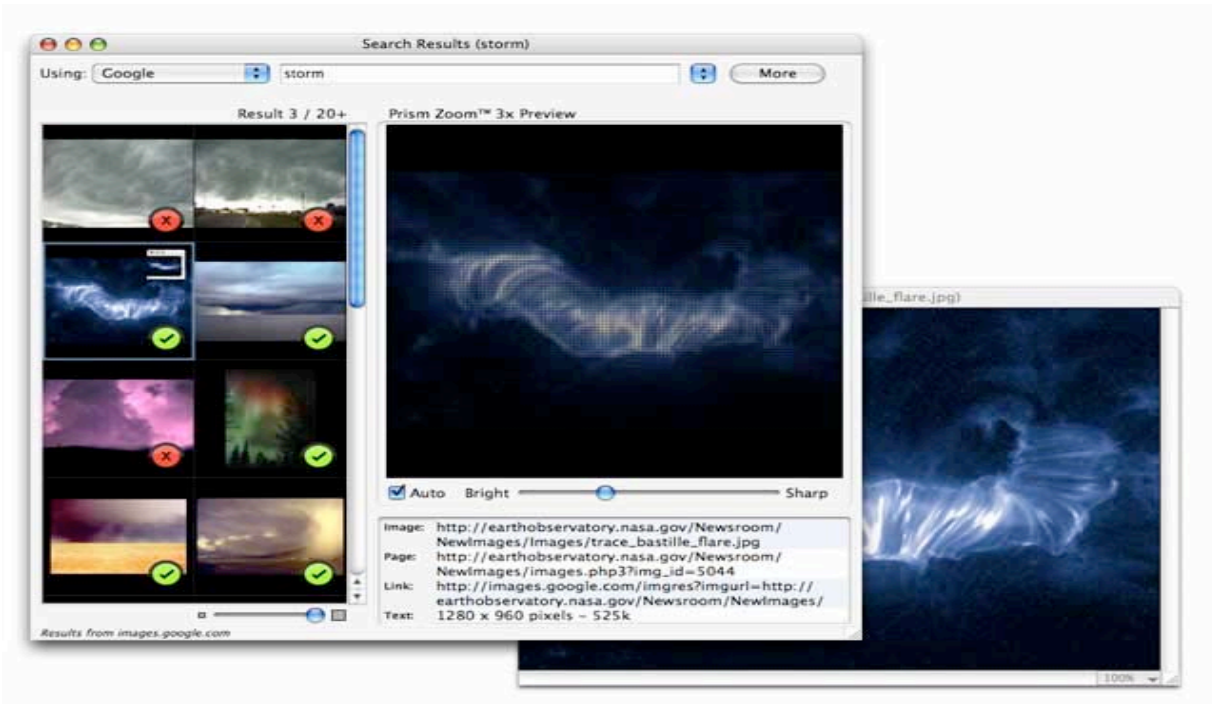
According to Danny Espinoza, “You probably know that web interfaces fall short when it comes to working with lots of images, so if you're really interested in finding pictures on the web, let Beholder do the searching for you.

“Beholder queries Internet search engines and quickly arranges their results along with their source pages, URLs, and other link details. Using Beholder's contact sheet interface, you can easily navigate through hundreds of images, verifying whether they are still available on the web, and downloading them for inspection or archival purposes. Thanks to Beholder's web site scanning engine, you can power your searches and crawl for images on any source page or networked disk directory. And for those times that you're interested in images closer to home, Beholder also supports scanning of your local image folders and iPhoto libraries.”

Beholder features according to Mesa Dynamics

“Beholder's interface is designed to allow you to quickly find, browse, and inspect images on the web. Whether you're more comfortable pointing-and-clicking or using a keyboard, Beholder has shortcuts to make your image searching tasks as easy and straightforward as possible.”

Features that I briefly evaluated, beyond its powerful search function, included batch image and direct image, image verification, image window zoom, and the Quick Open thumbnail. They all worked as expected.



Beholder ‘*storm*’ search results and an expanded selected image

iconCompo 3.2 — A graphic utility to modify and combine icon-size (max.128x128) images.

Developer: Trollin Loosli,
Email: <mailto:trollin@loos.li>
Website: <http://www.loos.li/trollin>
Shareware: \$17 [USD] File Size 2.2 MB

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 or later.
A Jaguar Mac OS 10.2.8 version [iconCompo 2.5.1] is available on the Trollin website.

This software has an uninstall feature.



Introduction

As many of you know, I do a great deal of customization of both my Finder's visual interface and the interface (tool bars and shortcuts) within my most used applications.

I have spent many an hour searching for icons that would best represent the contents of or project focus for the myriad folders in which I store my files. It's an organizational compulsion, but one which serves me well when browsing my hard disk. I have over the years downloaded hundreds, if not thousands, of icons, both folders and object images. However, the right combination, as a graphically illustrated folder, has seldom been available. It's the needle in a haystack thing, but without a magnet. When I read about iconCompo, it appeared to be just the tool I needed.

