

macCCompanion

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THINGS MACINTOSH



Simply Amazing

In This Issue

- WWDC Roundup
- Audiobook How-To
- SwiftPublisher 1.3
- Skype Starter Pack
- Google Map Hacks
- ...and much more!

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Our special thanks to all those who have allowed us to review their products!
In addition, thanks to you, our readers, who make this effort all possible.

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Letter from the CEO

Looking Forward

by Robert Pritchett

In a world that seems to be preoccupied with trying to destroy itself, I personally seek after that which is of “good report or praiseworthy” and bring those things to your attention here in *macCompanion*.

Joseph Smith Jr. wrote back in March 1842 to a John Wentworth, who at the time was the editor and proprietor of the Chicago Democrat, a response to a query about what he believed and it is now known as the *Wentworth Letter*. The *13 Article of Faith* reads;

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

http://scriptures.lds.org/a_of_f/1

Over the years, I’ve tried to put this into practice by attempting to “accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative” that was sung into popularity by Bing Crosby and Johnny Mercer:

Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive

Gather round me, everybody
Gather round me, while I preach some
Feel a sermon coming on here
The topic will be sin
And that’s what I’m agin’
If you wanna hear my story
Then settle back and just sit tight
While I start reviewing
The attitude of doing right

You've got to accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between

You've got to spread joy up to the maximum
Bring gloom down to the minimum
Have faith or pandemonium
Liable to walk upon the scene

(To illustrate his last remark
Jonah in the whale, Noah in the ark
What did they do
Just when everything looked so dark)

Man, they said we better
Accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between
No, do not mess with Mister In-Between
Do you hear me, hmm?

(Oh, listen to me children and-a you will hear

About the eliminatin' of the negative
And the accent on the positive)
And gather 'round me children if you're willin'
And sit tight while I start reviewin'
The attitude of doin' right

(You've gotta accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between)

You've got to spread joy (up to the maximum)
Bring gloom (down) down to the minimum
Otherwise (otherwise) pandemonium
Liable to walk upon the scene

To illustrate (well illustrate) my last remark (you got the floor)
Jonah in the whale, Noah in the ark
What did they say (what did they say)
Say when everything looked so dark

Man, they said we better
Accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
Latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between
No! Don't mess with Mister In-Between

(Harold Arlen/Johnny Mercer)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate_the_Positive

Another great song that puts life into proper perspective was one created by Terry Gilkyson
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry_Gilkyson for Disney Studios and became famous in the Disney version of *The Jungle Book* and sung by the bear Balou;
<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/bearnec.htm>

The Bare Necessities

Look for the bare necessities
The simple bare necessities
Forget about your worries and your strife
I mean the bare necessities
Old Mother Nature's recipes
That brings the bare necessities of life

Wherever I wander, wherever I roam
I couldn't be fonder of my big home
The bees are buzzin' in the tree
To make some honey just for me
When you look under the rocks and plants
And take a glance at the fancy ants
Then maybe try a few

The bare necessities of life will come to you
They'll come to you!

Look for the bare necessities
The simple bare necessities
Forget about your worries and your strife
I mean the bare necessities
That's why a bear can rest at ease
With just the bare necessities of life

Now when you pick a pawpaw
Or a prickly pear
And you prick a raw paw
Next time beware
Don't pick the prickly pear by the paw
When you pick a pear
Try to use the claw
But you don't need to use the claw
When you pick a pear of the big pawpaw
Have I given you a clue?

The bare necessities of life will come to you
They'll come to you!

So just try and relax, yeah cool it
Fall apart in my backyard
'Cause let me tell you something little britches
If you act like that bee acts, uh uh
You're working too hard

And don't spend your time lookin' around
For something you want that can't be found
When you find out you can live without it
And go along not thinkin' about it
I'll tell you something true

The bare necessities of life will come to you

(Reprise)
Look for the bare necessities
The simple bare necessities
Forget about your worries and your strife
I mean the bare necessities
Old Mother Nature's recipes
With just the bare necessities of life

As we begin a new school year here in the US and wait expectantly for the next Mac OS X from Apple in the spring of 2007, we can think positive and continue to seek after those things of good report.

Personally, I think Apple helps get the “bare necessities” of life by helping us forget our worries and our strife – and isn't that why we continue to seek out what is praiseworthy in the Mac community?

Now for some more good news. Take a 2-minute survey at <http://www.tinyurl.com/zo476> for a discount on a new glossy Mac quarterly magazine planned to be released sometime in the near future.

According to Hoyle...

<http://www.jonhoyle.com> Copyright ©2006 Jonathan Hoyle

WWDC '06 Round Up

by Jonathan Hoyle

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macCompanion

September 2006

This past month, Apple held its annual Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC), a week of presentations, feedback forums and lab time for the Macintosh developer to be prepared for what is on the horizon. WWDC is certainly the most important conference of the year to any Macintosh developer, and it is the one I look forward to most. At WWDC '04, Apple announced Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger; at last year's conference, they dropped a bombshell by announcing the transition to Intel. This year, it is back to operating systems again, with the announcement of Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard, due to be release this coming spring.

What We Can & Can't Tell You

Attendees at WWDC '06 have signed a non-disclosure agreement, preventing us from sharing any protected Apple technology. Fortunately, that covers only the nitty-gritty details we obtained from the conference. All of the high level information about Leopard found on Apple's web site <http://www.apple.com/macosx/leopard/> or spoken of in Steve Jobs' keynote address, is not covered under NDA and thus can be spoken of freely. Steve's keynote is perhaps the best introduction to what is becoming available in Leopard and is publicly available for anyone to view. If you have not done so yourself, take the time to watch it here:

http://events.apple.com.edgesuite.net/aug_2006/event/index.html

Power Macintosh RIP: 3/14/94 - 8/7/06

As the rumor mills suggested would happen, the Power Mac G5, the last of the PowerPC-based Macintoshes, was discontinued at WWDC. For a little more than 12 years, the PowerPC microprocessor has served the Macintosh community well. However, with neither Motorola nor IBM stepping up to the plate to make necessary improvements to keep up with the industry, it was time for Apple to move on. Replacing the Power Mac G5 is the new 64-bit Mac Pro featuring the Intel Xeon "Woodcrest" processor. This impressive machine features two Dual Core processors, thus giving quad processor performance, at speeds of 2.0, 2.66 or 3.0 GHz. And being 64-bit, the Mac Pro will be able to take advantage of Leopard's 64-bit capabilities.

Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard Top X

In the WWDC keynote address, Steve & Co. list 10 new features in Leopard:

- I. 64-Bit: Top to Bottom
- II. Time Machine
- III. Complete Package: Boot Camp, Front Row, Photo Booth, etc.
- IV. Spaces (virtual desktops)
- V. Spotlight
- VI. Core Animation
- VII. Universal Access
- VIII. Mail
- IX. Dashcode & WebClip
- X. iChat

Admittedly, some of these "features" are more impressive than others. Many of these are simply updates to current software or shareware that become part of the operating system. There are a number of articles available to read on each of these ten items, but I would like to discuss only four of them, as I see that these are the most important ones:

I. 64-bit: In Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger, 64-bit compilation became available for the underlying Unix-level. This allowed developers to create 64-bit console applications, and even 64-bit dynamic libraries which could be called from standard 32-bit GUI applications. Such code would run on only Mac OS X 10.4 and higher, and only on the PowerPC G5-based Macintoshes. These 64-bit programs will not run under Rosetta on Intel-based Macintoshes. Beginning with Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard, 64-bit compilation becomes available "top to bottom", that is: 64-bit Unix through 64-bit Core Foundation to 64-bit Carbon and Cocoa API's. This means that Xcode 3 can compile Universal Binaries containing up to FOUR architectures: 32-bit PowerPC, 32-bit Intel, 64-bit PowerPC and 64-bit Intel. 64-bit compilations will, of course, run only on 64-bit hardware, such as the PowerPC G5 or Intel Xeon.

II. Time Machine: This was, for me, the most impressive new technology available in Leopard. The difficulty of maintaining back-ups and recoveries has made it nearly impossible to do properly. With Time Machine, backing up and restoring becomes effortless, and it is one of the main reasons I am looking forward to upgrading to 10.5.

VI. Core Animation: Building upon CoreImage and CoreAudio, CoreAnimation simplifies the intricacies of animation, bringing amazing power to the developer. The Core Animation API is very impressive, and the Time Machine GUI is written with CoreAnimation.

IX. Dashcode & WebClip: Dashcode is the "Xcode for Dashboard Widgets", with a large number of templates and a full JavaScript editor and debugger. This takes Dashboard development up to first class citizenship, making development fun again. WebClip is another Dashboard development tool, but not meant for the developer but instead for the end user. Essentially, a user can clip a portion from any web page and paste it into its own Dashboard widget with very little effort. Both of these tools truly empower the Macintosh web user to incredible levels.

The Week

From Tuesday through Friday afternoon, the conference sessions were heavily attended, as 2006 broke the previous year's attendance record. Over 4200 developers, representing 48 nations, were in attendance. This year, WWDC had eight tracks running concurrently, covering everything from application technologies to graphics and media to development tools, and much more. In addition, over 100 labs were scheduled so that developers could test their products on site.

Evening Events

Apple hosted a special event each night of the conference. Sunday evening was the Student Developer Reception where students could meet and give resumes to a number of different companies. This year's reception was fairly well attended, with all the usual suspects availing themselves to the student population, placed at various tables throughout the banquet hall. The Google table was always busy, especially with their recent announcement of opening a new branch in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Microsoft's Geoff Price, who heads up the impressive Macintosh Business Unit team, was also there doing well with students. The MathWorks, makers of MATLAB, was drawing a bit of excitement as well. Eastman Kodak was represented there, both from Rochester, New York and Vancouver, Canada. Students looking to make the Macintosh part of their professional careers did very well by attending this reception.

Monday night was the general Apple Developer Connection Reception, in which food and drinks were served and Apple employees mixed with the crowd. There I chatted with Rob Kehrer from Apple's Worldwide Developer Relations, who spoke proudly of the tremendous growth the Mac has experienced in the SciTech arena. Growing in size geometrically, the scientific world seems almost giddy to embrace Mac OS X. Most developers I saw there seem relatively pleased with this year's keynote and first day's events.

Tuesday was a double-barreled evening of events. After pizza being served, the first event that night commenced with the impressive Apple Design Awards, hosted by User Experience Technology Manager John Geleynse and Shaan Pruden, Director of Partnership Management. Geleynse (also known as *Aquaman* for his expertise in Aqua) was particularly entertaining, as he made it a point to demo each winner in turn. Following the Awards, the infamous Stump the Experts contest was held, which pitted the general audience against a stage full of Apple experts. Some questions are straightforward while others are tricky. My favorite question, submitted by an audience member to the Experts read: "Which Macintosh has the dubious distinction of having the shortest lifespan?" The Experts' answer was the Macintosh IIx, with a market-life of just under 4 months. Surprisingly, this correct answer was in fact: the newly introduced Mac Pro, with a market-life of 2 days (and counting). The audience and experts alike roared with laughter.

Wednesday evening also had two events running. One was the Scientific Poster Session, the first ever held at WWDC. The speed with which scientific applications have been embracing Mac OS X is absolutely astounding. It is certainly a great time to be a Macintosh user, especially for those in the tech and biotech worlds. In addition to this, Apple held encore presentations of some of the more popular sessions so far that week, so that those who missed them could get a second chance. With eight concurrent tracks running, it was inevitable that you would miss a session you wanted to see just so you could attend another. These encore presentations were well appreciated.

Thursday was the final evening of the conference, and Apple capped it off with its annual Campus Bash. Buses appeared outside the conference building, loading up developers to transport them from San Francisco to Cupertino, home of Apple Computers. Developers enjoyed the music and food available on campus, and many lined up to get into the Apple Campus Store, with extended hours for WWDC. For those more technically minded, the Campus Bash also hosted the ADC Plugfest, where developers could test their USB, Firewire or Wi-Fi products against Apple's machines on campus.

Conclusion

WWDC has come and gone for another year. How does it rank with previous WWDC's? Well, it wasn't the best but it wasn't the worst either. The food was at an all-time low, and third party developers were almost invisible. However, with access to Apple employees and labs, and a real workable Leopard release to test with, there was still a very much upbeat spirit this year. WWDC '06 did not have the tumultuous upheaval of last year's announcement, but this year's "evolution instead of revolution" deliveries made most everybody very happy. My grade for WWDC '06: **B+**.

Next Month: Return to Cross-Platform frameworks.

MyAppleStuff

The European Perspective

<http://www.myapplestuff.com> Copyright ©2006 Chris Marshall

My Stuff

by Chris Marshall

Well we made it through the first month and are back for a second month.

As promised last month this months column is somewhat shorter, and has a lot less foundation information. Without doubt the largest single event of the month was WWDC 06 with its usual high level of pre and post show speculation and comment, and it seems general disappointment. To be honest as a “newbie” I am still somewhat amazed at the speculation that occurs, and perhaps more impressively, the level of work that goes into the speculation i.e. the suggested iPhones!

I am not a developer by any means, so I have to confess that WWDC 06 left me somewhat cold. Sure, some of the features in Leopard looked great, some seemed like a natural progression and some just seemed to be a straight lift from third party applications, especially [ChatFX](#) which I reviewed some months ago and use on a regular basis. I am keen to see an iPhone, but wasn't expecting one until at least January '07, and I am not sure that a “true” Video iPod would get my cash. I have a 5G 60GB iPod with video and hardly ever use the video function – not because of the screen size, but because I just don't have a use for video on that sort of platform. I am about to get a Mac Mini, so would have liked to see the newer chips in them, but heh ho, for what I am going to use it for I am pretty sure it will be fast enough.

My 'Casts

Books	Fun	General	Mac	News	Review	Sport	Technical
Fiddle & Burn	French Maid TV	The Daily Mayo	BRITISH MAC	BBC NewsPod	In Business	The Football Phone-In 606	AV Forums
Lessons from a Geek Fu Master		Daily Breakfast	EuroMac	Telegraph	iTunes New Music Tuesday	Nike Football	commandN
How to Disappear Completely	The Daily Nut		Mac Roundtable	Today	Mark Kermode's Film		Diggnation
Earthcore	Ricky Gervais		MacCast		NYT Book		Engadget
Nina Kimberly The Merciless	Tiki Bar TV		MacBreak Video				
Route 66 to Vietnam			macTV				Inside The Net
Podiobooker			Mac ReviewCast		24 Cast		The Tech Night Owl LIVE
Spherical Tomi			Typical Mac User				This week in TECH
			Macnation				TWIT Video

These are all available via the [iTunes Music Store](#).

Under Consideration –

Recently Deleted (a bit of a purge this month)

:Geek Brief TV

As predicted last month I have lost patience with this ‘cast and unsubscribed. I tried stopping watching before the outtakes, but realized just how short each episode had become, and I got increasingly frustrated with the style of presentation. It really did seem to be that since they announced they were “giving up the tyranny of the day job” the content got weaker at the same time as the show became more about them than the content – and wow, if you really make that many mistakes producing a two minute ‘cast (average content coverage over my “under consideration” period) take some lessons, don’t be proud of the fact and promote it! And don’t get me started on Second Life – sure have fun with the game BUT why promote it on your show all the time???

:NYT Movies

The format just didn’t work for me. The very short, sharp and snappy 30-second type clips didn’t give me enough information. Maybe it is the European vs. American “thing” again, but I have always found that European coverage is a lot more detailed and substantial – sort of conversational depth, rather than cocktail chat depth.

:NYT Music

Again, not a big fan of the style, and found that the iTunes ‘cast gave me a good enough update each month.

: [Jack Black’s Nacho Libre Confessional](#)

Purely because I have watched them, found them funny and thought it an excellent way to promote the film. I am actually surprised that more movies aren’t been promoted this way to be honest.

Just Added – Macnation

I have only listened to a few of these having been directed to it by Robert when Daphne Kalfon was interviewed.

I haven’t really made my mind up yet, but I think I like it. It is certainly very professional and has just enough about new stuff in it to keep me interested after I have listened to my favorites.

Favourite ‘Casts – The MacCast

No surprise here I am sure?! Despite his relatively young age Adam seems to be becoming the Granddaddy of Mac podcasting, much in demand not only with his own show, but with guest appearances, comments on events and interviews. I am going to stick with why I like the MacCast though.

In all probability a recurring theme with my favorites – he has found a simple and effective formulae that works and he sticks to it. The news is relatively current and he has authority behind his observations and views. I really like the way he interacts with his listeners; involving them in the problem solving and hints and tips, and he is really easy to listen to.

European News

As I have mentioned earlier I am going to get a Mac Mini, so I thought I would share with you the differentials in pricing across the US, Spain and the UK.

I am looking to get the Mac Mini 1.66 GHz Intel Core Duo, with

- a total of 1GB RAM (so for this comparison I am going to assume I am buying it from Apple, which of course I won't be doing!),
- a 120GB serial ATA drive
- wireless keyboard
- wireless Mighty Mouse, and
- DVI to Audio cable.

Price	USA	UK	Spain
	\$1,252.97	£792 = \$1,493.33	1.145,99 € = \$1,465.42

Other stuff that made me grin this month included:

- the Czech iPod advert that was banned from the USA for been too sexy [here](#)
- Levi's iPod jeans [here](#)
- The 200 million songs milestone reached for sales thru the European iTunes Music Store,
- The ongoing debate about DRM in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and
- Can't help thinking that Steve has thrown his teddy out of the pram a bit with France over the iTunes row by refusing to give a keynote at the Paris Apple Expo.

Last month I pointed you in the direction of an article about Macs in Spain. Here is another one, first published in 2003 and recently republished in Boston in 2006. It is well worth a [look](#). It will really put the size of the market into perspective for you, and has a little bit of interesting background into Spain as well. It mentions a MUG of about 50 members. I am aware of 14 MUG's in Spain in total, several of which are online ones – maybe I should set one up? I took a look at the Apple [documentation](#). If anyone has any experience of doing this, or would like to get involved, than please let me know.

Digital Media Solution

Three things have occupied my time this month:

- trying to resolve an issue I have with my Sony Vaio Media Centre Desktop, and
- reviewing the TVMax from Miglia. And
- getting to grips with my Sky + (same as TiVo).

I review the TVMax this month so I won't repeat myself, but suffice to say I am going to buy one :-)

I am still working on the best way of using the Sky + alongside the TVMax so will write about that next month. This month as I have effectively been testing them both, I have created some duplication which has led to a couple of obvious issues, namely that there is no way to transfer recorded material off the Sky + box to an external hard drive, even though it has a USB port. Sky says that port is for the future and hasn't been activated as such yet, and if a movie is split either side of the news (as is common on the commercial channels) the system doesn't automatically record the second part!!! One up for the TVMax for sure as it is easy to edit the recorded material on the Mac.