Overview

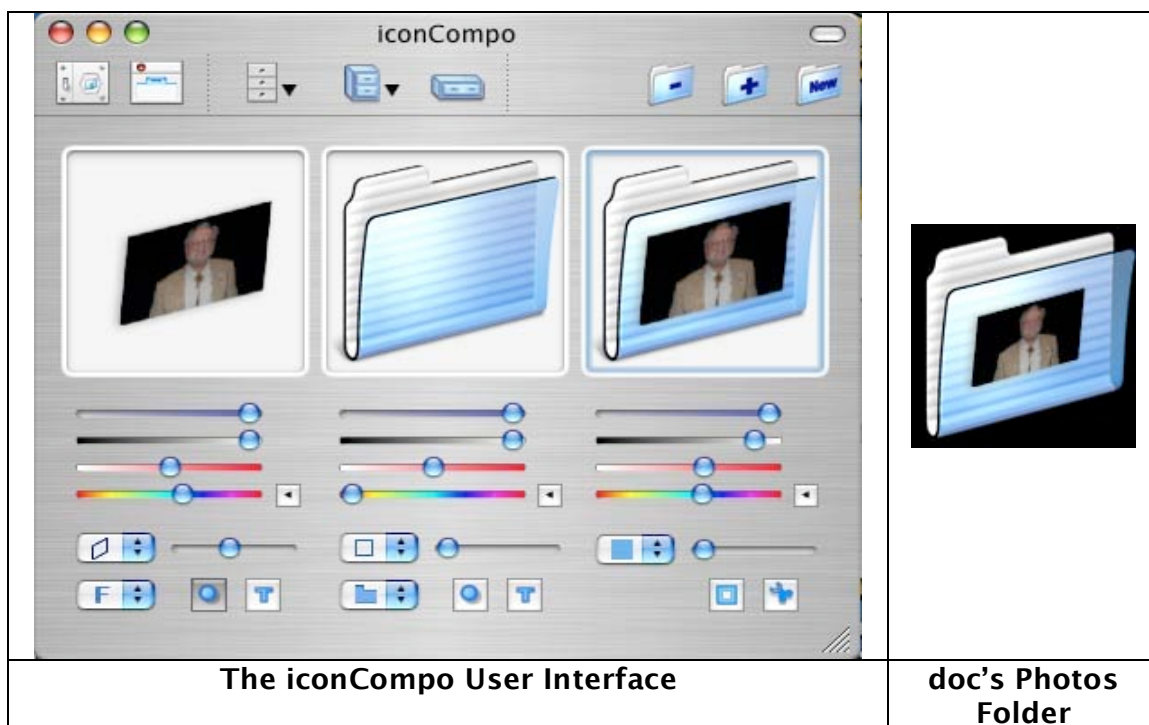
iconCompo is for those who love custom icons. It is a graphic utility for creating custom folder icons out of one or two images: Simply form an image-containing icon and a folder icon. It contains two components, the application itself and a plug-in. Both are well described, in clear detail, in the ReadMe files that are part of the software package.

Using iconCompo to create custom icons is very simple. I share the details further into this review. Drag-and-drop two images into their respective frames in the iconCompo main application window, create a new composite icon. Thus, you are able to attach the composite image as a custom icon to new folders or to existing folders/files. You can very easily adjust the composite image in many ways. The customization features are clearly described in the section "How to use" in the detailed ReadMe file.

In iconCompo you can create one new icon from two individual icon images allowing you to make custom folder icons. The program allows you to adjust the individual images in several ways – coordinates, size, directions, transparencies, and colors – prior to combing their images into a new custom icon.

Tutorial — To customize an existing folder with a new image, highlight the icon image of the new image and bring up the Get Info window [Command-I] associated with new file. Click on the image of the new icon and copy it to your clipboard [Command-C]. Repeat this process with the existing file/folder you wish to customize and paste the custom image into the icon image in Get Info. Close the Get Info windows and you're done. You can, if you like, keep the custom icon separately for later use. A simpler alternative is to fill the new custom folder with the contents of an existing folder and give it the appropriate name. [Obviously, you need to toss the empty plain folder.]

The new composite icons can be attached to existing files or folders, used to create new folders, or saved in the TIFF/PICT/JPEG/GIF/PNG/ICNS format. An additional panel supports the ability to 'read in' images, which are missed by drag-and-drop, e.g., those that are not the first frame of GIF animation files and movies.



More on using the software [adapted from Trollin's Read me files.]

I have partially replicated the author's instructions to illustrate how easy this product is to use:

1. Double-click the program icon directly or click the icon once on the dock. The main window shows up which has three image frames at the top: (left) foreground image [icon, logo, etc.]; (middle) background image (most probably a folder); and (right) composite image, automatically created out of the two images above.
2. Alternatively, drag-and-drop a file or folder, which is to be the foreground image, onto the iconCompo program directly or onto the program's icon you've put in the dock.
3. Depending on your settings, the file or folder selection panel is shown. The software will ask where to attach the new custom icon. *You can change this option in "Preferences".*
4. Select a file or a folder for the foreground and/or background image and drag it to the respective image frames (left or middle). You can also use a menu item to select files. If an image is on the clipboard, it can be pasted onto the active image frame. I.e., you can import an image from other applications.
5. If the file contains image data detectable by iconCompo, the image appears; otherwise, the icon image of the selected file will be used. To force iconCompo to use icon images instead of file contents, select the option "Take icon images only" in Preferences. If you use animation files, images are shown in the movie view in the side drawer as well.
6. Adjust images, as needed, using Basic Tools.

The software allows individual adjusting of both the foreground (graphic) and background (folder) images. It also allows you to customize the main application window and toolbars. There's a lot more to this powerful but simple to use tool, but since my space is limited, I leave such explorations to you, the reader. In addition, the plug-in provided by Trollin Loosli allows the user additional access to the software's features by using the contextual menu features of the Macintosh OS. Read the iCCMPlugin 2.0 (iconCompo Supplement) ReadMe file.

I asked Trollin whether there was a simple way to use a full-size graphic image to create a custom icon. I already knew that with the appropriate software, such as GraphicConverter, I could select part of an image to use with the iconCompo software, but 128 x 128 is a very small 'swatch.' Select the part of an image you want to use as an icon with any standard graphics tool. Then it's a simple cut and paste to place that image into the foreground frame, the one on the left had size of the application window.

More surprisingly, and something that was not obvious from the explanatory information, is that "You can drag an image file (even if it is large) to the foreground (or background) image frame directly, as the image contained in the file is scaled automatically. It takes, however, a while before the scaled image comes up." Thanks, Trollin!

I also learned a bit more about the favorites drawer. Trollin noted that you could store the new picture as a favorite. When you need it again, drag the new picture from the favorites drawer into either the foreground or the background image frame quickly.

application. Therefore, if you do not like the idea of information possibly being gathered from your computer and being sent to who knows where for who knows what, Little Snitch is designed to help keep you in control! You can allow the connection, deny it, or for reinforcement of your wishes, add a permanent rule for dealing with similar future-connections.

For example, when I start up an application (e.g., MS Word, Adobe Acrobat, GraphicConverter) it often tells me that a new version is available. You may, and perhaps should, realize that with every startup this application connects your computer to that developer's server. Such a connection has the ability, if so programmed by that developer, to send out statistics about your computer and thus violate your privacy — do I hear Microsoft?

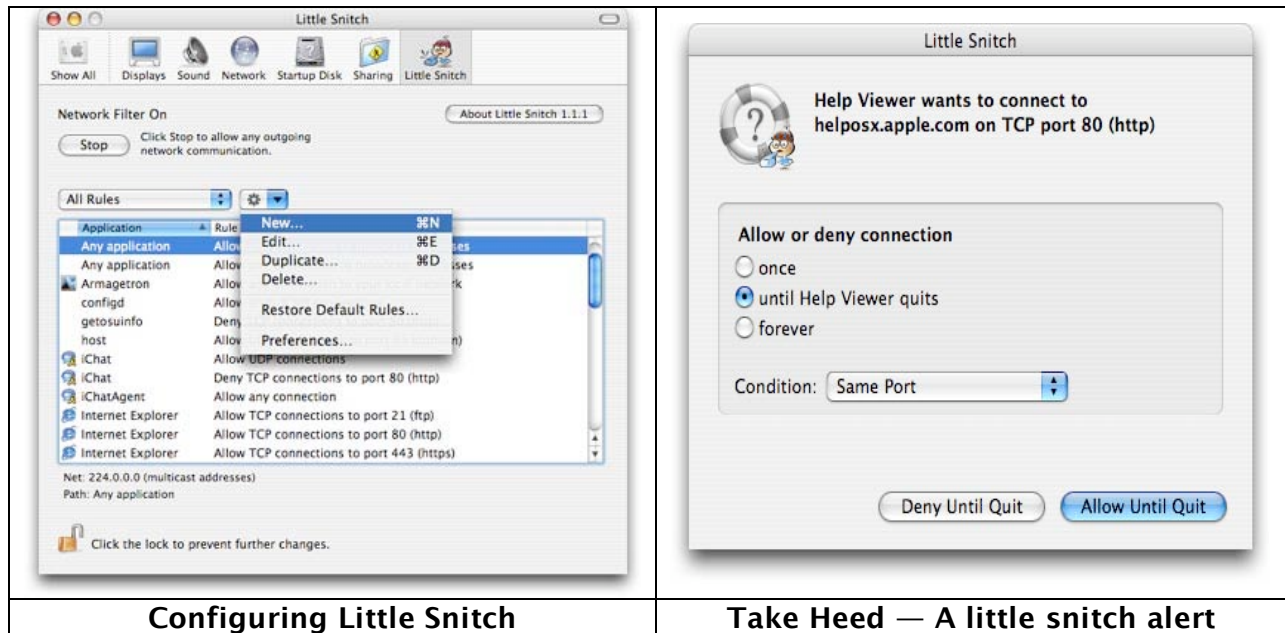
When any application tries to establish a network connection, Little Snitch intercepts the attempt and brings up an alert panel, telling you all the details of that connection, including the name of the application that initiated the connection

Installing Little Snitch and getting started is straightforward

The Little Snitch installer works like any well-behaved software. After installing it, the developer recommends that you go to the Little Snitch preference panel. Then authenticate yourself as your systems administrator by clicking on the lock at the bottom line of the window. Click the "Start" button.

The publisher recommends that you store the small Little Snitch installer application in your Applications folder or any other location on your hard disk. You'll need it if you want to uninstall Little Snitch.

There is very detailed information, on the publisher's website, about the product and its use. This was all the information I needed to put the software through its more elementary paces. The material provided walks the user through the Little Snitch interface that serves to allow or deny an external connection to an Internet connected application. The software comes with a set of default rules that are explained in detail on the website, but the user can build others to more specifically allow or block connections. (This feature was beyond my knowledge, so I worked only with the default settings [rules] provided.)



You can configure Little Snitch by using the software's preference panel. This is the location where you add, modify, or delete the rules by which Little Snitch allows or denies connections to or by external applications. Alas, there were more alternatives than I was comfortable with, so I stayed with the default settings. From the point of view of a seriously protective or paranoid user, the Little Snitch preferences gives one close to absolute control of the "not usually visible" information that is imported into and exported from your internet-connected computer.