By far the most frustrating problem though, has been with the Sony Vaio Media Centre Desktop and the Sony Triniton TV. Now I have no problems at all connecting the TV to the PC and can record and play back recorded items really well. It is also possible to use the TV as a monitor for the PC, although the quality of the picture isn't great. The problem is that the PC screen image is too big for the TV screen, so I only get the centre part of the PC image. I can scroll around on the TV screen and move the image so that I can see all of the screen, just not all at once. For example, if I was browsing the Internet and had it so that I could see the browser toolbar at the top of the TV screen, I wouldn't be able to see the Windows START toolbar at the bottom. This is a total pain. The only way that I have managed to get round it so far is to view movies with QuickTime and adjust the screen size so that I reduce the problem.

I have tried a number of forums with no luck, so if anyone has any thoughts please let me know.

And Finally Back Ups

It seems like the whole area of backups is becoming even more topical since the announcement of Leopard. Both Adam (MacCast) and Tim (MacReviewCast) have discussed this for many months now and there are a lot of options around.

I am somewhat anal about backups, as you will see!!

At the moment I have three computers in the apartment that we use – my PowerBook, my wife’s Notebook, and a shared Desktop. I also have a 250GB external Hard Drive.

My PowerBook has my files, pictures and music that I use and this is backed up each month to the external hard drive. I also back up my applications folder as well.

I do the same each month with my wife’s notebook, so on the external hard drive every month we have a back up of our own music, pictures, emails, documents, Quicken files, diaries etc.

I have ALL our music and photos on the Desktop and a copy on the external hard drive. Any music that isn’t on a CD (they are all loaded onto the PC) is burnt to 2 CD’s and one copy is stored outside of the apartment. I file all our pictures by year, so at the end of every year I take 2 CD backups and again store one outside of the apartment. Ditto downloaded digital media e.g. audiobooks. I haven’t worked out what to do with all the movies that I am now recording but I don’t want to copy them to disc, as that sort of defeats the objective of reducing the amount of “junk” I have laying around. The new Mac Mini will resolve that issue for a while, but after that I think I will just create more and more external drives as back ups.

Finally my mate Scott shoved me in the direction of a script in Automator that I use to back up my user folder to an old 3G iPod that I have. In theory, this would make restoring easier as it “saves” the meta data as well i.e. all the links.

Anyway, if you are interested this is the script that I have set up:

Build the script in Automator, or you can just use Terminal. Either way, you are using a Terminal script (not AppleScript).

If you use Automator, you need to make the initial backup in Terminal first. The command itself is pretty easy, but you must get the full paths right (source and destination). It looks like this:

```
sudo rsync -avE /source /destination
```

In the above example, the folder "source" (and all of its contents) will be duplicated within "destination". If "source" is your Users folder, there will be a new folder named "Users" created in "Destination". When you run *rsync* subsequently, you just need to update the backup, so I use a slightly different form of the paths:

```
sudo rsync -avE /source/ /destination/Users
```

Since "source" already exists at both locations, you only need to update its contents. The above paths will look at the contents of "source", copying any changes to the "Users" folder duplicate that is at "destination".

I like to use an additional option that will delete items that have been deleted from the original. This keeps my backup from growing over time with old files (I have no doubt that the new "Time Machine" uses *rsync* without this option, thereby allowing the ability to "rewind"). With this option, the command will be:

```
sudo rsync -avE --delete /source/ /destination/Users
```

I also like to have it write what it does to a log file. This allows me to troubleshoot in the event of some problem. To do this, I just need to "pipe" the command line "stdout" to a file:

```
sudo rsync -avE --delete /source/ /destination/Users >> ~/Documents/Backup.log
```

About Chris Marshall

Educated in the UK and USA, I have lived and worked in the UK, USA, and Spain. I currently live in Spain in a state of semi-retirement where I spend most of my time developing my skills on the Mac and understanding the significance and opportunities of the "Web 2.0" explosion.

I have recently started writing reviews and articles for *macCompanion*¹ and for *The Mac ReviewCast*².

From a "day job" perspective I don't really have one at the moment. I am doing some PC training and support locally and have been advising a couple of small start-up businesses. When I do work, it is a business consultant³ with an emphasis on small and start-up businesses and mentoring individuals. I am particular keen to help US organizations establish themselves in Europe. I am also keen to develop my writing skills.

Frappr: <http://www.frappr.com/myapplestuff>

MySpace: <http://www.myspace.com/myapplestuff>

Blog: <http://www.myapplestuff.com>

Digg: <http://www.digg.com/> (MyAppleStuff)

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/chrismpics/>

Personal: http://web.mac.com/chris_marshall

And just added

<http://www.chrismarshall.vox.com> the latest blogging option from Typepad, and <http://www.youtube.com/myapplestuff> my YouTube account.

¹ <http://www.macompanion.com/>

² <http://www.surfbits.com/>

³ <http://www.m2associates.wordpress.com>



Geek Speak: Random Mac Stuff You Need to Know

<http://www.macfanatic.net/blog/> Copyright © 2006 Matt Brewer

TechTracker Interview

By Matt Brewer



Let me start this off by saying that I wasn't sure what to expect when I met up with the guys from TechTracker this past month. I've heard of one of the sites, Version Tracker, and use it to find new and interesting software to play with. I'm one of the odd ones out there who subscribes to the RSS feeds and that's about the end of my experience with the company. However, the company has a few other products up their sleeve.

The people that bring you Version Tracker also happen to provide a Pro solution that acts as a wonderful solution for those out there that want an easy way to keep their system and all the software on it up-to-date and that's what we'll be talking about more here in just a second. I also just wanted to mention that the company also brings you MacFixIt as well and I would have never made the connection. This is a website that offers all kinds of tips and fixes for Mac problems and is a useful resource.

Version Tracker Pro

If you are anything like me, I'm very skeptical about anything that has the word "Pro" in it. I always feel like the company is trying to find a way to suck more money out of consumers by making them think that they are getting a far superior product when in reality they are shipping something that is very little different from a regular version. In this case however, Pro does mean Pro.

First off, you can use the Version Tracker website for free. There is no charge and it's a great resource. You can find updates and new software all the time. However, it's a mess to sort through unless you know exactly what you're searching for and it won't alert you when there is a newer version of a piece of software for you. So this is where the Pro version comes in.

The Pro version is an actual Mac OS X Universal app that resides on your system, so that it knows all about the software that you have installed and can therefore alert you to updates that pertain just to the software that you have. This is a very nice feature that you will soon wonder how you ever lived without. The software is a solid app with nice features and a decent interface. You can easily see updates to software you have installed as it will be shown in red. You can also easily search through all the software on Version Tracker.com simply by searching the site within the program, and you get all the information you need, including other Mac user's experiences and comments, so that you can make an informed decision.

This isn't what I would rate as the next killer app, and I don't find myself using it either as I'm usually doing beta testing and bug reports for the software that I really care about, so I already know more about the software that Version Tracker does. However, if you're just wanting an easy way to keep your software up to date and like the fact that you can get other user's comments and thoughts on the software (very handy if a certain Mac Office update breaks something, you'll know before you install it....) this is a nice piece of software for you.

[Visit VersionTracker.com here.](http://www.versiontracker.com)

WWDC 2006

I know there has already been a lot of talk about WWDC on the net, ranging from rants from angry small developers, comments about how gaunt and sick Steve Jobs supposedly looks, and just tons of pictures from the event. However, if you somehow missed all of that, I'd like to tell you about my first experience at this awesome event this year.

SF is a Pretty Cool City

First off, I'm a college student attending the University of Tennessee. I was looking around for scholarships for next year and thought about one place that I hadn't even thought about checking into before, being Apple. So, I searched for some scholarships and came up with a Developer Connection "Scholarship". After reading some more, I was initially disappointed simply because I was looking for tuition money and not a free trip out to San Francisco. I went ahead and took the time to apply, never thinking that I would actually be accepted and get the trip. Boy was I wrong!

I did in fact get offered a free ticket to attend WWDC, so I made plans to fly out and stay in SF for the week. I've never been in the western USA before. I've never flown, and I've certainly never been in a city this large. It's been quite an experience! SF is a nice enough city to have the conference. It fits in nicely with the Apple Campus being just a few miles away (maybe more than that, it's a good little trip actually) and the weather is wonderful. The Moscone Center is amazing, a three level supreme Apple Retail Store being the best thing to compare it to in style and elegance.

Catered food was almost always available throughout the week, providing three meals a day. There was room for everyone to hang around and socialize. The overall atmosphere was pretty cool as I got to meet developers of the applications that I really enjoy and love. Developers like the guy behind TextMate (which won an Apple Design Award as well), the developer of Cast Life, people from Parallels, VM Ware, Microsoft, and several more were all there. I also had a quick chat with a guy about the new site redesign for Icon Factory.

Keynote Madness

The week was essentially just a huge geek-fest, meant in the best sense of course. Steve Jobs presented his keynote Monday morning to kick off the week, announcing and debuting some of Leopard's newest features, as well as showing off the new Mac Pro systems. One thing I noticed during the keynote was that first off, a lot of 3rd party apps that hard core users already use, like Virtue, Desktop Manager, and Quicksilver, those features were being integrated directly into the OS in an attempt to make Leopard better than Tiger. That mentality just puts the little guys out of a job though. I won't go into a whole long rant now, as Apple has a right to try to deliver features that their consumers will want and use. I just hate seeing the little guys (aka me) being trampled on in the process.

Another observation from the keynote was that Jobs didn't spend that much time going over technologies that developers were really going to love. There was a new version of Xcode, Interface Builder and some other apps that were introduced during the week, but Jobs didn't go into any detail at all, besides a quick, "A new Xcode..", and moving on. This gave the feeling that he wasn't really up there talking to the developers, but rather to Wall Street. And while I firmly believe that Leopard will pack several compelling features for switchers and upgraders alike, stocks still dropped after the keynote when Wall St. realized that there wasn't any new iTunes or iPod related announcements forthcoming.

Diving into the week

After the keynote, the week was pretty much the same. There were sessions on several different new technologies in Leopard throughout the week. Some of these were fairly informative and interesting, while others were just geared so low (presumably so that non-developers could pick up a small trick or two?) that it was hard to stay awake. The Apple Engineers that were scattered everywhere were simply amazing, being very enthusiastic to share what they've been developing over the last year and tripping over themselves to help us implement them into our applications to continue making the Mac platform the best user experience possible.

Leopard

This is what everyone will want to hear about, so now that you've scrolled down this far, let's go ahead and get to the good stuff.

**Note: I value my life and can/will not mention specific features and technologies that weren't previewed during the keynote.*

Time Machine is presumably going to be the technology that Apple is going to push for this release (Spotlight being the one for Tiger). This seems like it will be a very cool feature for people who have problems accidentally deleting stuff. I got to try it out on my MacBook just a few days ago after making a full backup of my stock Leopard install, and was quite impressed with all the animations and flare. I had originally thought that it might be too much, but after using it for a few moments, it was readily apparent what the technology's function was and even my mom, who hadn't even heard of it at all (the usual guinea pig for my experiments) was able to figure out what she was doing with relative ease. I'm not sure if the implementation is quite ready for production launch, but Apple is off to a good start with this technology.

Spaces has shaped up to be the perfect implementation of virtual desktops in an OS. This is a concept that I was first introduced to when I made the switch to Linux a few years ago. I didn't like the implementation in Gnome and KDE for the Linux distributions, so I never realized the true advantages of this concept until I made it to Mac and tried out *Virtue* a few months ago (*See review here*). However, there were several shortcomings as far as I was concerned and I wasn't able to add this to my normal workflow. *Spaces* fixes all of those problems and performs like a virtual desktop manager should. You can have up to 16 spaces and easily configure keyboard shortcuts for switching between them. There is an Exposé-like mode that shows you all of your spaces at one time, and this is where *Spaces* shines. You can click on a space to go into that space, but the really cool thing (if you've used other desktop managers in the past) is that you can drag a window from one space into another. And I'm not done. From there, you can also have Exposé working in the individual *Spaces*, so that you can see all your windows in each space. Now you can "ooh" and "awe". Oh, and you can rearrange the spaces themselves. That's just cool.

Spotlight has seen some improvements sporting better search functionality for those that really need some crazy search criteria. The biggest thing that most people will notice is the fact that it performs searches much better and is so fast in fact, that it's meant to act as an application launcher. Just use *Spotlight* very quickly to find an application and hit *Enter* and it's launched. For those familiar with applications like *LaunchBar* and *Quicksilver*, *Spotlight* isn't going to provide all of that functionality. However, it does provide most users with all the features that they will need.

There are several new developer tools released, and for lack of memory of what is legal to talk about and what isn't, I won't go into any more detail than that. All I can say is that the updated versions have seen major revisions, some of them coming from the developer gods themselves, and the new ones will earn their place in our hearts very shortly.

iChat 4.0 has seen plenty of advancements since it's last revision and will sport many little features that will make using this IM client even better than it currently is in Tiger. There is support for little stuff like animated buddy icons and other cool features like graphics and movies as backgrounds while you're on a video chat, as well as something called iChat Theater where you can talk your way through a Keynote presentation, a QuickTime video and more. A very nice update to this application. The coolest thing about the new version is the updated interface that ditches brushed metal and adds nice "slices" (a theme in Leopard it seems) for your buddies, so it's very easy to organize your long buddy list. Tabbed chatting is also very well done.

Mail 3.0 will be better than it's current version, adding features such as notes and introducing a system-wide API for leveraging the To-Do list that we first saw in iCal. However, that's about as cool as Mail gets. We're getting some templates for Mail that will allow anyone to send huge and annoying HTML email all the time and that's about where the joy ends. Not what I had hoped for a 3.0 version of Mail. However, Apple isn't done with Leopard yet, so hopefully they will surprise me.

Conclusion

There are other applications, system services, menu items and much more that are seeing updates and improvements in Leopard. Some of these are simply amazing, some are on par with a "Oh, that will be nice" and yet others are "What were they thinking?!?!". So, with all of that in mind, this is an early Developer Preview of Leopard that I have gotten to play around with on my MacBook these last few weeks, so there will be plenty of stuff that will change before the final release that consumers will get next Spring, as Apple tries to get this product out before Microsoft officially ships its Vista operating system.

WWDC was an incredible experience. I got to attend a wonderful event, surround myself with people just as enthusiastic about the Mac platform as I am, and learn all about upcoming features and technologies that will debut in Leopard so that I'm prepared to leverage them in my next killer app (not that I have a first one, mind you). If you ever get the chance to attend, don't let the opportunity pass you by.

Contact Info

You can always send me an email at mbrewer@maccompanion.com or visit my website at <http://www.macfanatic.net/blog/> for more information about me and my ramblings. I also produce a weekly audio podcast taking an in-depth review of cool and new Mac applications, along with tips and the occasional tutorial.



MacFevre

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How to Make an AudioBook, Part 1

by Wayne Lefevre

My wife purchased one of the Janet Evanovich books on CD the other day. She asked if I would put it on her iPod for her so she would have something to listen to in the garden. Turns out, this thing is on multiple CD's. Each CD contains 20 to 30 tracks of 3 to 4 minute parts of the story. I ripped the CD's to iTunes without difficulty.

<http://www.simplyaudiobooks.com/audio-books-author/Janet+Evanovich/93/>

I've come to firmly believe when technology and marriage come together, nothing can be without difficulty. The problem was, my wife also liked to listen to music on the iPod. She was constantly getting lost or forgetting where she was when returning to her audiobook. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audiobooks>

I completely agreed that something had to be done. 160 somewhat odd files can get confusing.

Bookmarking is an option, but doesn't help much. It works fine, but what's the point of bookmarking a minute and-a-half file, when you can't remember you are on file 78? Of course ripping a CD, whether to AAC or MP3, will not "classify" an audiobook as an iTunes Audiobook, so it will not put it under Audiobooks on the iPod.

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/audiobooks/>

In order for the iPod to classify a file as an audiobook, it has to have an extension of .m4b. This is quite different for me, because I've got quite a few audiobooks ripped as MP3's. Now we'll have to convert those.

The first type of audiobook we will make is if you already have a large mp3 that you would like to convert. Say, you've already got a book split into chapters of 20 to 30 MB's, or you want to take all those old MP3's of Ricky Gervais and make them into an audiobook.

First, we will have to download a script file called *Make Bookmarkable* from Doug's AppleScripts.

<http://www.dougscripts.com/itunes/scripts/scripts07.php?page=1#makebookmarkable>

You'll take this script and place it into your *home/iTunes/scripts* folder, you may have to create this folder if you don't have one. The script download even has it's own "open iTunes script folder" script.

Next, if your files are MP3's, select them and open on the toolbar *Advanced/Convert* selection to AAC.

You can import at data rates down below what you would normally import a song CD. I personally import at 64 Kbits for audio. In iTunes this is set by Preferences/Advanced/Importing menu. You can check the Audio CDs error correction if you'd like. It will slow down the import, but may reduce skips and pops in the audio. You could probably go down as far as 48 Kbits and mono if you want to save some space. Some audiobooks sound better in stereo, and some in mono. I would check both and see which one you prefer.

After your files are converted to AAC, assuming you have placed the script file in the appropriate folder and re-started iTunes, you will now see a script icon in your toolbar. Again, select the AAC files, select the script icon, than select *Make Bookmarkable*. This will automatically make your files into audiobooks and rename them with the appropriate .m4b. Now on your iPod, they will appear under audiobooks and be book-markable!

That concludes converting a large MP3 into an audiobook format. Now to create an audiobook from a CD.

CDing an MP3

There are 3 modes of thought that you can use, each progressively more difficult, or time consuming. Each of course, takes CD's and rips them to your hard drive, legalities aside. The first is just ripping the discs, selecting all the files, and running *Make Bookmarkable*. Does the job, and leaves you with hundreds of files to listen to.

The second and third course require more work, and more scripts, but is much more satisfying to listen to and navigate.

Two scripts you will need from Doug's Applescripts is *Track Splicer*
<http://www.dougscripits.com/itunes/scripts/scripts07.php?page=3#tracksplicer>

and *Join Together*. <http://www.dougscripits.com/itunes/scripts/scripts07.php?page=1#jointogether>

To create the chapters we will need Apple's "Chapter Tool" application installed. You can then create a "chapterized" audio file of the exported AAC file. "Chapter Tool" is a command-line application that assists with creating "chapterized" audio files, (aka enhanced audio files). This script utilizes it to create such files from your joined tracks.

You can download the Chapter Tool application (currently Beta 2.0b8 as of this writing) by clicking on the URL clip provided in the script's download package. The direct download URL is
http://homepage.mac.com/applepodcast/podcasts/Resources/static/podcast_chapter_tool_beta.dmg
The "Chapter Tool" folder must be installed in your *Username > Music* folder, as its instructions also direct.

You should be familiar with how "Chapter Tool" works; however you needn't actually be proficient with it, since the "Join Together" applet handles all the required input and command-line operations.

Next month we will discuss how to turn a CD into one large MP4. Hope this helps you out, and if you have any questions, feel free to e-mail me at wlefevre@maccompanion.com/



The Mac Night Owl

<http://www.macnightowl.com> Copyright © 2006 Making The Impossible, Inc

The Mac Hardware Report: Stop Saying Macs Cost More!

by Gene Steinberg

It's pretty much agreed now that, for the time being at least, the Mac Pro is cheaper than a comparably equipped Dell Precision Workstation 690. That won't stop some from saying otherwise, but that's not important in the scheme of things.

However, what annoys me is the fact that far too many tech writers and Bloggers still insist that this is something brand new, that the Mac was previously more expensive, that this represents a new tact on the part of Apple. That's not quite true, to put it mildly.

You see, once someone gets a reputation, particularly an unfavorable one, it's not easy to overcome. Back in the bad old days when John Sculley was CEO of Apple, it was perfectly true that Macs cost a lot more. There's no dispute of that. Through the years even after Sculley departed, you had to pay a premium to go Mac, even if the cost of upkeep was less. Apple made some bad decisions in those days, and, eventually, those decisions killed the company.

Even the iPod was once thought to be a more expensive product, until Apple secured those killer deals when it cornered the Flash memory market, that is. Then things became a lot more competitive. But a price difference of perhaps \$50 isn't so significant if you're spending \$300 or more on a consumer electronics product. If you factor that increase onto a product costing five or ten times as much, however, pretty soon you have real money.

When Apple moved to Intel processors, again the online chatter had it that prices would go down, forgetting that the prices for parts from either IBM or Intel weren't all that different. In fact, some suggested that Apple paid a higher price to switch, and might have to eat the difference or pass it on to you and me.

Regardless, I've said this before and I'll say it now: In recent years, a Mac has been extremely competitive with name-brand PC boxes with similar configurations. Now that Intel is inside both, the comparisons might be easier, but the end results still show that a Mac is not more expensive, and hasn't been for a while.

For the moment, let's put the top-of-the-line aside, and look at the Mac mini. Yes, I know there are rumors that a new model may be in our midst soon enough, but, based on Apple's current strategy, I don't expect prices to change much. It may be faster, of course, and perhaps have more multimedia features, but that's not the point.

Now we all know that getting consistent pricing on Dell is a needle-in-a-haystack quest, but since they are the number one PC maker, I'll continue to compare them with Apple, even if it requires reading a few tea leaves.

The basic Mac mini, at \$599, has a 1.5GHz Intel Core Solo processor, 512MB RAM, a 60GB hard drive, an integrated Intel GMA950 graphics processor with 64MB of shared memory, a Combo drive, gigabit Ethernet, built-in Bluetooth and Wi-Fi and a remote control.

The least expensive Dell equivalent I could locate was a Dimension E310 P4 Vista Capable, which has a 3.06GHz Pentium 4, which you cannot compare directly to the Core Solo or Core Duo, an 80GB hard drive, an older Intel GMA900 graphics processor, a remote control and FireWire. I couldn't locate a gigabit network interface, though in fairness to Dell, it does have a modem, which the mini lacks, so let's call it almost a wash in terms of hardware. Dell's price is \$565, reduced from \$678.

A basic set of multimedia software and an optical mouse, to match what Apple provides, boosts the price to \$622. This may, of course, change by the time you get to check it, but I expect the basic trend will be similar enough for the sake of this highly informal window-shopping session.

Yes, there are cheaper boxes from Dell, but you have fewer options to customize, so you can't really do an honest comparison. Just as important, the Dell I configured, though it is supposedly capable of running Windows Vista, contains older Intel chips, and performance is apt to be inferior, even though the processor has a higher clock speed rating.

But even if performance could be regarded as equivalent or close enough not to be significant one way or the other, you can't make the argument that a Mac mini is more expensive. You can do similar comparisons down the line and prices will also be highly similar, until you get to the Mac Pro, where Apple has a huge advantage.

So why are the pundits saying otherwise? As I said, it's hard to erase the memory of a bad reputation, even when it is disproved over and over again.

However, I'm more interested in the truth, even though that's something a few out there still can't handle. No, the Mac is not more expensive! This myth has to end here and now, and if someone tells you otherwise, insist they check their facts first.

For Comments on this article and where you can add your own, go to:

<http://www.macnighthowl.com/2006/08/29/the-mac-hardware-report-stop-saying-macs-cost-more/>



Mac ReviewCast

<http://www.surfbits.com> and <http://www.macreviewcast.com> Copyright © 2006 Tim Verpoorten

The Top Ten Mac Freeware Updates for September 2006

By Tim Verpoorten

In no particular order, here are the top ten freeware applications I found that were updated for September 2006 and reviewed in the *Mac ReviewCast* in August.

VirtueDesktop

<http://virtuedesktops.info>

Before Apple introduced their multiple desktop feature in Leopard called Spaces, we already had several programs to do the same thing. One of them was VirtueDesktops. VirtueDesktops is a virtual desktop manager for Apple's Mac OS. It offers features, eye candy and configurable options that no other desktop manager on the mac has added yet, and is under active development. It is based upon the work done by Rich Wareham on DesktopManager, which is a lighter, less feature-packed virtual desktop application. Here are some of the features in the full-featured program. An unlimited number of virtual screens at your disposal, exciting transitions and window fading eye candy, Universal binary, scriptable, VirtueDesktops does not clutter your desktop - it gets in, switches your virtual screen and then quietly hides itself, waiting for your next request, install plugins to add additional features, and Make your windows and applications visible across all of your virtual screens. This is a very slick looking and working app, if you've never played with multiple desktops, here's your chance.

Azureus

<http://azureus.sourceforge.net>

You've heard me say that the podcast can be downloaded via bit torrent and if you're looking for a bit torrent client to use on your Mac, check out this one, Azureus. Azureus implements the BitTorrent protocol using java language and comes bundled with many invaluable features for both beginners and advanced users:

- * Multiple torrent downloads
- * Upload and download speed limiting, both globally and per torrent
- * Advanced seeding rules
- * Adjustable disk cache
- * Only uses one port for all the torrents
- * UPnP sets the forward on your router
- * Can use a proxy, for both tracker and peer communications
- * Fast resume
- * Can set a default download dir and move completed files
- * Can import torrents automatically from a set dir
- * Highly customizable interface
- * IRC plugin included for quick help
- * Embedded tracker, host your own torrents, automate your shares (periodic scanning of a dir)...

Many useful plugins are available:

- * Auto-adjustment of your upload and download speeds according to your network charge with Autospeed
- * Auto-download torrents with RSS Feed Scanner
- * Schedule upload and download speed limits with Speed Scheduler
- * Receive a mail when a download finishes with Status Mailer
- * Add numerous info on torrents (Extra seeding columns, Country Locator)
- * Remote control Azureus through the Swing Web Interface or the HTML Web Interface

If you're looking for a Bit Torrent application, this one is a great start.

DotMac Menu

<http://www.infinitenexus.com/dmm>

To answer your question, yes, I renewed my .mac account this week for another year. I purchased the \$79 package of .Mac that I explained on Surfbits.com and just entered in the renewal code and I can now complain about the service for another year. But to make using .mac a little less painful, I found this freeware app this week. DotMac Menu throws a .mac location menu in your menubar to make finding your way around .mac faster and easier.

DotMac Menu consolidates the various aspects of the .Mac experience* into five categories:

- * .Mac Welcome - the first stop for news, downloads, and all .Mac
- * .Mac Sections - the various pages and sections of mac.com
- * .Mac Syncing - applications from Apple that sync with .Mac/iDisk
- * iDisk Status - quickly view your iDisk usage (as MB or %)
- * .Mac Expiration - know how many days until renewal at a glance

DotMac Menu is fully customizable. Using the Show menu you can easily choose which categories are visible in your menu. You can also theme your DotMac Menu to match OS X's built-in Aqua or Graphite appearances.

DotMac Menu will automatically remember and restore your customized menu on every launch. It's that easy.

There's a few more features of DotMac menu, but I'll let you find them on your own. It makes paying for you .Mac account just a little more painless.

Email Backup

<http://homepage.mac.com/minge/emailbackup/index.html>

Email Backup is an easy to use, automated email backup solution. It allows for scheduled backups of the most common email applications through a simple interface. Once configured, Email Backup will automatically backup up your email data to the specified destination. The destination can be any mountable volume. Email Backup has built in support for the two major email applications - Apple Mail and Microsoft Entourage. Email Backup backs up all files needed for restoration in the event of an email corruption or total hard drive crash. The scheduling is flexible and can happen without having the program opened. I backup my hard drive with Super Duper every week, but I back up my email almost daily.

RapidoSMTP

<http://www.app4mac.com/freewares.html>

This free utility helps Mac users set up a full SMTP mail server in less than a minute. RapidoSMTP allows you to turn on the Postfix SMTP server built into Mac OS X that in turn will allow you to send out email from the command line, from PHP, or from any Mac OS X Mail application. RapidoSMTP is useful for example when you move locations with a laptop. You'll no longer have to setup a different SMTP server to send emails. But this product is also a great tool for developers. For PHP programmers, web designers, and other software developers, it's often useful to set up a local SMTP server on the development machine and communicate with it through "localhost" for testing the webpage or application.

WiFiSMTP

<http://www.doktorkleanor.com/SPIP/WifiSmtip-1,139.html>

There are a ton of free wireless hotspots popping up all over the world today. They're great for surfing the net and reading your email, but what about sending email? There are times you need to know what the SMTP mail server is for a particular hotspot, well give WiFiSMTP a try. WifiSmtip lets you know:

- the name of the Internet Service Provider (ISP) you are connected to
- the address of that ISP's mail server (SMTP)
- the connection speed (available bandwidth) It can also:
- copy the address of the SMTP server to the clipboard (so that you can paste it into you favorite e-mail software)
- regularly check the connection status

With WifiSmtip you can still send mail when you don't know where you are connected, as is the case with Wi-Fi hotspots. It's a must have app for any portable person grabbing Wi-Fi where they can find it.

Image Browser

<http://www.simulacrum.net.nz/imagebrowser.php>

ImageBrowser is a program for viewing and organizing images, movies and sounds. It makes it easy to move around the folders on your hard drive, using either the mouse or keyboard, and see all the image, movie, and sound files in each folder. When an image or movie file is selected it is shown in the ImageBrowser window, or can be opened in its own window. The list of files can be shown as thumbnails, making finding images easy.

- Multiple file types: View any image format supported by OS X, such as JPEG, TIFF, PNG, PSD, GIF, and more. Also PDF files, QuickTime movies, and sounds.
- Multiple windows: You can open as many browser windows as you need, each one operating independently so you can view separate folders in each one.
- Thumbnails: You can generate thumbnails for any image or movie file and they will be displayed in the list. Thumbnails can be shown in three size: Large, medium and small, or turned off.
- File Operations: You can Rename, Delete, and Edit images/movies. Also create new folders, show file information, and show the file in the Finder. Copy the image or the image's name to the clipboard.
- Batch Rename: Rename multiple files at once.
- Editing: Open the image/movie in its default application, or select the application to load the file.

Himmelbar

<http://softbend.free.fr/himmelbar/faq.html>

I've mentioned this app before, but it's so good that I wanted to talk about it again since it was just updated.

HimmelBar provides an icon in the menu bar to quickly access your installed applications by scanning standard locations such as local, user, network and developer applications. You can also add a custom location such as the Classic Applications folder, or any other folder of your hard disk that contains applications. HimmelBar doesn't just add all applications to a menu, it displays separated menus for each locations and allows you to customize menu contents and scanning behavior to best fit your needs. In other words, you set up the menubar to display your apps in any form you need or want them displayed in. It's a great alternative for mouse users that want another option for launching their programs.

SnapNDrag

<http://www.yellowmug.com/snapndrag>

We all know that OSX has screen capture capabilities built right into it, but I still like a program that makes it easier to use and a bit more functional. SnapNDrag lets you take a screenshot by just clicking a button and dragging the resulting screenshot off. For example, to email a screenshot, you would drag the screenshot from SnapNDrag to the Mail application. It is that simple. No hard-to-remember key combinations, no file conversion to deal with, no file dialog boxes to navigate, no temporary files to erase later on. Supports PNG and TIFF for times when image quality cannot be compromised. Or use JPEG with adjustable quality for smaller file sizes. This is the freeware version of SnapNDrag Pro, shareware, so you'll see an advertisement in the window when you use this, but it doesn't distract from the function or ability.

RapidoWrite

<http://www.app4mac.com/freewares.html>

Anytime you enter text in any application ,RapidoWrite can help you do it faster and more accurately! If you think this sounds a lot like TextExpander, you're right. Let me explain.

When you are writing text, you probably find yourself typing the same text again and again. Whether this is your name, your e-mail address, the URL of your blog, your personal address, etc. RapidoWrite is here to save time by "typing" these frequently used text for you. You just define your list of abbreviations, and RapidoWrite will automatically show you related texts as you type. With RapidoWrite, you will be able to quickly insert in any application, standard greetings and signatures (including formatted text) or any phrases. The other options are shareware, so give this freeware one a try first.

I'll be back again with the best of September's freeware in the October issue. Thank you for taking the time to check out my list and remember to listen to Robert Pritchett and I each week on the [MacReviewCast](#).



The Northern Spy

<http://www.TheNorthernSpy.com> Copyright ©2006 Rick Sutcliffe

Fall Harvest

by Rick Sutcliffe

The onions and early potatoes are in, the beans and corn are in their prime, and the tree fruit starting to ripen. Late summer and early fall is also the traditional time for a spate of industry announcements in preparation for the big selling seasons.

The old Apple Computer Corp kept secrets close to the corporate T-shirt without telling us they had them. The news generously informs us Leopard has secret features. Well, it beats announcing vapourware solely to kill off potential competitors, as some have been known to do. The features they did reveal at WWDC included Time Machine (a machine state rollback utility that could obsolete all other backup software), Spaces, a framework for task-oriented organization of application groups, and a plethora of new functionality for applications such as Mail, iChat, iPhoto, iCal, Front Row, and Keynote.

Improved underpinnings for the whole platform include 64-bit Intel support (without sacrificing 32-bit compatibility), a new graphics technology called Core Animation, new security measures, enhancements to Universal Access, the above-mentioned secret features, and of course new of developers' tools to take advantage of all the goodies.

On the hardware side are (up to double) dual core desktops (MacPro, available soon) and, completing the Intel transition, the new Xserve (October availability), said machines touted for their configurability and for being up to five times as fast. The new MacPro requires less cooling apparatus, so boasts much more room inside the case for an enhanced graphics slot and more drives. While it does sport SATA, at least it still has FireWire 800 connectivity, though Apple's lukewarm handling of its own brainchild recently makes one wonder how long before it will be orphaned. Let's hope it works better than in the G5s.

While some of the software details do seem novel, the scope of the WWDC announcements was more or less as ought to have been expected. This is all incremental innovation along marked paths, not particularly trailblazing, an outcome that left some attendees with little to talk about except for speculating on Steve Jobs' health, complaining about the lack of giveaways and food, and beefing that "five times as fast" might be the new "faster than some things, at least" One could predict with fair certainty the impending advent of multiple quad core machines, as the 4GHz barrier is unlikely to be breached.

Perhaps more to the point is that at the desktop, Apple is now astride better price points for comparable gear than, say, the now beleaguered Dell. Of course, the cost of owning a Mac over its useful lifetime has for years been lower than the competition, but purchase price advantage makes for better marketing leverage to potential switchers.

Still no sight of a phone/PDA/eBook reader done right or of the real iVideoPod. However, perhaps holding over 75% of the U.S. digital music player market suffices for the time being. Of course, once Leopard is finished and the last of the MacIntels actually ship, speculation on the Next Big Thing will surely become rampant.

Some naysayers suggested that developers might be less willing to release products for the Mac platform once it was on Intel--thinking vendors would tell Mac owners to boot into W*nd*ws to use their products. The spy's sense of recent market announcements suggests the opposite. It appears that the number of people developing for the Mac platform, either exclusively or dually, is growing rather than shrinking.

Lego Mindstorms offers an interesting case in point. Their new Mindstorms NXT robotics toolkit includes the NXT brick and its programmable 32-bit processor, various motors, controllers, Technic construction bricks, and the software running under OX X 10.3.9 or higher. Downloading to the brick is via Bluetooth or USB interface.

Other announcements noted in passing include MakeMusic releasing the 2007 version of the excellent and venerable Finale music notation program for Mac OS X (universal) and Windows. Finale 2007 costs \$600; upgrades start at \$99.95.

And, although the Spy does not recommend for commercial purposes any web site building packages (they tend to be proprietary and non-portable) and especially not the use of word processors to output a semblance of (often incorrect) HTML, there are times when one needs to toss together small, temporary, or otherwise quick-and-dirty web sites, that are at least soundly programmed. RAGE WebDesign has been around for six years now and could fill the bill for this and then some, offering support for HTML, XHTML, CSS, PHP, Javascript (they mean ECMAScript), ASP, XML, VBScript, and more. It sports a set of editing tools, and comes with a year of web hosting to sweeten the pot. Sounds interesting, though the Spy has not actually used the product.

Uber geek note of the week

If, like the Spy, you do a little web hosting business to pay for your own web addictions, education, and the fast servers you couldn't otherwise justify affording, there's a pretty good chance you use cPanel for your customers and the companion WHM (Web Hosting Manager) for much of your own administrative work. You undoubtedly also find it necessary to make small edits to server configuration files, permissions, owner/group, or to make backups, delete files, uploads/downloads, etc. Yes you could SSH to the box, and use the command line and pico to do the necessary, but wouldn't it be simpler to do all this right in the web browser using a WHM window?

Now you can. Moreover, the ConfigServer folk (makers of excellent MailScanner and firewall front ends) have now renamed their WHM File Manager/Console script application as ConfigServer Explorer, and released it as a free download. This thing is so wonderfully and exquisitely dangerous, it prompts the Spy to formulate:

The Spy's Seventh Law: A utility's hazard rating is directly proportional to its usefulness.

In the case of cse, the hazard is wonderfully, insanely high, and the constant of proportionality moderately low. The Spy loves it. ConfigServer's cse is a web host's indispensable tool, and it bothers me not a whit that I paid for it before it was free.

Toy of the month announcement

Canon Corp. has announced a new digital SLR, the EOS Digital Rebel XTi. The hook? This thing is supposedly cleans its own optics whenever you turn it on (or select the function from a menu. Oh. Oh. The Spy actually has his tongue hanging out for a Canon EOS 30D, but this concept is quite intriguing. When will we have computers that can expunge the dust from their own cases?