In practice, a Little Snitch alert panel appears and informs you which application wants to create a network connection and connect to which server. By clicking on that application's icon, you can get additional information about the initiating application and its net characteristics (Unix ID, the full path and IP address). With that information, the user can either allow or deny the connection for that specific instance and time, or create a permanent rule set up to your specifications. Clear explanations on the developer's website are provided for the conditions related to any given accept or deny action. The user can then use the "Condition" pop up-button to allow or deny specific connections to a specific server.

A residual uncertainty about Little Snitch

I have only one concern with this product. I wonder how carefully a user must set up the preferences to avoid the annoyances of too many alerts for systems continuously connected to the Internet. I know the "learn" features can allow you to establish rules that the software can automatically follow, but I am not experienced enough with the product to do so.

In summary, the software's main strengths...

- Little Snitch prevents applications from "phoning home".
- The software can protect you from trojans, worms, and other network parasites.
- Alerts show you to which applications try to send your 'information' over the

Process 1.1 – An Outline Creation Tool

Developer: Jumsoft

Email: <mailto:info@jumsoft.com>.

Website: <http://www.jumsoft.com/process/>

Shareware \$25 [USD]: Size 734 KB

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 or later.

Rating: 3.5 macCs



Introduction

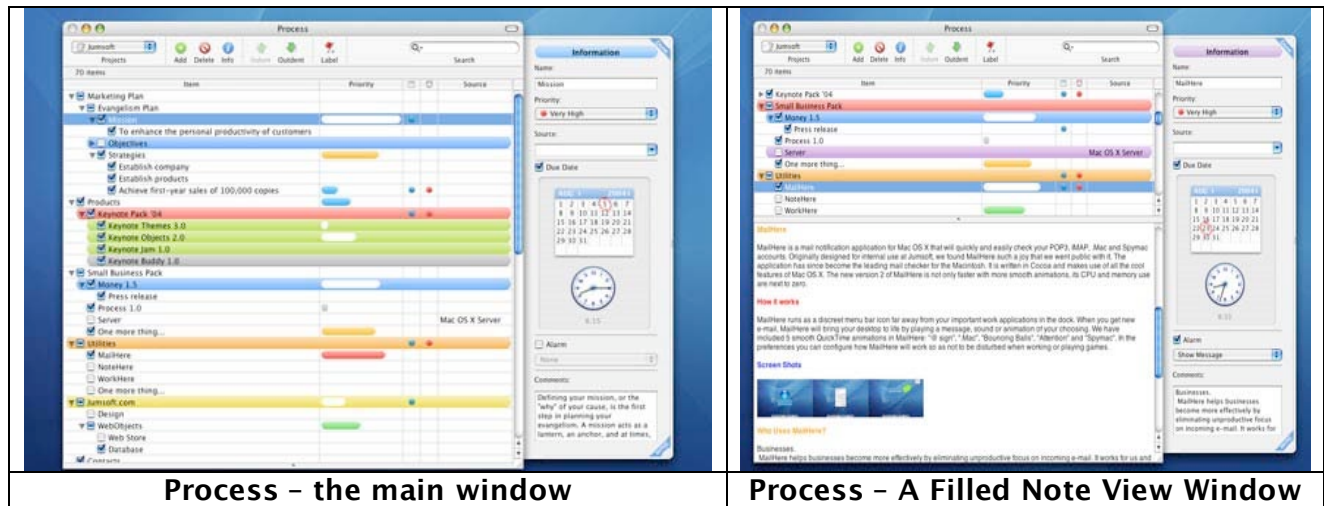
As many of you know, I am drawn to notepad, checklist, brainstorming, and outline tools. I've reviewed some of these kinds of products previously, but, as always, I remain in pursuit of a perfect tool, so I keep on truckin' along. Now, if you folks are really interested in scholarly analyses about outliners, brainstorming tools, and the like across all their myriad uses, check out Ted Goranson's outstanding analyses at ATPM [About This Particular Macintosh — <http://www.atpm.com/index.shtml>] in articles starting around December 2003 to his most recent in the February 2005 issue, from which I later quote.

My own primary outlining experience, after I've shifted to Mac OS X, has been with MS Word. I also own Omni Outliner, but have not yet needed to explore its features. My main use for an outliner is for organizing information to export to PowerPoint and, at times, for organizing long reports. So I decided to do a quick check on Process 1.1, based on information I gleaned from my e-readings.

The software itself

Process, Jumsoft's new product, is competing with the existing throng of outlining applications. Its publisher claims that it is destined to draw its own audience of devotees. After working for a few minutes with the application, I realized that Process has a solid to-do list interface and is easy to learn and thus use. Although I did not choose to use all of its available bells and whistles, I was pleased with the interface and the software's capabilities. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not about to get into the existential benefits of the product as claimed by Jumsoft. "Process doesn't just make it simpler to organize your ideas and projects; it has a favorable effect, *according to its developers*, on the outcome of all your planning that is nothing short of subliminal." Doc_Babad Sez ignore all of this hype and you still have a powerful and useful outliner.

After a brief flirtation with Process, which I found the software too feature-rich for my needs, I agree with Jumsoft that it is a powerful program that allows you not only to plan and schedule your projects, but also streamlines your productivity by giving you single-window access to all the elements of your project — all without ever leaving Process.



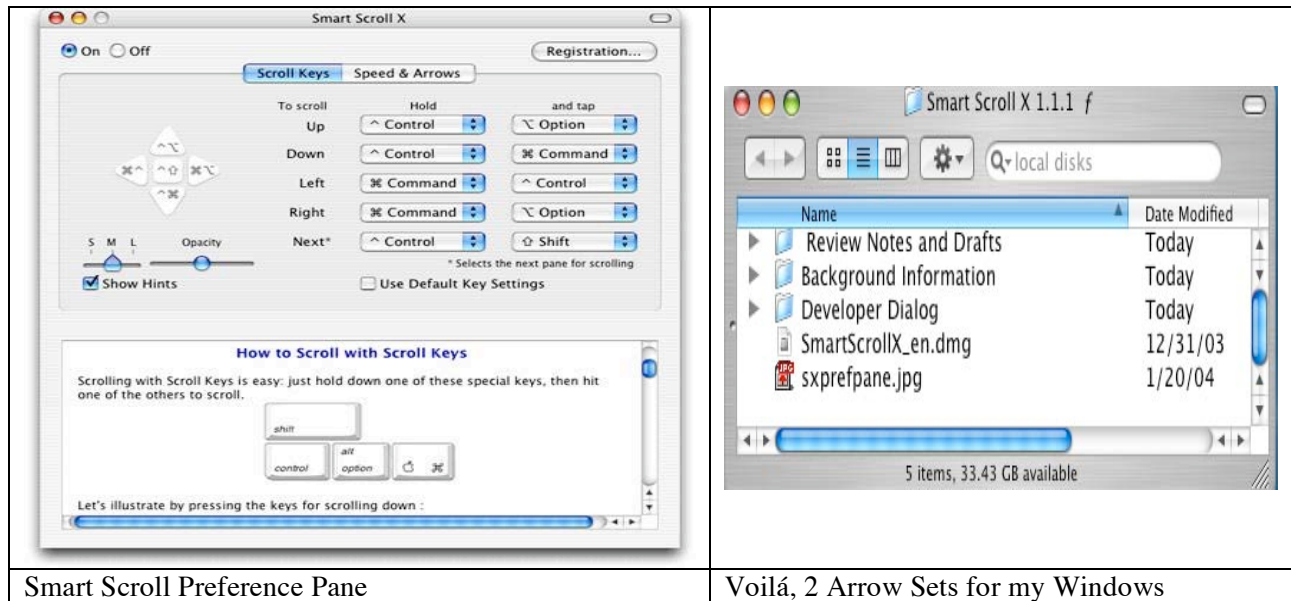
The software has strong built-in search tools and label tools. It supports extensive rich text editing and color-coded prioritization. According to Jumsoft, “You are never an island when using Process. Jumsoft’s outlining app supports many other file formats—OPML, OmniOutliner, RTF, HTML and PDF.”

It also contains a special notes feature that allows you to attach custom text to all your items by way of Source Taking. Until now, I’ve never run across a feature called Source Taking, which may appeal to those who demand more than straightforward outlining capabilities. “The heart of Source Taking consists of a powerful little text field in the Process drawer that lets you type in links to everything you need to complete your projects—links to web sites, PDF files, text documents stored in other programs on your Mac, whatever. By using the handy Source popup, you can access the files and sites directly from Process. Best of all, what you access appears on a scrollable window in the lower half of Process. There, you can open web sites or edit documents, making and saving changes without separately opening the original text-editing application.” Nevertheless, there are naysayers about some of the present capabilities and limitation of this new outlining tool.

Quoting from Ted Goranson’s ATPM article (February 2005)

“Process is new and a sweet piece of work. I wouldn’t recommend it over many others for general outlining, but it has a succinct optimized design for task management. As an outliner, it supports labels and columns. It does not have named styles, scripting, internal links, or clones. Keyboard control of outline functions is scanty. You can see it as a two-pane outliner with columns for task support and a task property inspector in a drawer.

“There are two things that make this application stand out. The first is that in addition to OPML and OmniOutliner import and export, you can export to your iPod. The second: as with any two-pane outliner, you have a notes pane where you can enter text and drag images. However, with Process, you can choose instead to display certain files by reference. It’s a good idea. With an ordinary power outliner, you can enter a link to a file which when clicked opens the file in its own application. You can also display the contents of a file or Web page. In this case, you can display them (but only one) in context with the task. It is a clever and potentially useful idea. However, only certain files can be viewed, those that can be “previewed” in the Finder: RTF, images,



Smart Scroll Preference Pane

Voilà, 2 Arrow Sets for my Windows

Marc notes that Scroll Keys are the same across all applications: no need to remember different keys for each app. Because of this, and because they're conveniently located in the corner of your keyboard, you can scroll without even having to look. In addition, Scroll Keys are made possible by the new kind of keyboard shortcut used in Smart Scroll X, which doesn't involve hitting letter keys (hence avoiding conflicts with existing key combinations). Instead, you hold down one of the four modifier keys (shift, control, option or command) and you scroll by hitting one of the others. (Some keyboards have modifier keys on both sides, letting you scroll with either hand.) Check out the image of the *Smart Scroll Preference Pane*. Marc provides clear information on using the Universal Scroll Keys that his software provides, making learning how to use them a no-brainer. You can also create Custom Scroll Keys should that meet your computing style.