Meanwhile at the Billg ranch (now under a new foreman)

The MS Macintosh Business Unit (Mac BU) claims to have made progress toward porting MS Office to Xcode and therefore to a universal version. MS Messenger will be the first universal product actually released, but not till late 2006, so Office should not be expected until at well into 2007.

One major change for the next version of Office includes a new XML-based file format (with converters for old versions), which will ensure cross-platform compatibility with W*nd*ws versions. Contradictorily, the new Mac Office will NOT have Visual Basic for Applications. Macros under Mac OS X will be written in AppleScript instead of VBA.

The Spy has decidedly mixed feelings about this decision. On the one hand (and under his hat as a supposed language expert) he has long held that VBA is the single worst designed programming language ever, violating security, orthogonality and the principle of least astonishment at every turn. On the other hand, and under his hat as a church treasurer, he has a vast collection of complex and painstakingly-worked-out VBA automations of his extensive spreadsheets (some, incidentally include cell formulas originally written for VisiCalc). Not only will all this automation have to be rewritten, the rewrites will apparently not be cross-platform, erasing one of Excel's principal attractions (and canceling his rating of Excel as the best software ever written). Moreover, it's not at all clear how function extensions could be written, unless MS plans to extend AppleScript's mathematics. Sorry, no. He'd rather learn someone else's macro language and retain cross-platform compatibility.

Meanwhile, Microsoft also announced it has halted development on a universal version of Virtual PC. Given that Apple is reportedly working on virtual machines that would allow W*nd*ws and Linux, given the Parallels product, and given Boot Camp as a stopgap, Virtual PC has no obvious role to play on MacIntels.

The pitter patter of little feats

The Spy notes that AOL has decided to make access to its system free (except for phone access, for which there will still be a charge.) The last of the old-fashioned value-added online communities, AOL has lost so many customers in recent times it has already become marginalized. It's hard to imagine anyone needing something this any more, so it's just as well it's now free. Hats off to the beginning of the end of an era. Course, in our neck of the disciplines, an era lasts a month or so. See you in an era.

--The Northern Spy

Rick Sutcliffe, (a.k.a. The Northern Spy) is professor of Computing Science and Mathematics at Trinity Western University. He's written two textbooks and several novels, one of which was named best in the science fiction genre for 2003. His columns have appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers, and he's a regular speaker at churches, schools, academic meetings, and conferences. He and his wife Joyce have lived in the Aldergrove/Bradner area of BC since 1972.

Want to discuss this and other Northern Spy columns? Surf on over to ArjayBB.com. Participate and you could win free web hosting from the WebNameHost.net subsidiary of Arjay Web Services. Rick Sutcliffe's fiction can be purchased in various eBook formats from Fictionwise, and in dead tree form from Bowker's Booksurge.

URLs

The Northern Spy Home Page: <http://www.TheNorthernSpy.com>

WebNameHost : <http://www.WebNameHost.net>

WebNameSource : <http://www.WebNameSource.net>

nameman : <http://nameman.net>

opundo : <http://opundo.com>

Sheaves Christian Resources : <http://sheaves.org>

Arjay Books: <http://www.ArjayBooks.com>

Booksurge: <http://www.booksurge.com>

Fictionwise: <http://www.fictionwise.com>

The Spy's Laws collected: <http://www.thenorthernspy.com/spyslaws.htm>

ConfigServer's WHM-based Explorer (cse) : <http://www.configserver.com/cp/cse.html>

RAGE : <http://www.ragesw.com/products/webdesign.html>

LEGO : <http://www.lego.com/>

MakeMusic : <http://www.makemusic.com/>

Canon: <http://www.canon.com>



Mac Security 101

<http://www.applemacpunk.com>
applemacpunk@cox.net

Connecting to the Internet: Put a Router Between Your Mac and the World

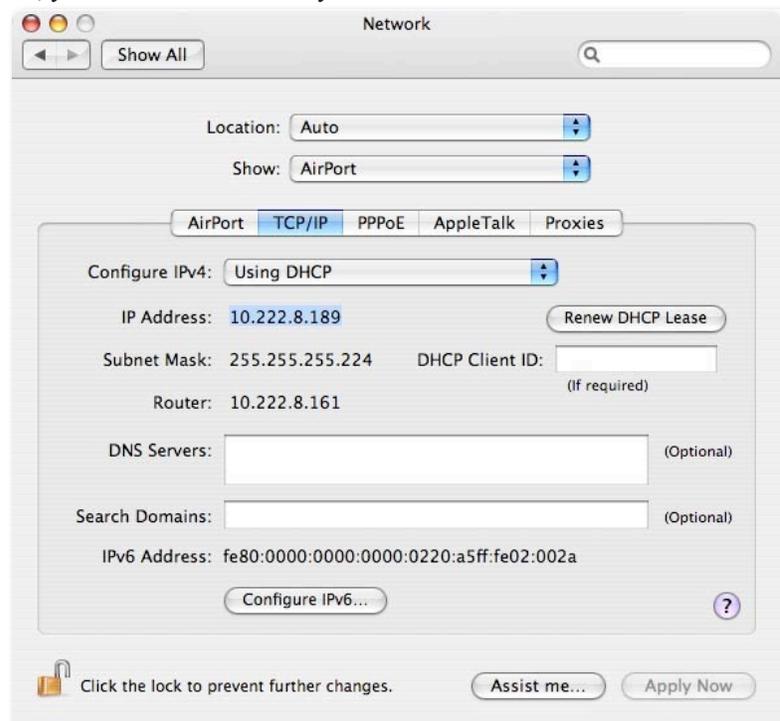
by Kale Feelhaver aka: Applemacpunk

The days of dial up are gone. These days everyone connects to the Internet via high-speed Cable or DSL connections. Though these connections are much faster (and much less painful to use), they pose a new problem. When you plug your Mac directly into your Cable/DSL modem, you are putting your Mac directly on the Internet. This article will give a brief synopsis of a safer way to connect.

Before talking about ways to connect, let's talk a little bit about what actually happens when you connect to the Internet. Every connection to the Internet is given a number. Think of them like addresses, or phone numbers. These numbers are called IP Addresses and each one is a unique string of four numbers (between 0 and 255), separated by dots (i.e.: 68.159.36.122). Every Internet provider (AOL, Earthlink, etc.) is given a range of IP Addresses that they can distribute to their members.

IP Addresses on the Internet are called Public IP Addresses. Local networks also use IP Addresses, but to keep things from getting confusing, local networks have three reserved IP ranges, called Private IP Addresses. The ranges are 10.0.0.0 – 10.255.255.255, 172.16.0.0 – 172.31.255.255, and 192.168.0.0 – 192.168.255.255. These IP ranges designate internal networks and are never used on the Internet. At any time, you can check your Mac's IP Address through the Network pane in System Preferences and see if you are connected to a Public IP Address, or a Private IP Address. If you see an address like 10.222.8.189 (or any of the reserved addresses), you are connected to a local area network. If you see an address like 157.62.44.101, you are connected directly to the Internet.

One of the easiest and cheapest ways to put a barrier between your Mac and the Internet is to connect through a router. A router is a hardware device that sits between your Mac and the Cable/DSL modem. The function of the router is to translate Private IP Addresses into Public IP Addresses. Routers use a technology called NAT (Network Address Translation) to achieve this. A router has (at least) two interfaces. One is the external interface, which plugs into the Internet (Cable/DSL modem). The other is the internal interface, which plugs into your Mac (or into your network if you have several Macs). Basically, the router takes the Public IP Address from the Internet, and gives your Mac a Private IP Address to keep it separated from the Internet. The true function of a router is far more complicated, but that is a simplified overview.



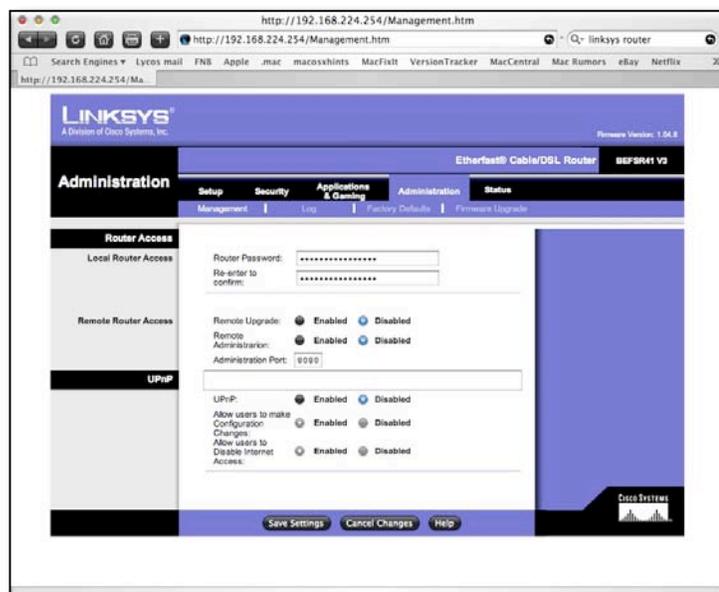
Think of the router like a front desk in an office building. If you are sitting at a desk in the building, and you call someone, the call goes out through the front desk. If the person calls you back at that number, they are connected to the front desk and not directly to your phone. The router uses a similar method to secure your Mac from the outside world. The router takes the Public IP Address, so every time you browse the Internet, you are using the address of the router, not the address of your Mac. If a hacker attempts to “call you back” he gets the router, and not your Mac.

There are several routers on the market made by companies like Linksys, D-Link, and Netgear. A decent router will cost you less than \$100, and probably last for many years. The basic setup is pretty simple. First, shut off your Mac and shut off your Cable/DSL Modem. Hook up the router, according to the directions. A cord should come out of the modem, and go into the router. Then a second cord should come out of the router and go into the Mac. Once everything is hooked up, power on the modem, power on the router, and power on the Mac, in that order.

Now for the part that everyone forgets... go to the router configuration screen and change the password. Look in your router's manual to see how to get to the configuration screen. On most routers, this will be accessed via a web browser. Since the router is now your connection to the Internet, you want to make sure you are protecting it with a password. Anyone who has ever setup a Linksys router knows the default password is “admin”. The same is true of every manufacturer. Each one uses the same default password on all of their routers. A hacker is always going to try the default passwords when attempting to break in. Make sure to choose a password that is complex, but still easy to remember. You may need to perform maintenance on the router at some point, and then you will need the password.



Connecting to the Internet through a router is not going to guarantee security, but it should help to increase the security of your Mac while you are on the Internet. Fortunately, there are a lot less Mac-specific hacks out there, because most people target Windows. However, this doesn't mean Mac users should get lazy and think, “it won't happen to me.” The Internet is a nasty place and there are a lot of evils out there lurking in the virtual shadows. Put some hardware between your Mac and the Internet... you'll sleep better at night.



Books

Building Scalable Web Sites

reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Cal Henderson

<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/web2apps/index.html>

Released: May 16, 2006

Pages: 348

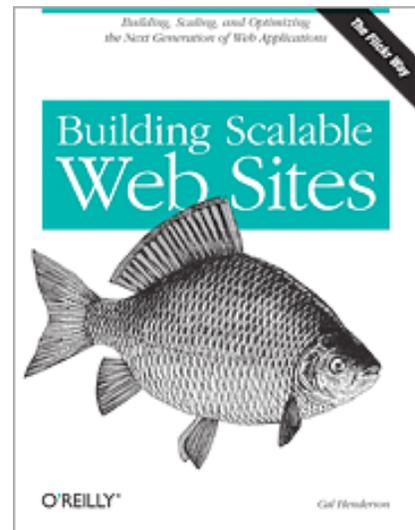
\$40 USD, \$52 CND, £28.50 GBP, 28,39€ Euro

ISBN: 0596102356

Advanced.

Strengths: Shows how to use Open Source tool and commercial ones for designing and developing web apps.

Weaknesses: None found.



Cal Henderson has taken his experiences with Flickr.com and put the practices into published form. It took me quite a while to get through *Building Scalable Web Sites*, even though the author has an excellent writing style. I got slowed down while going through the chapter on Unicode glyphs and graphemes. That and the code samples and examples spread throughout the book.

What I found valuable to me anyway were the sections discussing statistics, monitoring and alerting. Others may find the treatments on software development enlightening or perhaps application scalability. Also the discussion on data integrity and security (Cross-Site Scripting or XSS) are helpful.

Every website can be improved and if it is to grow and flourish, knowledge on how it can be scaled is invaluable. Knowing which tools are available and which ones work well are also very helpful.

There are 11 chapters covering application architecture, development environments, internationalization and localization, data integrity and security, Email, remote services, bottlenecks, scaling apps, statistics and APIs.

Run the gamut of web technologies and techniques with this book.

Combating Spyware in the Enterprise

reviewed by Mike Hubbartt



Authors: Brian Baskin, Tony Bradley, Jeremy Faircloth, Craig A. Schiller, Ken Caruso, Paul Piccard, Lance James
Technical Editor: Tony Piltzecker

Syngress

<http://www.syngress.com/catalog/?pid=3740>

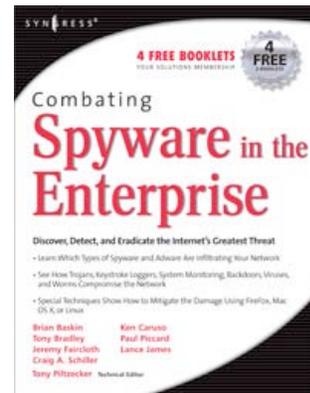
Released: June, 2006

Pages: 386

\$50 USD, \$65 CND, £28 GBP, 41,72€ Euro

ISBN: 1597490644

Intermediate/Advanced



Strengths: Good subject matter coverage, well structured, excellent website references for additional information and tools.



Weaknesses: Few sources of spyware affect OS X, so most of the Mac-specific coverage is in chapter seven.

Few computer users today are unaware of the threat of malicious programs dispersed through the Internet. Opening e-mail, even visiting websites can result in attacks on unwary systems. While Mac users have been spared the plethora of viruses that regularly plague Windows users, there are other types of attacks than can affect Macs, so it is important to know how these attacks can occur and how to prevent them.

Chapter one explains and defines the types of programs grouped as spyware. Useful background information, but not intended to solve spyware problems. Chapter two covers the evolution of spyware - some software was written as ad ware, as some companies merely wanted to track consumer preferences to better aim their product ads. Like chapter one, it is good background data covering the hows and whys spyware was developed, but doesn't offer a lot of solutions. For that, move on to the next chapters.

Chapter three covers keystroke loggers, Trojans and back doors, and includes a list of some of each as reference material. This is really the starting point for readers already familiar with spyware. Keystroke loggers track and send the actual keys pressed, enabling a hacker to steal username and passwords as well as private data. Trojans are programs that are meant to be installed on computers to allow someone unauthorized access, and that purpose is masked from users. Backdoors are hidden ways into a computer, which often happens when a hacker exploits Windows and Internet Explorer weaknesses. While good material, this chapter has little information pertinent to Mac users, except those that use Internet Explorer.

Now chapter four is packed with information, tips and tools addressing spyware used for crime and espionage: phishing and bots. Phishing is the technique of sending email to people with a dire warning that something has happened and the user must contact the company immediately and provide confidential information, using the supplied link. And these links appear to access legitimate websites but usually access faux sites that mimic the true sites and ply the user for personal information that can be used to steal money or enable identity theft. A bad situation, but one that is easily addressable by education.

Why should you e-mail your account information, social security number or mother's maiden name to someone? Answer: you shouldn't. Ever. But many people fall prey to this ploy every day. Everyone out there that ever received email from Nigeria offering to send millions of dollars, please raise your hands. This is a scam, and the criminals are fishing for targets. Refer to CastleCops.com for help if you suspect you're being targeted by phishers, and think twice before you reveal private information in e-mail.

Bots are another matter. They are often used to let hackers gather information or launch remote attacks on websites. Hackers often rent these programs to spammers, as they keep the spammer isolated from discovery and retaliation by ISPs. It can be difficult to detect bots on computers, but the author covers tools and websites (e.g. sysinternals.com) to find and remove these pests. Very good chapter and one of my favorites in the book.

Chapter five goes into spyware solutions for individuals, and covers freeware and commercial applications and tools. There are several places on the internet that will scan for spyware, and the author of this chapter advises that people use more than one tool. This chapter covers the steps to use several spyware scanning tools and discusses toolbar add-ons from 12Ghosts, Yahoo and Google. Only bad news - 12Ghosts and Yahoo's toolbars are for IE users, while Google offers an IE and Firefox version. Not much help for Camino users, but these three toolbars mainly provide popup protection and Camino handles popup without needing an add-on.

Chapter six covers the Windows-specific places spyware uses to hide and tools that can reveal and remove these pests. There are several packages referenced that let a company block access to known spyware-related websites. Good information, but not for Mac users - skip this one and move on to chapter seven.

Chapter seven covers spyware that affects Linux and the Mac, both platforms with some, but near as much spyware as Windows. The author points out that Wikipedia lists 14 known viruses for Linux, and security researchers know of two instances of OS X malware: Leap-A and Inqtana. Leap-A caused little harm to Macs, but could have been a major problem in the Windows world, as it requires user intervention to run. Inqtana-A relied on an OS vulnerability and spread via Bluetooth - Apple was quick to provide a patch to address this problem.

Something very important to Intel-based Macs is covered in this chapter. Boot Camp opens the path for a virus to infect Macs when booting Windows, yet infect OS X damage. A very real danger and one we Mac users must not overlook in the future. The end of this chapter covers MacScan, the only tool designed to remove spyware (keystroke loggers and remote control software) on OS X. While Linux and OS X users have few spyware threats compared to Windows users, we should remain vigilant as Linux and Macs could be targeted more in the future.

Chapter eight goes into locking down IE, developing a security update strategy, securing e-mail and securing Windows. The material on locking down IE is worth reviewing for Mac users that don't use Camino or Mozilla browsers; the rest of the chapter is aimed at problems encountered by Windows users.

Conclusion

This book provides good coverage of the problems and threats internet users face with spyware. It not only explains the hazards, but provides links to online references that go into detail on many specific issues, and it covers tools to help find and remove spyware. And each chapter has FAQs at the end, and readers are encouraged to check the publisher website (syngress.com/solutions) to ask questions not addressed in the book. As the authors say, there are many sources of free and commercial tools that remove spyware, and it is incumbent on the user to use these tools to protect themselves.

Recommendation: Although Mac users currently face few spyware problems, we will in the future as the Mac market share increases. This book is recommended for people that access the Internet.