Finally, although I did not need this feature, Smart Scroll X lets you select a comfortable scrolling speed for Scroll Keys, including optional acceleration. Smart Scroll offers a larger selection of positions for scrollbar arrows (still useful from time to time, although with Scroll Keys, Marc notes, you won't want to click on window margin arrows anymore). In addition, you do not need to restart applications for these changes to take effect. Try it: you'll buy it. Set it up and forget it while you start to scroll effortlessly without mousing around.

A scrolling alternative, for your amusement, is SCROLL DIFFERENT from the February '05 MacAddict "I'm tired of clicking those teensy arrows in Finder windows to scroll through icons. Is there an easier way?"

Locating and clicking those little arrows can get old. Try pressing Command-Option, then clicking and dragging while you're in the Finder's icon view-you'll get the hand icon, and you can then grab and move the window's contents.

Software

Grammatica 6.1 (English) — A grammar and spell checking tool

Reviewed by Harry {doc} Babad

Edited by Julie M. Willingham



Developer: Ultralingua, Inc. [Minneapolis, MN]
<mailto:contact@ultralingua.com>
<http://www.ultralingua.com/en/productsgram.html>
\$30 USD Single user. Download allows a try to Buy Demo for 15 days. An upgrade from a previous version is \$20 USD

File Size: ca. 7.5 MB
Well developed and comprehensive on-line help

Requirements: Mac OS X recommended v.10.3 (or 10.1, 10.2) and 64 MB Ram with 20 MB disk space. A PC Version is also available.

Audience: All user levels

The software was tested on a 1 GHz dual processor PowerPC G4 Macintosh with 2 MB DDR SDRAM running under OS X 10.3.8.

Strengths: Grammatica allows the user to check words in the text window of any editable program, and includes such valuable features as conjugation of verbs, analysis of syntax, and interaction with Ultralingua dictionaries.

Weaknesses: The developer provides too little warning, for newbies, that checking a highly formatted document, such as one in MS Word for example, will destroy its formatting. Although bulleted and numbered texts are preserved in the order you've chosen, tables are not. What remains after you elect to do a grammar or spelling check with Grammatica in text is pure and simple.



Software Overview — A bilingual grammar and spell checker supports the English, French, Spanish, and German languages. It provides comprehensives. Depending on which mode and with which language modules you use it with you it can in parallel handle include Ultralingua's dictionaries with hundreds of thousands of entries for each selected language.

An Aside — As some of you know, I have been using the English Ultralingua dictionary for some time, and I routinely access from my dock where it is a permanent fixture.

Introduction

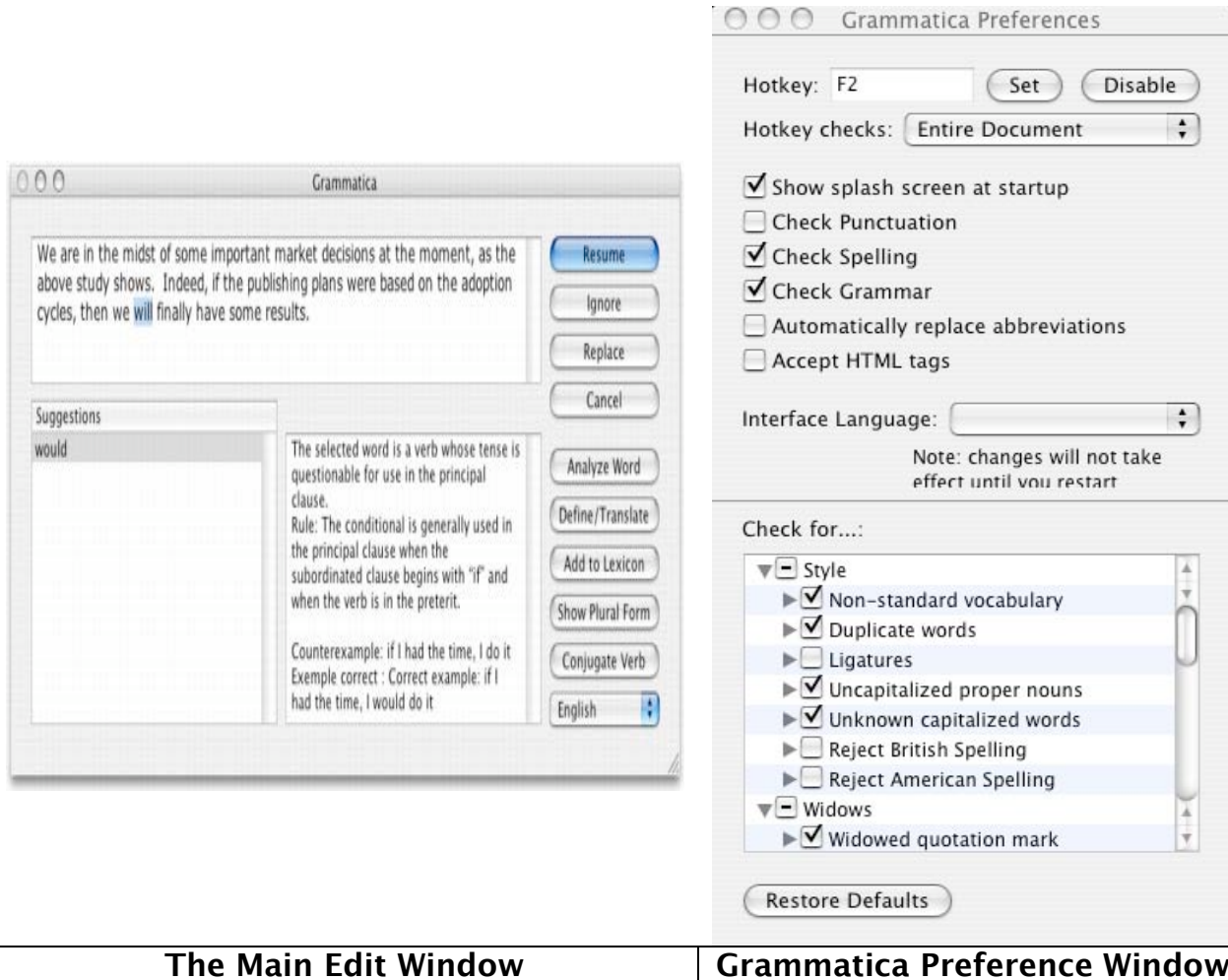
Readers who follow my articles, reviews, and columns will recall that I enjoy working with a variety of tools to assure that my words ring true, both in their spelling and in your ability to make sense out of them. For macCompanion, I've written *For Would-Be Literati* (January 2004) in which I discuss dictionaries and thesauri, and *Ultralingua English Dictionary* (June 2004). I still use the tools I've described in my search for semantic purity, or, at least, for the avoidance of repetition. I also explored the grammar and spell checking software Grammarian Pro™. However, after about four months of constant use, I found that it introduced errors into my documents that both the Microsoft Word grammar checker and my editor did not like. (It might have been a preference-setting thing, but who has time to look back?)

I have spent most of my career writing highly technical articles and reports, both for peer-reviewed journals and for the companies that paid me to write them. In almost all cases, my technical writing was subject to the scrutiny of professional and excellent technical editors, and written in the third-person impersonal mode. When I started writing for macCompanion as well as for non-computer outlets, my style needed to change, but much of my early writing still contained Germanic style sentences 150–200 words long.

It was my good fortune to obtain the services of my wonderful, patient, and unpaid editor, Julie M. Willingham, but when she was forced to provide me with 30–70 comments per document (regarding errors of grammar, syntax and punctuation), I knew it was time for a change. Since Julie uses the MS Word grammar checker, I was able to copy her customized MS Word preferences to catch at least some of the 'stuff' that was wrong. Nevertheless, I hankered for a more sophisticated grammar checker. Perhaps I could wow Julie with a perfect document or three, or at least make her work easier — yeah, delusions of grandeur. Therefore, when I read about Grammatica, now version 6.1, I felt a compulsion to try it, but only the English language version.

Working With the Product

Installing Ultralingua's Grammatica is a simple drag-and-drop operation. Once in your application folder, the software is ready to use. I also added its icon to the critical applications to my dock, but that's up to you.



The Main Edit Window

Grammatica Preference Window

I approached this review from two directions: First, I went back into my detailed macC review files and selected a handful of before and after documents, all of which were in MS Word format. I used Ultralingua on my unchecked draft document, my MSW grammar-checked final draft to Julie, and my final submittal to macC, which incorporated most of Julie's editorial suggestions. While doing this process for three different articles/reviews, I made qualitative comparisons of the results. I also noted whether the suggestions pleased me—i.e., respected my quirky writing style, often full of what my editor calls "Babadisms".

When working with it, Grammatica allows the user to check words in the text window of any editable program (MS Word, Word Perfect, ClipEdit, Eudora, MS Outlook, Apple's TextEdit, and, of course, Apple Works. These programs and many others allow text editing, which is Grammatica requires to function.

Features

The software contains many rich features that include:

- English grammar and spell checking, with explanations about the suggested corrections.
- It includes more than 275,000 words and word forms in English (e.g., talk, talks, talking, talked; a feature comparable to that in the OS 9.x version of SpellCatcher).
- It can be accessed by hot key: the default hot key is F2, from within any (text editable) application. If selected within a graphics application, it will not function and gives you an error message to that effect.
- Mac OS X Services are completely compatible with Grammatica.
- It allows installation of multiple languages within the same interface—and allows users to change language interfaces on the fly, within a single document! Additional modules must be purchased from Ultralingua for \$29.95.)
- For users who require multiple language spelling and grammar checks, the product allows seamless interaction with Ultralingua dictionaries, but they must be purchased separately.
- The software can be customized, via its preference panels and extended by using user-created lexicons of new words.
- As with any well-behaved grammar-checking tool, the software provides an analysis of sentence syntax.
- It allows users to add words to a user-created lexicon, in a manner comparable to the User Dictionary in MS Office. Not surprisingly, it considers these new words during a grammar check.

I noted when reading about the features of this software that this product was an international edition of Grammatica, one that recognizes both UK and US forms of English, but I could not find a means to choose between them in the software I used. (Perhaps I'm not using the international edition.)

Potential multilingual users of this software should remember that the program is a bilingual grammar and spell checker not only for English, but also for the French, Spanish, and German language. Although I used only the English version, the product provides focused and detailed grammar suggestions and spelling alternatives, including a dictionary with hundreds of thousands of entries in each supported language.

Software Testing Results

According to its publisher, Grammatica's fully rewritten Mac OS X interface allows a tremendous speed improvement over previous versions. I don't know about previous versions, not having used version 5.x or 6.0, but the software checked my 6–8 page macC reviews rapidly. Moreover, like other products made by this firm, although not completely intuitive, it was easy to learn and use. The software includes an automatic updater feature to alert you to free upgrades for your software.