Dictionary of Information Security

reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Robert Slade

<http://www.oreillynet.com/cs/catalog/view/au/2698>

<http://victoria.tc.ca/techrev/rms.htm>

Syngress

<http://www.syngress.com>

Booksite: <http://www.syngress.com/catalog/?pid=4150>

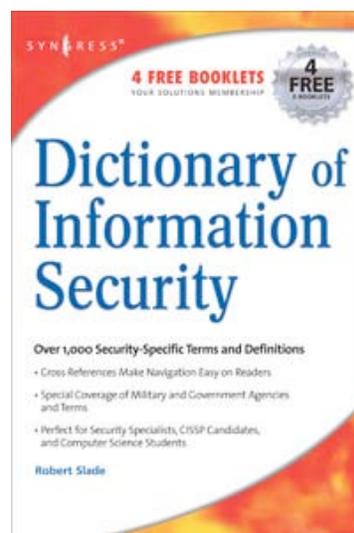
\$30 USD, \$39 CDN, £ GBP, 16€ Euro

Published: July 2006

Pages: 256

ISBN: 1597491152

Requirements: An interest in computer system security.



Strengths: Provides up-to-date definitions to computer security terms mixed with a smattering of dry humor.

Weaknesses: None found. Okay, one. Page 206 is labeled as a Forward instead of part of Appendix A (Quibble).

Dictionary of Information Security by Robert Slade may be jaundicedly looked at as a glorified glossary, but it is more. It doesn't gloss over the definitions. It comes from intimate knowledge about what constitutes as malware.

The close-knit Computer Forensics industry is expressed here in no less than 5 Forwards and one Preface before getting into cross-referenced A-Z terms and definitions followed by two Appendices, the first being References and the second being an Excerpt from *Stealing the Network: How to Own a Continent*; "The Lagos Creeper Box".

Robert Slade did a pretty good job justifying yet another dictionary. He found others were either too old, or didn't cover areas he and others were involved with.

So if you are involved in computer security and need a recent stab at the language of computer forensics. Why not take a look here?



Google Maps Hacks
reviewed by Dr. Eric Flescher

O'REILLY®

Authors: Rich Gibson and Schuyler Erle

<http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/googlemapshks/#rr>

Released: January, 2006

Pages: 366

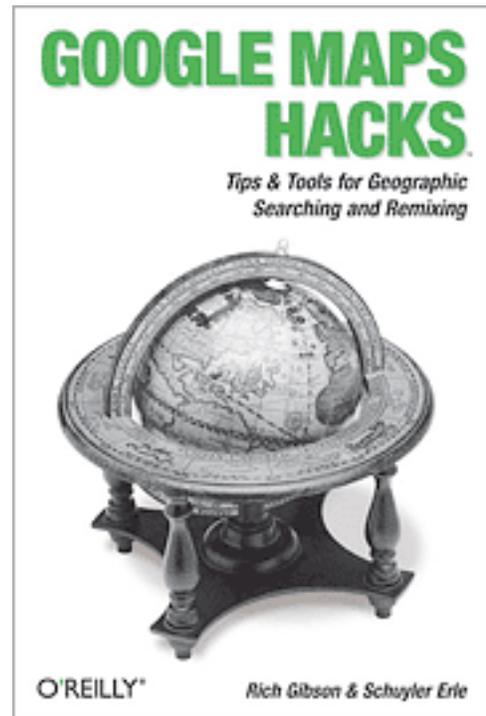
\$30 USD, \$42 CND, £20.99 GBP, 25,05 € Euro

ISBN: 0596101619

Advanced.

Strengths: Chapters contain screenshots of maps produced and includes the code which produces the results for new modeled individual maps.

Weaknesses: Tutorial and information explaining how to use “hacks” is nonexistent. Black and white only screenshots instead of color. No term definition and clearer explanations. This new technology (2005) is not explained in a way that the “hacks” can be used. Advanced users may already know how to use the book but new users and even intermediate will be lost.



Maps are useful for helping us find locations, how and where to go and giving us “visual road maps of our World”. But most importantly, maps can assist us with making information more visual through markers that help us explain our world around us. However there is more to maps “than meets the eye”.

Maps can help us improve our lives, show us different types of information, and display information in ways usually not thought possible. With computers, The GIS (Graphic Information Systems) tool has allowed scientists, people, historians and others to elaborate upon and show us much more. We can find clues to what is happening in varied locations over time, creating visual maps which allows us to compare and contrast phenomenon, events and much more. Visual tools are powerful instruments and more have been created since the personal computers have arrived. Possibly you have used Mapquest, Yahoo Maps and others to find directions and show a map to go somewhere. However in 2005, a new piece of software took “center stage” regarding spatial mapping. This free innovation created by the software giants Google, is called Google Maps.

The authors of **Google Maps Hacks** use their knowledge to apply maps using Google Maps for an even better sense of diverse needs. The purpose for the authors and the book was to embrace the technology to a higher level. Many books do this by easing the user into initial uses of the technology by using clear tutorials, offering clear explanations and keep from “stranding” the user on how to proceed to the next follow steps. Apparently the authors decided to not follow this educational route to making their book more useable.

Rich Gibson believes the world is made of stories and his GIS-related training led him to create this book. Schuyler Erle believes that GIS applications and maps and help improve peoples lives can tell compelling stories. The two authors utilize 26 people to demonstrate examples of how Google Earth can assist with helping people's lives. Their contributions help provide 60 various activities and information that make up the exercises in this book. So far so good.

The black on white (only) 366-paged book includes screenshots of maps produced and include the code which produces the results for the new modeled individual maps. Actions can be added by writing the Javascript code after the gmtrack (never fully explained in the book). The code listing are seemed very interesting and could provide many more ways to use Google. Several examples were tracking your UPS packages on your own. Writing the code is not a simple task. I was a little concerned about trying to copy the code from the book. The authors did not explain such a dilemma. But there is a online part of the book (stated in the book, but not really explained until one goes into the other website called Safari), that already has the sample codes and more.

Looking at this other website, there is a free 14 day subscription use. After that there are various plans to search for quick answers, to read on screen, download chapters for printing and off-line viewing. Use Safari primarily as a reference tool to quickly pinpoint answers online and to read books on screen. So I thought I was in business and decided to try the free plan to try. I was wrong.

The sample activities addressed are divided into three different levels: beginner, moderate and expert. Unfortunately these tutorials and the screenshots are not in color to liven up the process and activities. Each chapter and maps stand alone, so that as once you understand what to do, skipping around to the different chapters is acceptable for trying the exercises at your leisure. Some examples of "mashing up" (creating the maps and layers which once again are now fully explained by the authors) Google maps include weather mapping, finding where the ISS (International Space Station is right now, finding restaurants or locating a place to live.

Since I do stormchasing, I was interested with a beginner one "Track official storm reporting". Coincidentally I was planning to try something like this that I already use on a weekly basis regarding other storm websites and forums. I decided to see if I use the "hacks" using the book and particularly this storm map tutorials. Since the book seemed fairly well put together, I thought that even with the intrepations, creating and viewing the task related "hacks" would be fairly straightforward. But I was very wrong.

The authors and the book left me "stranded", unable to proceed any further, even after searching in books, forums and other resources. Their lack of any basic tutorial set up and explanations regarding the use of maps, hacks and how to weave all this together was really confusing, to say the least. It was really an exercise in futility even though I wanted to follow through and use the exercises now.

A tutorials laden exercise based book is only as good with how well the book takes you to the next levels to use the application or technology (whether Photoshop, iPod or more). I know users who already know and use Google Maps since it's inception in 2005 are comfortable with using it even with these more advanced hanks. But for me and others who are still learning, this book stops right in your tracks, like a car in a big mud field unable to go anywhere further. Maybe somewhere or some how I will be able to pull myself out of the mud, but this review is for now and I am not wasting my time anymore until a tow truck shows up. Sometimes that's what you have to do with technology. Move on to something else.

Keep it Simple with GarageBand - Easy Music Projects for Beginners

reviewed by Daphne Kalfon

PC Publishing

Author: Keith Gemmell

PC Publishing

<http://www.pc-publishing.com>

<http://www.pc-publishing.com/kisg.html>

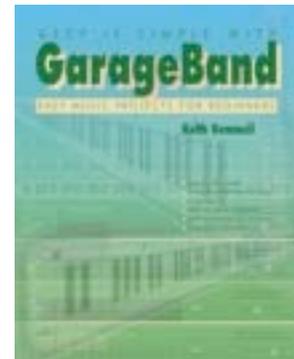
Released: April 2006

Pages: 96

\$18.75 USD, \$21 CND, £9.95 GBP, 12,48 € Euro

ISBN: 1870775163

Beginner/Amateur



Strengths: This book is brimming with the very kind of information that any person new to music-making would want to know and have on hand as they delve into GarageBand for the first time. A great starter book.

Weaknesses: None found.

Other Reviews: <http://www.atpm.com/12.08/kiswg.shtml>

With the ever-growing popularity of Apple products, it's no wonder that this component of the well-loved iLife family, GarageBand, is drawing so many people of diverse backgrounds into exploring and experimenting with the joys of music-making.

Author Keith Gemmell, who is also a music tech lecturer, composer and arranger, has written a wonderful little book to help people get started with GarageBand.

The book is divided into ten chapters, each of which is essentially a music-making project. Each project focuses on just a few key concepts. For example, Project 1 deals with Time and Tempo, Project 2 deals with the rhythm section, Project 3 with arranging instruments and sounds, and further on in the book, projects cover more advanced concepts such as Project 8 - adding signal effects processing to vocal tracks and Project 10 - the final mix.

Throughout the book, there are black and white snapshots of whatever window/menu is being discussed in GarageBand, as well as pictures of any recording gear he discusses, both of which serve as additional helpful guides to the reader.

In Chapter/Project 6, the author makes helpful recommendations, such as which MIDI keyboard to buy for playing GarageBand's software instruments, as well as a recommendation of a good virtual instrument to download, accompanied by the direct link, if one wants to experiment for example with a virtual synth to use with GarageBand. I'll have to check that one out myself...

In addition to working with and learning how to record GarageBand's software instruments, the reader also learns how to record audio - a simple voice-over track in Project 7. This chapter also includes helpful information for those considering the purchase of additional gear, such as mic cables, adapters, USB and FireWire audio and MIDI interfaces, microphones, headphones and speakers.

This book has two unique and very useful features. One is that as you complete each of the projects, you have the option of downloading the author's version of it from <http://www.pc-publishing.com/downloads.html> for easy comparison. And as each project is based on the one before it, you also have the option of either continuing on with your own version or picking up the author's version and going from there.

The other feature I really like is that at the end of each project, you have the option of completing one or more suggested assignments to further solidify the concepts you have learned in that chapter.

These assignments are followed by further tidbits of info for those who would like to dig a little more.

As well, another thing which I feel makes the book really fun and interesting is that throughout the book, the author sprinkles little “Tip” and “Info” windows about whatever concept is being explained on that page. I think it’s a really neat way to impart more information without seeming overwhelming. The eye just wants to go and read it, and see what it’s all about.

For example, for the very first project, Time and Tempo, there is a little “Info” window along the right hand column of the page, explaining to the reader what a metronome is and the history behind it. I must say that even I learned a lot as I leafed through the book reading these little windows, and that it was a fun experience, which is always a bonus.

Conclusion

This book is well-written, easy to understand and full of timely and useful tips, information, recommendations and advice. I could easily see a reader wanting to delve further into the more advanced concepts of music-making after having absorbed everything this book has to offer.

Mac OS X Internals: A Systems Approach

reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Author: Amit Singh

<http://www.osxbook.com>

Addison-Wesley Professional

<http://www.awprofessional.com>

<http://www.awprofessional.com/bookstore/product.asp?isbn=0321278542&rl=1>

<http://osxbook.com/book/bonus/chapter1/>

\$65 USD, \$96 CND, £36 GBP, 58,45€ Euro

Published: June 19, 2006

Pages: 1,680

ISBN: 0321278542

Requirements: A desire to want to see the underbelly of Mac OS X. For application programmers and anybody else who wants to look at the nuts and bolts of Mac OS X up close and personal.

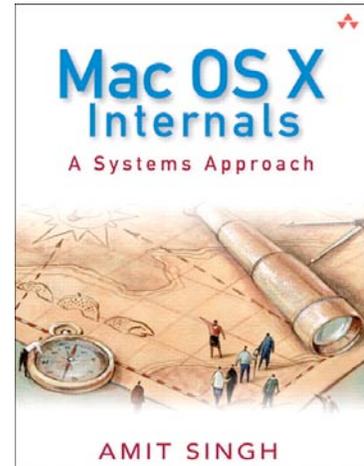
Strengths: Mac OS X-specific.

Weaknesses: None found.

Book Blog: <http://www.osxbook.com/blog/>

Book Forums: <http://www.osxbook.com/forums/>

Other Reviews: <http://www.osxbook.com/book/reviews/>



Mac OS X Internals: A Systems Approach by Amit Singh has got to be about the biggest and heaviest book I've ever come across that deals directly with Mac OS X and its long development history and all the parts and pieces that make it work.

The preface describes what is in each of the 12 chapters and the Appendix discusses the differences between Mac OS X and how it works on a PowerPC-based system vs. an x86-based system. However, true to form, most of Mac OS X is CPU-independent and this is described in the book, including EFI, GUID-based partitioning and even Universal Binaries.

In the history part, I'd almost forgotten about such things as MkLinux and all the various "false-starts" Apple went through before settling on what we have in Mac OS X today. Some of the earlier systems I had not even heard of before (Star Trek, Raptor, TaIOS).

And if you want to know how Mac OS X got its Mach back, just read about the Mach factors with Rochester's Intelligent Gateway, Accent, Mach, MkLinux, Pink, Red and even Rhapsody.

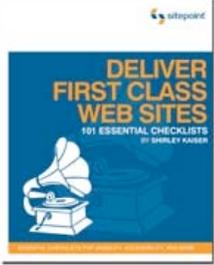
I really enjoy how Amit Singh organized the information in this book. It is not overtly geeky. It is immensely readable well, at least until the later chapters that are filled with tables and code segments – but that is why you would want to read this book, right? Think Apple documentation put together by a carbon-based unit that not only can read well, but can write well.

Even non-Mac-based and educated folks will want to get this book. Who knows? They might even learn how to do security code from the ground up. Ya think?

Not only that, but this book has a Blog and Forums to go with it. And that is why I give this heavy tome a 5.

Deliver First Class Websites 101 Essential Checklists by Shirley Kaiser

reviewed by Chris Marshall

 <p>Empowering Web Developers since 1997</p> <p>Sitepoint Publishing http://www.sitepoint.com/ http://www.sitepoint.com/books/checklists1/ http://www.sitepoint.com/books/checklists/errata.php</p> <p>Released: July 2006 (1st Edition) \$39.95 USD, \$44.60 CND, £21.10 GBP, 30,00€ Euro</p> <p>ISBN: 0-9758419-0-4</p> <p>Pages: 331</p> <p>Audience: People with very little web development experience who aren't afraid to find out just how much they don't know.</p> <p>Strengths: Well-structured and the checklists make it easy to scan over what you need to know.</p> <p>Weaknesses: Switches between very basic advice and somewhat advanced detail.</p>	 
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What they say: Want to learn how to make your web sites usable and accessible? Want to ensure that your sites meet current best practice, without spending hours trawling through incomprehensible specifications and recommendations from dozens of different books, research papers, and web sites? Want to make sure that the sites you build are "right the first time", requiring no costly redevelopments?

Look no further: Deliver First Class Web Sites: 101 Essential Checklists is a comprehensive coverage of current best practice with over 100 checklists, containing over 500 individual checkpoints that cover areas such as design, usability, project management, SEO and much, much more.

Deliver First Class Web Sites: 101 Essential Checklists is a complete compendium of best practices drawn from the author's own experience and dozens of expert third-party references. It's the ultimate roadmap for web developers, project managers, and anyone involved in the process of building web sites. Each checkpoint is accompanied by an explanation and references as required, making this the most comprehensive and easy-to-understand guide to delivering high quality web sites.

Free access is provided to downloadable PDF versions of the checklists—streamlined to contain the checkpoints only, without explanations or references—for you to print and use in your own web projects.

1. Let's Get Started ... but How?

- * Planning to Stay on Schedule and Within Budget
 - o Effective Pre-planning
 - o Doing your Homework and Making Educated Decisions
 - o Developing a Web Site Style Guide
 - o Managing Like Magic: Effective Organization
 - o Working Together as a Team
- * Summary

2. What to Find Out: Initial Questions to Answer

- * Establishing your Target Audience
 - o Who will Visit and Why?

- o How will they Visit?
- * Identifying your Initial Goals
- * Identifying your Budget
 - o Domain Name Costs
 - o Web Hosting
 - o Branding and Marketing
 - o Bringing in the Experts
 - o How Much is a Picture Worth?
 - o Ecommerce
 - o Computer Software and Hardware
- * Summary
- 3. Preparing Web Site Content
 - * Gathering and Itemizing Content
 - * Providing Accessible Content
 - * Preparing Web Copy
 - * Preparing Images
 - * Summary
- 4. Managing all the Content
 - * Assessing your Web Site Content
 - * Determining your Content Management Needs
 - o Web Authoring Tool Features
 - o Content Management System Features
 - * Summary
- 5. Web Site Usability: Focusing on the User
 - * Creating a User-friendly Index Page
 - * Ensuring your Web Site Focuses on Users
 - o Providing Fast-loading Web Pages
 - o Accommodating User Abilities, Disabilities, Browsers, and Alternative Devices
 - o Ensuring Predictability
 - o Providing User-friendly Corrections for User Errors
 - * Summary
- 6. Color
 - * Preparing a Color-friendly Work Environment
 - * Choosing a Color Scheme
 - * Using Color to Enhance Functionality
 - o Using Color to Enhance Readability
 - * Summary
- 7. Information Architecture
 - * Laying the Foundations
 - * Improving Findability
 - * Organizing for Success
 - o Organization Schemes
 - o Organizing Content Structure
 - * Preparing Web Page Information Architecture
 - o Information Architecture for Ecommerce Pages
 - * Organizing Directories
 - * Using Friendly URIs, URLs, and Filenames
 - o Hiding Filename Extensions as Much as Possible
 - * Summary
- 8. Navigation
 - * Golden Rules for Effective Web Site Navigation
 - * Creating User-centered Global Navigation
 - * Creating Local or Section Navigation
 - * Providing Internal Page Navigation
 - * Adding Supplemental Navigation
 - o Creating Sitemaps
 - o Creating Site Indexes
 - o Creating Search
 - * Summary

9. Best Coding Practice: W3C Standards and Recommendations

- * Magic Markup
 - o Separating Content from Presentation
 - o Ensuring the Integrity of your Markup
- * Excellent XHTML
- * Spectacular CSS
 - o Using Appropriate CSS Naming Conventions
 - o Beware of Browser Bugs and Problems
 - o Using CSS for Print
- * Summary

10. Creating Accessible Web Sites

- * The Bare Bones of Creating an Accessible Web Site
 - o Creating Valid, Structured, Semantic Markup
 - o Providing Accessible Navigation
- * Color for the Masses
- * A Thousand Words to Each Picture
 - o Accessible Image Maps
- * Multi-purpose Multimedia
- * In Good Form
- * Sturdy Tables
- * Summary

11. Web Site Optimization

- * Creating Clean, Lean Markup
 - o Minimizing URLs
 - o Optimizing CSS
 - o Optimizing JavaScript
- * Supporting Speedy Server Responses
- * Optimizing Images, Multimedia, and Alternative Formats
- * Summary

12. Search Engine Optimization

- * Successful SEO in a Nutshell
- * Working with Keywords and Keyphrases
 - o Using Keywords and Keyphrases in your Markup
- * Being Search Engine-Friendly
- * Avoiding Being Banned by Search Engines
- * Getting Listed
- * Creating an Ongoing Links Campaign
- * Planning for Ongoing Maintenance
- * Summary

13. Design

- * Basic Design Principles
- * Effective Typography
- * Brainstorming
- * Finalizing the Design
- * Summary

14. Testing

- * Getting Started
- * Good Testing Practice
- * General Testing
 - o Solid Security
- * Accessibility Testing
 - o Conducting a Preliminary Review
 - o Conducting a Comprehensive Review
 - o Testing with a Graphical Browser
 - o Testing with a Voice or Text-only Browser
- * Usability Testing
- * Summary

15. Preparing for Launch

- * Conducting Final Checks

- o Checking Templates and Markup
 - o Checking Layouts
 - o Finalizing Content
 - o Checking Functionality
 - o Checking Server-side Requirements
 - * Conducting a Soft Launch
 - * Launching the Web Site
 - * Completing your Web Site Handover
 - o Checking and Finalizing Project Documentation
 - o Creating a Handover Package
 - o Archiving Project Documentation and Files
 - * Summary
16. Post-launch Follow-up
- * Conducting a Post-launch Review
 - * Completing Initial Post-launch Tasks
 - * Orientating New Staff
 - * Getting Attention
 - * Managing Maintenance
 - o Undertaking Daily Duties
 - o Conducting Monthly Minding
 - o Performing Periodic Processes
 - o Conducting Annual Activities
 - * Collecting Data
 - o Collecting and Using Quantitative Data
 - o Collecting and Using Qualitative Data
 - * Summary
17. A. Ecommerce Checklists
- * Assessing Ecommerce Content Usage and Management Needs
 - * Features to Seek in a Shopping Cart Program

What I say: Communication and delivery in arranging delivery were excellent, and if the web site is to be believed they have a very good customer service department which is always encouraging.

I was looking forward to reading the book as I have dabbled with developing a few personal web sites in the past, nothing commercial, and have had my fair share of good and bad web surfing experiences. The summary of the chapters was very encouraging and demonstrated a good approach and layout. I liked the idea of the checklists, although they soon became too repetitive and “checklist for checklist sake”.

My initial thoughts after reading the first 3 or 4 chapters was that I really couldn’t believe that people developing web sites needed this basic level of information e.g.

- visually group similar kinds of information together,
- visually separate different information.

(Surely this is the same thing and isn’t it pretty obvious anyway?)

I then thought about the diet industry. Strange I know, but every month we see Top 10 lists on how to lose weight and they seem so obvious; i.e. don’t fry food, eat more fish, and each time I can’t believe that people need to be told this, but with c 1billion obese people in the world it is obvious that people do. Whilst I doubt there are c 1billion badly designed web sites in the world there are enough for to me agree that the basics haven’t been covered in previous developments.

At times, parts were very useful, for example the chapter on color was very good, with a good amount of technical and valuable details e.g. yellow is the brightest and most reflective of the primary colors, while red causes the most active physiological responses, BUT they then let themselves down with black and white examples which didn’t work at all.

At other times, chapters seemed to cover similar questions and subjects and maybe it would have been better to concentrate on really key bits e.g. buying off the web, registering on a web site etc. As such I sometimes felt that the tone of the book was a little condescending, at others I felt like I was drowning in technical details. It was a real rollercoaster of a ride to be honest and I was left feeling a little queasy and disorientated.

For us Mac Geeks, there were a few good tips (pages 247/8) regarding the fact that type displays at a different size on a Mac to a PC, and which type of fonts to try and use.

Back to the diet industry analogy. I once read a 120 page report called “The US Weight Loss and Diet Control Market – Introduction, Executive Overview and Demographics of Dieters Part 1” that summarized that to lose weight, people needed to eat less and exercise more, and that is sort of how I felt at the end of this book – I was left with a “I know that” feeling, which is always a little disappointing when you hoped to learn a lot.

In summary: Not worth the price. Personally I would study the amazon.com web site in detail as they mention it so many times as an exceptional site and buy yourself a book on general project management.

They suggest that the people that should read their book require no technical knowledge “This book is ideal for anyone involved in the process of building web sites. Whether you’re a web developer, a project manager, or you’re looking to commission someone to build web sites for you, the information contained in these checklists will prove invaluable. You don’t need any technical experience to benefit from this book” and I just can’t agree with them. The middle chapters – 9 onwards do require a fairly high level of understanding just to understand what they are saying, never mind to actually implement their suggestions.

Fundamentally the book is a solid concept, but suffers from trying to cover too much and as such never actually covers anything in enough depth. The large amount of suggested reading and references are useful and prove the depth of subject, but at the same time reinforce that the book just isn’t worth \$39.95. At \$19.95 it would be a more attractive proposition, but if I would much prefer to see it divided into two levels, basic and intermediate, and released as two books.

Hardware

Flip Wireless USB for 2-computer KVM

reviewed by Robert Pritchett

BELKIN.

Belkin Corporation
501 West Walnut Street
Compton, CA 90220, USA
310-898-1100
Fax: 310-898-1111
<http://www.belkin.com>
<http://www.belkin.com/flip/>

\$60 USD

Requirements: Two computers, desk or portable; One monitor with VGA port. For Macs with DVI-I port, needs a VGA to DVI cable. Linux, Mac OS X 10.3 or later, Windows 2000 or later.

Contains: User Guide; Flip device and battery; base and octopus cable; extra audio extension cable. Fastener strip for the Remote. 3-year warranty.

Strengths: Cross-platform OS independent. 2-computer-one monitor, keyboard, mouse design. No software needed.

Weaknesses: This unit does not support DVI ports directly. The remote needs to be within 10 feet of the base system.

“KVM” is Keyboard, Video, Mouse. I used one at work to switch between a Dell and an HP system with one monitor and it required double-clicking certain not-too-often used keys and combination in order to go between systems.

With the Flip Wireless USB, the battery-operated button toggles from either the green side or the yellow side instead of doing the key combo. The earlier system also required driver software and this one does not. That’s right, no software needed.

And the pictures shown here are all wrong. The Remote is wireless.

The Flip unit (Remote) indicates which system is “on” with a bicolor LED and works on Channel 1.

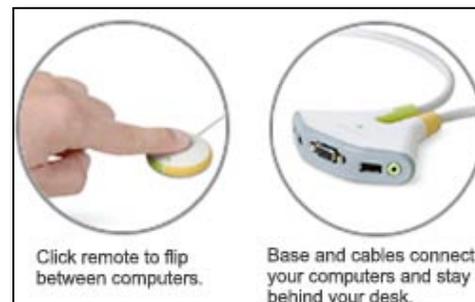
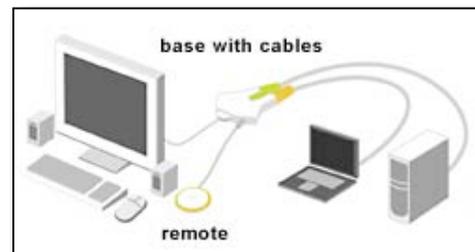
Video resolution supported is up to 2049x1536 at 65Hz.

The octopus cable length is 2 foot (green side), 6 feet (yellow side)(.6 meter and 1.8 meter) with one-foot hangers for USB and audio.

If you want to flip for a KVM, look no further.

For \$85 USD there is also a Flip designed for use with Mac Minis.

http://catalog.belkin.com/IWCatProductPage.process?Product_Id=255941



HP Photosmart 3310 All-in-One (AIO) could be one-for-all!

reviewed by Robert Pritchett



HP

<http://www.hp.com> Search on Q5863A#ABA

Released: June, 2005

\$430 USD. 2-year warranty. Look to Amazon for used units for much, much less.

Requirements: USB cable for connectivity; Mac OS X 10.2.3 or later; Windows 98 or later. 128 MB RAM; 400 MB hard drive space for Mac installation and 855 MB hard drive space for Windows installations. QuickTime 5.0 or later; Adobe Acrobat 5.0 or later;

Comes with: Phone cable, phone adapter, set of ink and 4x6 prints, power cord, software on CD, HP Photosmart 3300 All-in-One series User Guide and printer unit. Built-in Ethernet, Wi-Fi networking along with USB 2.0 interface. 1-year warranty. Curiously, the software has a 90-day warranty.

Strengths: 4-in-one scanner, copier, photocopier, fax functions, plus OCR and server software. Cross-platform friendly. Connectivity can be USB, Ethernet or Wireless or as a network printer. Can handle legal-size paper. Two-level paper trays, Built-in transparency (for four 35 millimeter slides or 6 negatives) scanner bracket. Rotate-able control panel with excellent 3.6-inch LCD color display. 4 memory-card ports.

Weaknesses: Paper tray issues, better bug-freer software for non-Mac systems than for the Macs, but not by much. No Auto-duplex. And be careful of Regional coding (!?!?) integrated into the cartridges. No sheet-feeder. Semi-frequent Self-Maintenance cycles provide noisy bumps and grinds and “do not interrupt” messages on the LCD screen. Does not come with a USB cable. HP’s support center is in India and the folks there do not know or use the products.

Other reviews are indeed mixed and run the gamut from excellent to sub-optimal and everything in between:

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,1878528,00.asp>

http://reviews.cnet.com/HP_Photosmart_3310_All_in_One/4505-3181_7-31413613.html

Reviewed using an iMac G5 with Mac OS X 10.4.7 Tiger.

First off, we bought this machine because my wife wanted an All-in-One (AIO) so she could work on her children’s book projects and she wanted a printer/scanner/copier and occasional fax machine. We weren’t really expecting a full-page photo printer as part of the package, but here it is! The real choice was Epson or HP. Epson doesn’t have the printhead in the cartridge. ‘Nuf said.

So this unit is a 4-in-one instead of a 3-in-one. Technically, it could be called a 5-in-one, because it does photos too.



I really think the wireless feature is what sold my wife on this machine. Since we bought it, she has move the iMac G5 it is paired with no less than 4 times so far, but I had a spare USB cable, so it isn't connected wirelessly to the wireless Mac. The wireless feature is designed for use with IEEE 802.11g environments.

But I am curious as to how well the I.R.I.S OCR software works with this machine and then there is the film negative (who still uses negatives? Oh, 35-millimeter film stuff) that can be scanned in. This works fine on the non-Mac systems, but may produce mixed results with Macs. It is a software issue and not a hardware issue. The hardware issue is one related to the paper tray (Out of Paper) error and I hope that has been resolved.

Should we have gone for the HP 7410 OfficeJet instead? That unit costs \$500 USD, but has a duplex feeder for printing on both sides and has the Automatic Document Feeder I was looking for with the HP Photosmart 3310. The cover on that one is not removable. Reviews of the HP 7410 OfficeJet were not kind. Heck even CNET gave it a mediocre rating and gave the HP Photosmart 3310 a better rating, but users were not as kind with their ratings.

The Vivera ink cartridges have smartchips in them so refills are not possible – yet. But for the price? \$10 USD for cartridges? I realize the inkwells are rather smallish, but can you believe the bother of trying to refill any of 6 different colored cartridges? But really, they regionalized the cartridges so you can't use the ink if bought in a different part of the world? Oh, come on HP, I'm sure this is due to anti-pirating schemes, but get real! After all, we are not paying \$35 USD per cartridge with this system.

Now for the machine itself

The scanning cover has a holding bracket for a 6-transparencies (or four 35 millimeter negatives) at a time. This feature negates the capability of being able to use an automatic sheet feeder for input. It would have been nice if this could have been an option. The cover is removable however, for those books or other items that require the cover not being there.

The HP Photosmart 3310 takes 6 ink cartridges (think Vivera) and the guy at CircuitCity convinced my wife to buy a set of ink cartridges for another \$90 or so bucks (about the price difference between the MSRP and the Sale price), even though she got the unit as part of a back-to-school offer. HP Value packs for the same group of "02" cartridges and 150 4x6 sheets can be obtained online from then for \$26 USD. No kidding! Otherwise, 5 of the 6 cartridges cost \$10 USD each and the black goes for \$18 USD by itself. I was concerned about the inkwells running out, since it took 5 minutes to initially charge the system after loading the no-muss, no-fuss cartridges. Apparently HP has technology that recycles the ink so it is not wasted. Is that cool or what?

You will need to get a USB cable separately or use the built-in Wi-Fi wireless function, assuming you have a wireless network nearby. The iMac G5 that this is intended to be paired with is set up on our wireless network and that system has been moved no less than 4 times now upstairs. I had a spare USB cable anyway. If we wanted to make it a network printer, we could, because it also has Ethernet 802.3 built in. And even if we didn't have a computer, this machine can work in stand-alone mode as it has 4 different memory card slots for; CompactFlash I and II, Secure Digital, MultiMediaCard (MMC), xD-Picture Card, or Memory Stick, Magic Gate Memory Stick, MemoryStick Duo or Memory Stick Pro. It also has the ability to accept PictBridge connectivity.

And the paper tray unit doesn't hold much paper, because right above the 8x11 tray there is a 4x5 photo paper tray so switching between paper sizes is not an issue.

In front of this unit is a relatively large 3.6-inch color QVGA LCD screen that I wish digital cameras had for previewing pictures before they print. I just thought that was so great! That and the fact that the control panel rotates up to about 45-degrees. Nice idea!

Installation was super-simple and the software installed without problems. I just followed the direction and heeded the cautions as I proceeded without incident.

The specs say this unit runs 32 pages per minute for black and white or 31 pages per minute for color – only the tray doesn't hold that much (supposedly it holds 130 pages), so HP has bragging rights to fastest printer but supplies of paper and ink probably don't keep up. The 4x6-inch full color prints can pump out at 14 seconds each. This beats the Kodak 4x6 printer we reviewed earlier with the Kodak camera that had the color transfer technology and multi-pass processes. Price per print can be as low as 24 cents per sheet vs. the 69 cents per sheet or so for the Kodak printer. And the combination of HP photo paper and the '02 series ink stands up to water.

The nearest competition for this machine would be either the Canon PIXMA MP760 Photo All-in-One or the Epson Stylus Photo RX620.

Just the Fax, Mam

The fax function allows for caller ID and can interoperate just fine with Vonage systems. It can even do color faxes at 200x200 dots per inch as well as black and white at 300 dots per inch. It has a junk barrier and can do fax forwarding.

Scanning

Try 4800x4800 dots per inch up to 19,200 dots per inch enhanced resolution with 48-bit color. The unit has a built-in memory of 64 MB. If you do the 35 millimeter slide or negative thing, the lid comes off to reveal a light for backlighting the film and negatives for copying.

Copier

Resolution is 600x1200 dots per inch for black and white and 1200x 4800 dots per inch for color resolution and printing is 1200x1200 for black and white and 4800x1200 for color.

Photoprinting

Redeye elimination seems to be a standard feature in photoprint software nowadays and it is here as well with the Image Zone software. Older photos that have not aged gracefully can also have the scratches and “dust” removed.

And our experience?

I really miss the manager that once-upon-a-time ran the printer department at HP who was pro-Mac. He did a great job marrying hardware to software. Recently HP has not fared so well in the software side of things and users have really dinged them hard for shoddy software implementations. Hardware-wise, I would have raised the printer a tad to give the unit a larger paper feed tray so it too could hold a ream of paper instead of a small handful.

We had a PSC 2100 earlier that I gave to my Dad for his eMac and once the new drivers from HP became compatible for Mac OS XC Tiger, it worked again (it stopped working with Panther, so it was running on my Mom's PC machine until we upgraded Dad's machine to Tiger). They love that printer, but each of the ink cartridges are about the price of the Value-Pack for this printer.

The software for the HP Photosmart 3310 installed easily enough and seems to be functioning as advertised so far. HP is pretty ambitious with providing so much

Now that the printer has been out for over a year, I think HP may have been able to get the bugs out. As long as the paper tray plays nice, I think this one is going to be a keeper.

iClear iPod Case

reviewed by Daniel MacKenzie



Griffin Technology
1930 Air Lane Drive
Nashville, TN 37210 USA
+1 (615) 399-7000 - voice
FAX: +1 (615) 367-6468
<http://www.griffintechology.com/products/iclear/>
\$20 USD



Strengths: Polycarbonate Clear Case.

Weaknesses: None Found.



Another great product from Griffin Technology. The iClear iPod case is an excellent case. It's made out of tough polycarbonate material which can stand up to damage of falls or hits. I was very pleased with the iClear. The review will be for the video iPod, but there is an iClear for Nanos as well. When you buy the iClear for video iPod, you get the 30 GB and the 60 GB backing, so it all comes in one package.

There are two parts to the case that snap together. The front is the same for both the 30 GB and the 60 GB, but the back is different. The suggested method to open the case is to stick a coin in the notch in the case and turn. The case will pop open. The case protects the screen of your iPod and leaves the click wheel open, so you can still use it. My screen looked pretty good before I put it into the case and the case looks like it's been scratched. I haven't had any problems so far. The case feels comfortable when you hold it and it doesn't feel like rubber. It's not slippery and it just works.



I only had two problems with the case. I have a headphone splitter and the headphone hole on the top of the case is too small to fit in. I think they should make the hole a bit bigger to accommodate for other accessories. Also, the bottom of the case is wide open. This allows the bottom to be scratched. If the case is on, you can't use the universal dock. Either make the case able to use the dock or put more protection there, but leave a space for the iPod connector cable.

Overall, this is an excellent case for your iPod and for \$20 USD, it's a steal. I would definitely recommend this to anyone who needs a case for their iPod. Great work Griffin!

Invisible SHIELD

reviewed by Ken Crockett



ShieldZone Corporation
3855 So. 500 W. Suite B
Salt Lake City, UT 84115-4279 United States
801-263-0699

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

Released: January, 2006

Ranges from \$25 to \$60 USD

Strengths: Invisible. Lifetime guarantee. Applies easily.

Weaknesses: None found.