I was surprised that the software did not make available the selection of a preferred writing style. I would have thought, layman that I am, that the grammar rules would differ when writing colloquially, formally, or when writing technical documents. Nevertheless, although not always completely clear to one who 'flunked' public school grammar (ca. 1949), the highlighted sections could easily be re-read and changes were simple to make.

Remember, to incorporate the changes made, after completing a Grammatica document check, one must close its window and save the changes via a standard save dialog box. Quitting the Grammatica application will not save your corrections!

Overall, this product was easy to use and provided me with greater insight on my sometimes-flawed writing style than does MS Word. Although this is a very good product, some of its limitations in handling highly formatted documents got in my way. In addition, you should, if Grammatica becomes your primary tool for checking spelling and grammar, make it a startup item to make accessing its hot key function more automatic.

I had no problems using the software with Eudora eMail, but I would not want my mail recipients to be unnerved by any sudden improvement in my style and grammar. In both RTF and moderately formatted MS Word documents, I had to only make minor changes in the checked document to recover my lost formatting. These test documents did not contain tables and formatted bulleted lists. When checking documents that did not contain MS Word style bullet or numbered lists, the 'style' disappeared, but all of the numbering or bullet symbols remained intact.

I tested, while working, most of the vendor's advertised features and found they performed in a well-behaved manner, as expected. The software met most of my expectations for a grammar checker that probed more deeply than the one in MS Word. I did indeed find some items I missed in my MS Word checks of my final (to Julie) draft and just a very few that it challenged after I incorporated Julie's editorial recommendations. Sensible doc_Babad that I am, I of course stuck with Julie's corrections.

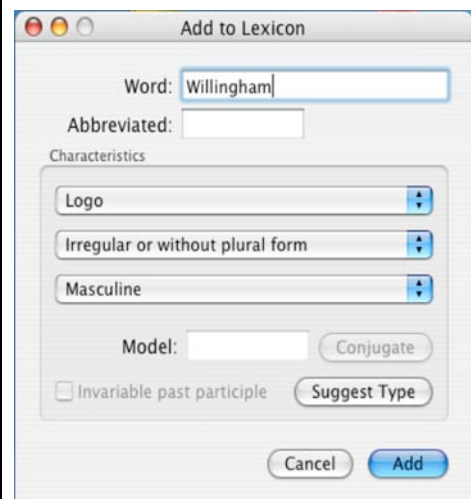
All of this does not change the fact that the potential errors Grammatica identified in my documents were interesting and likely needed correcting, but the recommended changes were not adaptable to my quirky colloquial writing style.

Software Limitations

As always, in my critiques of a software product, I mix the important things with other things I observed. Only the first item discussed below created a serious problem for me. Perhaps I had not paid enough attention to the fact that the product was a text checker and as such did not respect complex formatting like tables.

Working with complex MS Word documents — Not fully recognizing that Grammatica is a text-oriented product, I inadvertently destroyed tables, bulleted lists, and numbered lists when performing a grammar and spelling check. I know that there is a message that should have alerted me to this issue, but, alas, I did not fully understand it. Now, since I always play with a duplicate copy, it was no major loss... but! Folks, if you are working with a MS Word document, either (1) set the software to check only selected paragraphs of selected text, or (2) safer yet, use Grammatica on a 'saved as' text version, and incorporate the changes back into your formatted RTF or Word document.

Adding words to a custom lexicon — One element of this product literally infuriated me. When using other software including MS Word, it only takes one click to add the word deemed misspelled to my custom (user) dictionary. In Grammatica, I must copy and paste the selected word into the lexicon window. Since I use many specialized technical terms in my writing, this proved to be both time consuming and tedious. I recognize the flexibility built into Grammatica's 'Lexicon', but having the ability to determine whether the word is a noun, verb or adjective, or whether the word represents an irregular verb or plural form, or whether the word is masculine or feminine (not used in English) just gets in my way. Now, if there were only a way to turn that complexity off!



Adding lists of custom words — I have compiled an extensive user dictionary in MS Word — a dictionary I maintain across all upgrades. If there is a simple way to add these words to the Grammatica lexicon, I could not find it. What I did instead was to export my MS Word user dictionary as a text file, and used Grammatica, one word at a time, to incorporate those words. I know that I could, perhaps, have accepted all the words in my MS Word user dictionary at one time, but late night typing and a fast trigger finger has, unfortunately, allowed misspelled words to be incorporated.

Discounted Multiple language Packages — Now don't get me wrong, the combination of Grammatica and its excellent dictionary–thesauri made by Ultralingua are a bargain at \$29.95 each in English for a total of \$60. However, pity my multi–lingual European friends who must pay ca \$60.00 for each additional language set they buy. If there was a discount for such purchases, I could not find it on the website.

Conclusions

I whole–heartedly agree with its publisher that Grammatica could be, for many authors both serious and casual, the *ultimate* writing assistant. I shall continue to use the Ultralingua English dictionary and thesaurus to help me find the right words while I'm composing articles, and then use the powerful tools of Grammatica as I edit my purple prose for misspelled words and grammatical glitches, prior to turning it over to Julie. Folks, you need to remember: superior software is replaceable but a great editor is not!

Considering how much I paid for MS Office 2004, purchasing both Grammatica and the English Ultralingua Dictionary and Thesaurus makes good sense at a combined price of about \$60. I rate this product **4.0 macCs**.

Well that's it for this issue. Please come back again next month!