Other Reviews:

<http://techgurls.blogrc.com/2006/07/04/invisibleshield-review/>

<http://gadgets.elliottback.com/2006/07/09/invisibleshield-review/>



So I got an email a few weeks ago from a great company: InvisibleShield. They make some pretty sweet device protectors, now why did they contact me well, they are pretty well known for their iPod InvisibleShield.

Now when I think of screen protectors, I usually shy away from them, one reason why it always makes the screen look really bad in a way. Like the screen looks smeared and I like my products and I don't like seeing that I want to see a crisp clear screen.

So the good people over at InvisibleShield sent me a screen shield for my T-Mobile Samsung T-309 and one for a Tungsten E from Palm. Now I only really used one of them, which was the Cell phone screen shield. Applying this seems like it is really hard, but in reality it is not. I was a little intimidated because it had a spray bottle a squeegee and the shields. But I quickly read the instructions and realized how easy this would be.

First off you have to peel the shield carefully make sure not to get a corner to fold over onto the rest of the shield the cause the adhesive is really sticky at first and it is kind of hard to get it to un-stick from itself, then all you need to do it take the cap off the spray, spray one to two shots of the spray onto the protector, what is really cool is that if a dog or a baby were to get right in the line of shot of the spray you don't need to worry it will not irritate eyes and it is not toxic, now you don't want to feed it to them but it wont hurt them if they getting into it and ingest some.



Then all you have to do is take the side that was/is the adhesive side and apply it to the screen, take the squeegee that they send with it and firmly press down and slide it across the surface of the shield, and you're all set! Now if there are any bubbles or anything like that don't take the shield off and try all over again, as much as you might hate it. Give the shield about 2 days and it works itself out. Now what really made me think this thing is way too good to be true, is the fact that you can try and scratch the screen with keys and it won't scratch it. I have seen people claim this and it has never worked. And even before receiving the shields and applying them I saw InvisibleShield's video over at their [site](#). Heck I even took a pocket knife to it and of course I did not apply all my pressure on it I did push pretty hard and dragged it across sure enough it didn't make a mark!

Now what I did with the PDA screen protector, was I took a pen to it, most plastic screen shields can't withstand the pressure of a pen trying to push thru. Well I took some pictures shown below that show how hard it is to break. The pen never made it through, and I took both ends of the shield and tried to pull them apart and stretch the shield while I could only pull it so far, then it went right back to its original shape.

I would have to say the Good people over at InvisibleShield have renewed my faith in screen protectors for my devices.

Disclaimer: Ken Crockett was given this product to review, the product was used in the way it was intended and was even put thru more extensive testing, the product was evaluated with no expectation from the vendor of a positive review.

Yes those are my extremely hairy arms! ha-ha

Laptop Desk 2.0

by Daniel MacKenzie



Lap works
7955 Layton Street
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730
909-948-1828 or 877-527-9675
sales@laptopdesk.net
<http://www.laptopdesk.net/>
<http://www.laptopdesk.net/laptopdesk2f.html>

Released: May 12, 2005

\$30 USD

Requirements: A Laptop computer.

Strengths: Reduces laptop computer heat.

Weaknesses: Flimsy and breaks easily. Hard surface is uncomfortable when uses on the lap. Ventilation holes leave indents in the lap. Overpriced.

Other Reviews: <http://www.laptopdesk.net/reviews-laptopdesk.html>

My first impression when I looked at the Laptop Desk I thought, "Well this looks pretty cool", but when I pulled it out of the bag, a piece of the device broke off. It was one of the supports to reposition the desk. Let's just say it wasn't the greatest first impression.



Now, you can position the desk at 5 different angles, for whichever angle suits your needs. I didn't need all of the angles. I just left it flat. Personally, I think all of the angles aren't needed, but it really depends on what's comfortable for you. There are two ways you can make it flat; One, leave it folded up and put your laptop on it or Two, unfold it completely. This is for use with a mouse, if you use a mouse with your laptop. That was one area where they did well.

Another part of my first impression was that when I looked at it, I thought it could have come from a dollar store. Now, I don't mean to offend the hard working people at LapWorks, but this polycarbonate plastic laptop pad is not visually pleasing at all. I know I'm not a fashion critic, but if they added some color and a new style, the Laptop Desk would look a lot better.

The piece of plastic that broke off when I took it out of the bag, could have been because of shipping. If it got banged around, it could have been damaged, but still, the plastic did look a bit flimsy. They need to rethink the way to attach the support to make the different angles. Since you can just fold it down, there is no need to make it snap into place. If they glued it or melted it into the design of the pad, I don't think I would have had that problem. The people at LapWorks need to make the material they use stronger so users can get more life out of them.



It also wasn't very comfortable. The "ventilation panels" made indents in my legs that wouldn't go away for over an hour. Also, hard plastic doesn't feel very comfortable when your laptop is weighing down on it. I think they need to put some gel or some sort of cushioning on the pad, so it's more comfortable.

However, the Laptop Desk 2.0 does do what it says it does. It reduces the temperature so it's not burning your legs, but there are other options out there that might suit your needs better. And for \$30, I think it's a little overpriced. Extra "feet" can be purchased separately for either non-Mac (black) or Mac (white) computers.

If you really need a laptop pad the Laptop Desk 2.0 will work for you.

Sorry, LapWorks. I think it needs some improving.



Icy Dock Shuttle Disk Firewire Enclosure

reviewed by Wayne LeFevre

ICY DOCK®

ICY DOCK USA
147 Puente Ave.
City of Industry, CA 91746
626.956.8800
Fax: 626.956.8811
info@icydock.com
<http://www.icydock.com/home.htm>

Released: August, 2006

\$39 USD

Requirements: 2.5 IDE hard drive. USB 2.0 and/or FireWire ports. Mac OS X 10.2 or later, Windows 98 or later.

Strengths: Strong aluminum lightweight enclosure. Easy to install hard drive and hook up to computer afterward. I am impressed with quality and attention to detail.

Weakness: None I could find, which is why I am giving it a 4.5 stars. It probably could use a power switch, and more places to purchase it, but it does do exactly what it advertises, without difficulty or any problems encountered.



The first thing I noticed when I opened the box for the Icy Dock Shuttle Disk enclosure was the packaging and packing. I know that there are some that take great care and glee when they open their Apple product, me, not so much. However I had to admit I was impressed. No Styrofoam here, but a nice, embossed molded plastic that kept everything in it's place. There was nothing missing, either, to keep you from getting up and running in no time, except, of course, the hard drive. You will have to supply your own 2.5" IDE hard drive. Unfortunately, these drives being smaller and usually for laptops tend to be more expensive per gigabyte than your average 3.5" drive. This enclosure is a small enclosure, however, so it all depends on what you want to do with your particular needs. Will you be using it as a backup for your laptop, or a secondary drive to hold pictures, movies, etc? The smaller drive will, of course, do both, so the Shuttle is a fine alternative. It looks great sitting on it's four rubber feet securely to your desktop.

The box included a 6-pin -to-6 pin 6-foot FireWire cable, a 5 volt DC Power Transformer, the Shuttle Disk enclosure, a manual, and to top it all off, a nice felt storage traveler bag. A nice addition that wasn't expected. The transformer also had folding, retractable electric prongs to make a nice compact design. The manual was short, but understandable and easy to follow with plenty of illustrations.

By following the manual, installation of the hard disk was a breeze. The hard disk itself is mounted to a circuit board with supplied screws. The board is then mounted to four rubber stanchions suspending the hard disk to prevent shock and vibration. The securing screws attaching the top and bottom of the Shuttle Disk pass through these stanchions and secures the circuit board between the two half's of the Shuttle enclosure. Plugging in the transformer and the FireWire cable, the drive was immediately recognized. There were no extra steps involved or software to install.

After closing up the Shuttle with a 20 Gig hard drive, I weighed it at 1/2 pound, or about 250 grams. I thought it was a nice, light weight compared to some other enclosures I've seen. There is also no fan, so no noise.

Speaking of the enclosure itself, I think it's a great design. It almost reminds me of the concept cars of the 60's and 70's. There are no hard corners on it, making it very easy to slip into a pocket in a briefcase or bag, without having it catch on anything. It's made entirely of aluminum, so it's very sturdy. It's supposed to distribute heat evenly because of the aluminum enclosure, though I never ran into a situation that even made the case warm. The sides are rubber to assure that you have a firm grip on the enclosure.

There are two LCD's in the front that inform you of power and when the disk is accessing. When plugged in, there was no problem in recognizing or accessing the drive, though there is no power switch, so when it's plugged in it's on all the time. There also was no battery-only option on this model, though it's apparent that they may have that option in future models. The manual hinted that there may be an internal PC 5.25 inch docking station to accompany the drive, also in the future. I admit, it would be neat to be able to just slide the whole enclosure into the front of your PC, akin to a Zip disk in the past. Not a option for us Mac users, but the FireWire works just fine.

Skype Mac Starter Pack

reviewed by Robert Pritchett



Skype

<http://www.skype.com>

<http://us.accessories.skype.com/direct/skypeusa/itemdetl.jsp?prod=3237>

Released: July 25, 2006

\$20 USD, 13€ Euros

In the Box, Earbuds with integrated microphone; 30 minute Skype-out voucher and a crushed-velvet pull-string back for carrying the headset around.

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 or later, 128 MB RAM, 43 MB hard drive space (for Skype) and a broadband connection.

Forums: <http://www.cmedia.com/forums/>

Strengths: On-the-run Skype phone.

Weaknesses: Muffled mic.

Used on an iMac G5 with Mac OS X 10.4.7.

Interview: Len Layton - VP of C-Media Electronics

<http://themoddingden.objectis.net/interviews/interviewwithcmedia>

Other Reviews: <http://blog.tmcnet.com/blog/tom-keating/vonage/vonage-vphone-review.asp>

The Skype Mac Start Pack costs twice as much as the one for the non-Mac environment with the basic difference being that the non-Mac unit is designed for plugging into the multimedia jacks and those starter kits are monaural instead of stereo and the stereo unit is USB. Oh, and the non-Mac unit comes with a mini-CD to cover the driver needs for those non-Mac systems. The Mac unit doesn't need any new drivers for Mac OS X.

The back of the blister-pack shows information in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The package indicates that 20 MB of hard drive space is needed, but the latest Skype folder for the Mac (1.5.0.48) shows that it is using over 43 MB on my system.

While working with Tim Verpoorten on the Mac ReviewCast, I tried the unit on for size. The USB cable has a generous amount of length (plus it has a blue LED indicator where the cable connects into the USB plug housing), so that is not a challenge. What is, is the earbud mic combination at the other end. The earbuds ability to hear are excellent, but the mic part hangs down to my shoulder. For Tim to hear me well enough, I had to hold the mic up to my mouth. There is no slide adjustment to bring the mic closer. The left earbud extends from the bottom of the mic and appears to be about 2 feet long. As he was listening to me, he said my voice sounded muffled.

My *About this Mac* (and *System Preferences* > *Sound*) reveals that the unit is a *C-Media USB Headphone Set*. So Skype is OEMing it from them. It consumes 500 milliamps of power and has a throughput of 12 Megabits per second. I'm guessing it uses the CM108 audio chip; <http://www.cmedia.com.tw/?q=en/USB/CM108> and after downloading the spec-sheet, I think I guessed correctly.

C-Media Electronics is located in Taipei, Taiwan, but the VP of North American Operations is based in Vancouver, BC and we provided a link to an interview of Len Layton above.



From the C-Media Forum I see that Linux folks have been having issues, (and when do they not?) regarding audio in and audio out.

If you use various headsets like I do, ever time you go into Skype the C-Media Headphone Set has to be reset to all the way up for volume. I suppose that if you leave the computer in “always-on” mode, the setting has to be set only once if Skype is running in the background.

This device might be desirable for those who are using a portable computer. I do not see it as being _Mac-only, since it uses a USB port, but I’ll experiment some. I’m guessing that since the non-Mac Start kit uses the multimedia jacks and requires a mini-CD that contains the drivers that I can’t just plug&play on a non-Mac system. And I do not see a download for software for the unit on the Skype website either.

So, if you Skype and have broadband access while being a road-warrior, you might be able to save a few pennies phoning from your MacBook Pro as long as you don’t mind your voice sounding a little muffled.

TVMax

reviewed by Chris Marshall

	
<p>Miglia http://www.miglia.com http://www.miglia.com/products/video/tvmax/index.html</p>	
<p>Released: June, 2006 \$249 USD, \$353.05 CND, £169 GBP, 249€ Euro</p>	
<p>Audience: Anyone that owns a Mac and watches TV.</p>	
<p>Strengths: Simple, efficient, reliability, form factor.</p>	
<p>Weaknesses: Nothing worth commenting on!</p>	

What they say: This revolutionary and stylish little box is really one of a kind.

You are now in control of your TV viewing: watch, pause, rewind, skip forward and record live TV.

You decide what to watch and what to record and it doesn't end there. Once that favourite show has been recorded you can choose to edit those boring adverts or cut out uninteresting scenes and keep the things that you really want to watch.

TVMax receives analog over the air (antenna) and analog cable TV and features built-in video hardware compression within its small, yet ever so stylish case. It can even capture VHS tapes, allowing you to store them on your hard drive or burn them onto DVD.

So just sit back and let TVMax do all the hard work. It really will amaze you!

- Watch, pause, rewind and skip forward Live TV, timeshift on your Mac.
- Record and edit your favourite shows with our built in EPG (Electronic Program Guide).
- One click Apple iPod (writes directly to iTunes) or Sony PSP export.
- Hardware compression to MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX
- Convert VHS and Hi8 tapes to DVD, TVMax doubles as a video converter.

TVMax ships with EyeTV 2 software that lets you watch analog television on your Mac. Change the way you watch TV with the timeshift feature! Pause or rewind live television at any point, ensuring that you'll never miss any part of what you are watching.

The integrated online TV guide TitanTV gives you control of your TV schedule, allowing you to schedule TV recordings.

There is no need to be sitting at your Mac to start the recording! TVMax is not only "TV on your Mac", but also a great solution to say goodbye to your old VHS video recorder. Record straight to your hard drive, in full digital quality!

What I say:

First the administration stuff:

The communication in relation to obtaining the sample unit was first class, which I always think bodes well for future customer service. Before you go all cynical on me and say that a company is bound to be keen to impress at this stage, you would be surprised. I am still waiting for three books to arrive from a company that promised them two months ago, and despite three chase Emails, have still to get them delivered! The few questions that I had were answered promptly and clearly, again a good indication, so from my experience, they are a good company to deal with.

The unit was a review unit so the packaging wasn't pristine, but whilst it isn't going to be at the Apple end of the spectrum it was competently and effectively packaged, so I don't think anyone should worry about damage during shipping.

As for the form factor:

Well if their promotional literature hints at an easy-to-use box a quick look at the actual unit will reinforce that perception. The unit itself is all clean lines and round corners, with just a small eye in the front and the necessary connections at the back. Minimalist and functional, and oh so simple. You have to love that!

Out of the box then and all set up, I hit my only frustration, and this is so minor, it is hardly worth mentioning. The QuickStart documentation refers to the user guide, which I hunted around for a while, before realizing that it was a PDF – see I told you it was hardly worth mentioning, but they could have made it a little clearer and saved me that “vital 5 minutes” before I was ready to fire it all up ☺ At this stage, I will also add that there are a lot of different user guide versions, so make sure you look at the correct one, but having glanced through them all, the basics are pretty much the same to be honest, and if you are even half way techy you aren't really going to need them.

By this stage I was pretty excited, as I have been wanting a device like this for a long time. Certainly since I first got my PowerBook and as luck would have it, I had just installed a Sky + system (TiVo like device) so it was going to be a good comparison (I will be doing an article in future months on how the two devices work for me).

My set up means that the review was going to be somewhat limited, as I receive all my channels through a satellite receiver, so my feed into the Mac was only ever going to be the one feed from the satellite system. This meant that I wasn't going to be able to use the remote control that came with the unit, and I was going to have to be tuned into the satellite channel that I wanted to record. To be honest I was a little concerned about this at first, but with the auto-view function on the satellite system (turns over to the program that you want to watch automatically) and the EyeTV schedule program feature, it really wasn't a problem. Sure, I had to set two devices to watch/record the program, and it limited me from watching any other program on that TV at the time it was recording, but I didn't find this to be a problem. This is where the beauty of running both Sky + and TVMax really kicked in, as it allowed me to record one program on the Mac and another on the Sky + box. As I have a second satellite receiver in the apartment as well, I could always pop along to our media room to watch anything else that I fancied at the same time.

For this review, I was using a PowerBook G4 with 1.5GB RAM and I had absolutely no problems at all. As this machine is my every-day machine, it has somewhat limited disc space (about 20GB out of 100GB free) so I wanted to copy some of the recorded films over to an external hard drive and here I hit a couple of problems. Without EyeTV installed on my PC I couldn't view the films. I kept getting a codec incompatibility with media player problem, and I also found out that a FAT32-formatted hard drive has a 4GB file limit for transfer. Both problems were easily resolved by exporting the original recording to QuickTime format (just one of many useful and easy formats), and then I could view them on any PC in the apartment and copy to an external drive as well.

Without giving too much away regarding how it compares to the Sky +, suffice to say that you can edit easily and that is a huge benefit. To be fair, it isn't the most advanced editor that you will find and it is somewhat tiresome trying to achieve the professional (seamless) editing out any adverts, but as this occurs on so few movies that I record, it wasn't a problem at all, and it was nice to be able to edit out the slack at the beginning and end of the recording time. I tended to do this before I exported to QuickTime, but of course you have other options. I wanted to stick to the options that came with the device.

I even exported some material to my 5G 60GB iPod with video, and it was unbelievably simple. Now I can't actually see me doing this that often, but that is purely because of the way I use (or don't use) my iPod. If you have a commute and want to catch up on the latest episode of something you have recorded, this will really appeal to you. Just for good measure, I tried it with my PSP as well, and boy was that impressive compared to the decoding and burning to memory stick option that I used before on my PC!

Unfortunately I can't really comment on the practicality of the program guide function, as I couldn't use it with the set up I was restricted to. I did take a look at it and it looked pretty solid, so I can't see any reason why it wouldn't be as good as everything else that I reviewed.

And finally, as you would expect, the copying from Video worked a treat.

I may not be in my "media heaven" yet, but I am well on my way and the TVMax is going to be a HUGE part of it ☺

In summary: Buy It! I am going to, for sure.

I will also be buying a Mac Mini to use solely with the TVMax hooked up permanently to my TV. As I said earlier, I will write about how this works for me at the same time as I do the comparison of TVMax and Sky +, or to be more precisely, how they sit side by side and complete by home media solution.

I totally rate this product and really can't recommend it enough, especially if you are looking for a reason to get a Mac Mini as well ☺

Berlitz French Premier

reviewed by Mike Hubbartt



Nova Development Corporation
<http://www.novadevelopment.com>

Released: July, 2006

\$40 USD

Requirements: G3 or newer Mac, OS X 10.2.8 or later, 128MB RAM, CD-ROM, Sound card and speakers.

Optional Devices: microphone, iPod, Palm OS 5 or later, Pocket PC 2002 or later.

Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced



Strengths: Uses Computer (Mac or PC), iPod, Palm Pilot, Pocket PC and audio CD players - not a book - to teach French. Easy and intuitive software to navigate. Voices that pronounce the words and sentences are clear and can be slowed down to help better grasp the nuances of French conversation. Flash cards on the computer or Palm or Pocket PC are handy for a practice session during the day at work or school.

Weaknesses: Serious problem when trying to install on a Palm TX.

For years, people striving to learn new languages had to decide what worked best for them: buy a book or language tapes, or take a class. But time constraints often prevent studying, or the material may not sink in before the trip begins, producing the same results: another traveler toting along a short reference guide and hoping that local people would speak 'their language.'

I studied Spanish in school and it made a huge difference when I had an opportunity to visit Spain a few years later. I found that people were quite willing to help me with nuances of their language, as they appreciated that I did not insist they speak 'my language' to communicate. I felt they respected that I understood I was a visitor and guest in their country, and should at least try to communicate in a way they best understood. When Nova Development announced the release of four language courses, I was eager to try their French course. We plan to visit Paris next year and friends that visited France said the people there expect you to at least try to speak their language, and it seems that you should know some of the language of a country to understand the people that live there.

After receiving the software, I installed it on my 1.8GHz G5 iMac and ran through the tour guide, then went through a lesson and was impressed. The software has the words onscreen and they can be pronounced at normal speaking rate or slowed down, to assist understanding the proper enunciation of words and phrases. Nice, and much better than messing with winding and rewinding audio tapes or CDs. I ran through the basics of greetings and simple conversations. Numbers were part of the practice, not just standalone set aside for rote memorization - useful and easier for me. After several days of practice, I was still a novice but actually felt I learned enough French to at least understand basic sentences and questions, although I knew it would take time and a lot more work to be able to carry on a conversation.

My next step was to use the audio CDs in my car while driving to and from work. The lessons were easy, some were repeating words or phrases and others had you figure out what the speakers said during a typical conversation. Very useful and easy to review as needed - the audio materials bolster the computer software, although they can be used as a standalone learning system as well. A nice addition to the software.

I went back to the iMac and tried some of the activities, basically games intended to help learn without feeling like you are studying. I liked Crosswords and Segment Unscramble best. Crosswords helps vocabulary and spelling skills - fill in the crossword puzzle using the French sentence as a clue. Same deal as English crosswords - you get the number of characters and the positions of crossed words help guess other words. I liked that the software would

pronounce the entire sentence or just the missing word. The Segment Unscramble activity uses resorting sentences in a conversation in the correct order - you can look at the sentences in French while listening to them pronounced, or read the sentences in English when first starting a lesson.

Vocabulous and Word Diction activities were more difficult. However, I found both were more useful learning tools. Vocabulous has a sentence and you type in the missing word - you see the meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the missing word in English, and have the grammar explanation as a clue as well. This activity, like Crosswords, will say the entire sentence or the missing word. Very helpful. Word Diction has a word for the displayed sentence (in French) pronounced and it was initially difficult, but a big help with spelling versus enunciation. Overall, the activities made it much easier to immerse myself in French without 'trying to learn' it. Very nice way to augment the tutorials and help imbed the language elements in your memory, and a feature I heartily encourage people to utilize. One tip - don't even think about trying the activities until you start to feel comfortable with French - they are designed to augment, not replace the lessons.

Palm TX

I decided to install the Berlitz software on my Palm TX, so I could use it during the bus ride to and from work, as well as during lunchtime. This is the only time I ran into issues with this package. I have a 2-month-old Palm TX running the most current version of the Palm OS, use Bluetooth to sync with my iMac, and have an external keyboard driver (for a wireless external keyboard not connected during the installation process). The Palm did not have problems before this install, so I did not anticipate one during the installation. The installation went much longer than seemed reasonable and the application seemed to hang, so I did a Force Quit on the iMac, but had to soft-reboot my Palm Pilot. When the Palm TX restarted, the keyboard at the bottom of the Palm screen was missing. I soft-rebooted it twice and no better luck. I had backed up my data, so I did a hard reboot of the Palm, wiping out all data on the handheld, then tried to resync and regain my data, but each time after syncing, the keyboard would disappear from the bottom of the Palm screen. I was able to eventually recover by doing a hard reboot and resyncing a bit at a time, so I didn't permanently lose data, but it was a lot of work.

I believe that several factors that together may have been responsible for this problem; the first was the lack for a driver specifically for the Palm TX - I had to choose the Tungsten driver; the second was the use of Bluetooth to sync, as there is a lot of data (> 6 MB) that must be installed on the Palm; the third factor was the wireless keyboard driver. I contacted Nova Development and they are looking into this issue and promised to keep me apprised if they find what caused the problem. My only suggestion for people that buy this product is to be sure your Palm data is backed up, and I would also suggest you use a USB cable to sync the Palm instead of Bluetooth. I did not try to install the software on an iPod nor Pocket PC, as I was unsure whether I might have the same experience as with the Palm, and did not want to take the chance.

Berlitz French Premier ships on eight CDs for the Mac and for Windows operating systems, supports iPod and Palm Pilot and Pocket PC handhelds, and four of the CDs are audio CDs with lessons to use in a car or any CD player. My overall impressions of this application are very good. I liked learning a language without a textbook, the software interface was intuitive, and the word and sentence pronunciation mirrored being in a classroom environment. I would have loved having this application when I was taking a foreign language in school and believe it would be helpful to students in grade school or college. If I hadn't had the problem with the Palm Pilot, I would have rated this five stars, but would still encourage people wanting to learn French, Spanish, Italian or German to give it a try.

Berlitz German Premier

by Daniel MacKenzie



Nova Development Corporation
<http://www.novadevelopment.com>

Released: July, 2006

\$40 USD

Requirements: G3 or newer Mac, OS X 10.2.8 or later, 128MB RAM, CD-ROM, Sound card and speakers.

Optional Devices: microphone, iPod, Palm OS 5 or later, Pocket PC 2002 or later.

Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced



Strengths: Fast and innovative learning techniques. Reasonable price.

Weaknesses: Style and user interface needs improvement.



This review is based on the German version of the Berlitz Language Learning system but there's also French, Spanish and Italian software. They will be coming out with the English version later for those people who need to learn English.

I was blown away by this software. It's just so easy to use. There are two main applications that come with the software. Berlitz Learning System and Berlitz Before You Know It Flash Cards. Let's start with the Berlitz Learning System.

Berlitz has developed a great new way to learn. It's called Immersion Environments. This is where you get to pick an environment to use and you're right there where native speakers are talking for you to listen to. They also have video that goes with the speech. Underneath that is text. The text is what the people in the video are saying. This is so you can follow along with what they are saying. This is Theater mode.

Next is Reading mode. It has everything that theater has and more. There are more meanings to help you understand a word or sentence. Also you can make a word review list if there are words that you are having trouble with. They are called Check Words. The last feature in Reading mode is the sound tab above the video. You get to pick a word from a segment in the text and you can try saying it. The computer will grade you on how well you said the word. A microphone is required to do this but most Macs come with one built-in.

Next, you get little activities to practice what you just learned. Some of them are crosswords, spelling games and unscramble words plus many more. You can base the activities criteria to either the entire text or just your check words. It's very customizable.

Then you get a whole section on speaking the words and checking pronunciation. Like the activities you can base it on anything you want. You can do either words or whole sentences.

The last feature in this is the conversation tab. You can put all that you just learned to use. You get to pick one of the conversations and then choose one of the people to play. Then just follow the directions.

There are a couple of reference tools to use such as an Alphabet Reference and Grammar Basics. Everything so far I enjoyed a lot.

The next thing is the Language Flash Cards. This is my favorite part about the software. You get to pick a topic and you learn the words through flash cards. I learned a lot of the animals in under an hour. There are many kinds of flash card sets for beginners and advanced.

In the flash cards, you start with reviewing them. This gives you the word and the meaning the language that you get. Next part is to recognize it. This is when it shows you a word and you have to think the English. Then the next section is Know it. It shows you a word and you have to type the English. Following that is called Produce it. This is where it shows you the English and you have to think the German meaning (in this case). And finally it shows you the English and you have to type the German (in this case). This is a very useful way to learn words fast.

Also included in the box was some audio CDs so you can learn the language on the go in your car or in a CD player. There was also a bunch of MP3 files included so you can learn the language on your MP3 player or iPod.

This software is compatible with both Macs and Windows computers so everyone is happy. If you have a Pocket PC or a Palm there is software for that too.

The only thing that I would suggest is to change the style and make it look a little better. When I launched the Language Learning System, there was a plain gray box with the immersion environments. It didn't feel like a Mac OS X application. Just add some color and modify the user interface a little bit. After that, you'll have a great piece of software.

Overall, I would definitely recommend this piece of software to anyone who needs or wants to learn Spanish, French, German or Italian. Great job, Nova Development!

Flip4Mac - the Intel version

reviewed by Ted Bade



Telestream, Inc.
848 Gold Flat Road, Suite 1
Nevada City, CA 95959, USA
info@flip4mac.com

http://www.flip4mac.com/flip4mac_home.htm

<http://www.flip4mac.com/wmv.htm>

Cost: \$29 USD, \$49, \$99, \$179 depending upon the features. You can also download a free player only version.

Download: <http://www.flip4mac.com/wmv.htm> (Pay versions).

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/player/wmcomponents.mspx>
(Free version).

System Requirements: Mac OS X version 10.3.9 or later; QuickTime version 6.5 or later

Universal code support: Yes

Strengths: Transparent, easy to use and install. Adds a number of abilities to your Macintosh.

Weaknesses: Doesn't support Microsoft's Digital Rights Management functions. But that's Microsoft's fault not theirs! (So complain to Microsoft already).

Equipment used for testing: Intel Dual Core MacMini.

Experience needed: Minimum for the player. If you intend to do advanced video/audio editing, you will need a lot more experience!



Flip4Mac is a must-have solution for anyone who enjoys a variety of multimedia files either from the Web, through Email or any other means. It gives your Macintosh the ability to play and even manipulate almost every type of media file that uses Windows Media formats.

This article is a follow-up for the complete review I wrote on this product that is available in the April 2006 edition of *macCompanion*. Everything I said in that article holds true. Telestream recently released a "Universal" version of this product, and I just had to try it on my Intel MacMini.

As far as I can tell, Flip4Mac works just as well on an Intel Mac as it did on the PowerPC. You can still watch all the WMV files you get from your PC friends as well as those you find on the Internet.

As with the previous version, use of Flip4Mac is totally transparent to the user. After it is installed, you handle playing WMA or WMV files just as if they were QT files. You single double-click on them and QuickTime opens and plans them. If you click a web page containing a media file, it plays in a window that is controlled with your standard (or Pro) QuickTime controls.

You can get Flip4Mac in a variety of packages, each with more and more features. First, let me point out that the distribution methods of Flip4Mac have changed a little. You need to download the free version from Microsoft. You can click on a link at the Flip4Mac site and it will redirect you to the download area at the Microsoft site. As before, you download the whole package and can add features by paying for a code that turns them on (This was very similar to how QuickTime Pro works.).

So what does each version include? Here is what you get with each version. For a complete comparison chart visit the following URL: http://www.flip4mac.com/wmv_compare.htm

Free - Downloaded by visiting <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/player/wmcomponents.msp> or through a link on the Flip4Mac site. This version provides the basic features necessary to watch and/or listen to Window's Media files. The page at the Microsoft site lists the various formats the free player can handle.

WMV Player Pro - Buy from Telestream for \$29 USD. (You can buy and download this and all the pay versions by visiting <http://www.flip4mac.com/wmv.htm>)

This version adds the ability to import Window's Media files and convert them to QuickTime files. Once converted you can edit them with any QuickTime tools you own. It also lets you move Window's Media files to your iPod (although not those containing Microsoft's DRM). It can also let you convert Window's Media based movies from a digital camera to QuickTime, which you can then edit.

WMV Studio - Purchase for \$49. This version adds the ability to export QuickTime media files to Window's Media version 9 format using setting files that have been pre-configured by Telestream. Once you import the files you can edit them with any QuickTime tools you own (including Final Cut Pro, Final Cut Express HD, QuickTime Pro, iMovie, Sorenson Media Squeeze 4.1, Discreet Cleaner 6, Compressor 2). When you complete your work you can leave it as a QuickTime file or save it as a Window's Media file. The preset setting files are very useful and will satisfy most amateur needs.

WMV Studio Pro - Purchase for \$99. This version includes the ability to import and export Windows Media files and adds the ability for you to manipulate the conversion setting files. This ability would be valuable for someone doing some serious editing and who needs to output files in Windows Media formats.

WMV Studio Pro HD - Purchase for \$179. This version adds the ability to work with Windows Media files that are in HD format. This is the complete tool set and would be useful to anyone into serious video editing. It also includes functions for working with Pro audio,

The above discussions deal mainly with video files, but I should note that the same abilities exist for audio files in each of these versions.

Although Flip4Mac is pretty transparent, sometimes things go wrong. If Flip4Mac encounters a problem when trying to work with a media file on a web page, it will pop up and tell you that it cannot work with a particular file and give you the ability to choose to turn Flip4Mac's function off so you can try using the standard Microsoft version. I have found in the few cases that this has happened, that the Standard version doesn't work either. And turning them back on means a short trip to the System Preferences Control panel.

You should definitely add Flip4Mac to your Macintosh. If only to be able to transparently handle the majority of movies that you will come across. I also highly recommend all of the pay for versions. Evaluate their features and decide which you will really use. I think most people will be satisfied with the Player Pro version although anyone who needs to output in Windows Media format should consider one of the more expensive versions. Flip4Mac gives you the ability to play all sorts of Windows Media files transparently moving them to your QuickTime player. It is an excellent program and a must have for all Macintosh owners!

iPartition 1.5.2 – hot-swap partitioning

reviewed by Ted Bade



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Phone: +44 20 7043 8217 (International); 0870 0682394 (in UK)

sales@coriolis-systems.com

<http://www.coriolis-systems.com/>

URL: <http://www.coriolis-systems.com/>

Released: July 26, 2006

Cost: \$44.95 USD

System Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.7 or later (including Tiger), 450MHz PowerPC or better or Intel Mac, 512MB RAM. Supports internal and external disks. Does not support Mac OS 9.

Universal code: Yes

Strengths: Easy to use and understandable interface. Allows you to easily move free space from partition to partition without disturbing the data on the drive.

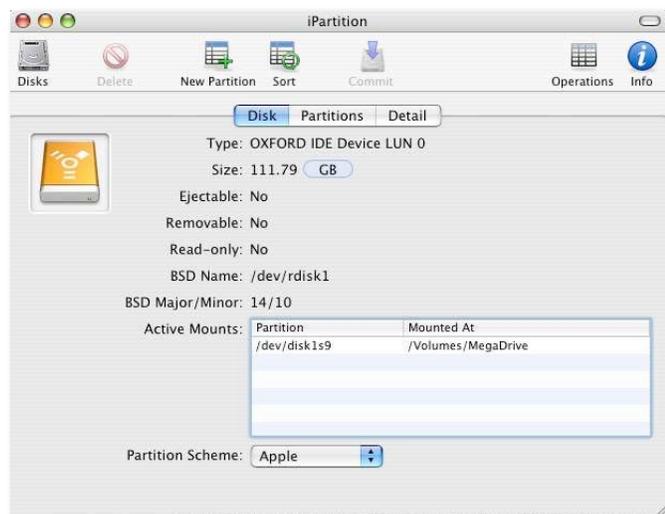
Weaknesses: No support for drives partitioned in other formats such as Windows Fat32 or NTFS. When a drive cannot be partitioned, no help message appears, the interface doesn't let you move space around and you think it just isn't working.

Equipment used for testing: G5/1.8GHzSP and Intel Dual Core MacMini. Also an external Firewire hard drive.

Experience needed: Intermediate. You need to understand some rules about partitioning a drive and the system limitations.

iPartition is a useful utility that can be used to manipulate partitions on your Macs hard drives. More than just partitioning the drive, it can repartition a drive, moving free space from one partition to another. Which means you don't have to back up, reformat and repartition. A real time saver.

Conceptually, iPartition is designed to access hard drive partition information and allow you to make modifications to the existing partition information without reformatting the drive. This is very useful if you decide that the way you partitioned a drive doesn't make sense and you don't want to back up all the data and reformat/repartition the drive to get it right. I have made some less the optimal partition decisions in the past and a solution like iPartition would have been very useful.



However, iPartition cannot help me with my most recent partition error. I created a Fat32 partition to run XP on my Intel-based MacMini. I didn't realize just how much space XP kills and I created a Windows partition that is smaller than optimum. While iPartition doesn't currently provide this feature, there is a good chance that it will be released in a later version. However, because Apple protects the Boot partition on a Macintosh, using iPartition on the boot drive requires booting off a different drive.

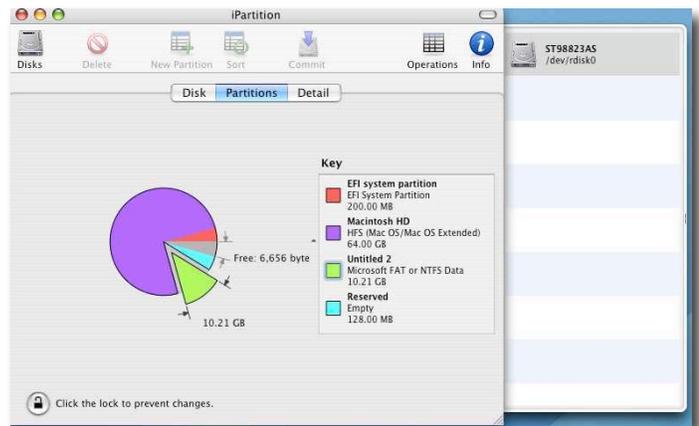
You might already have a second bootable drive or partition with a version of Mac OS X on it. If not, the iPartition package includes a utility called CDMaker that will allow you to make a bootable CD. You can download a CD template from Coriolis Systems, which contains the files necessary to boot either an Intel or PowerPC Macintosh. These are larger files (261MegaBytes for the Intel boot disk and 175 Megabytes for PowerPC), which means you will need a good Internet connection. Alternatively, you can use your own CD template if you have one. You can use the Mac OS X Install CD as a template (or I guess you could just boot from it).

When you build the bootable CD with this application, you can include other applications you might want to use. The Intel template from Coriolis Systems includes a copy of iPartition and iDefrag Lite.

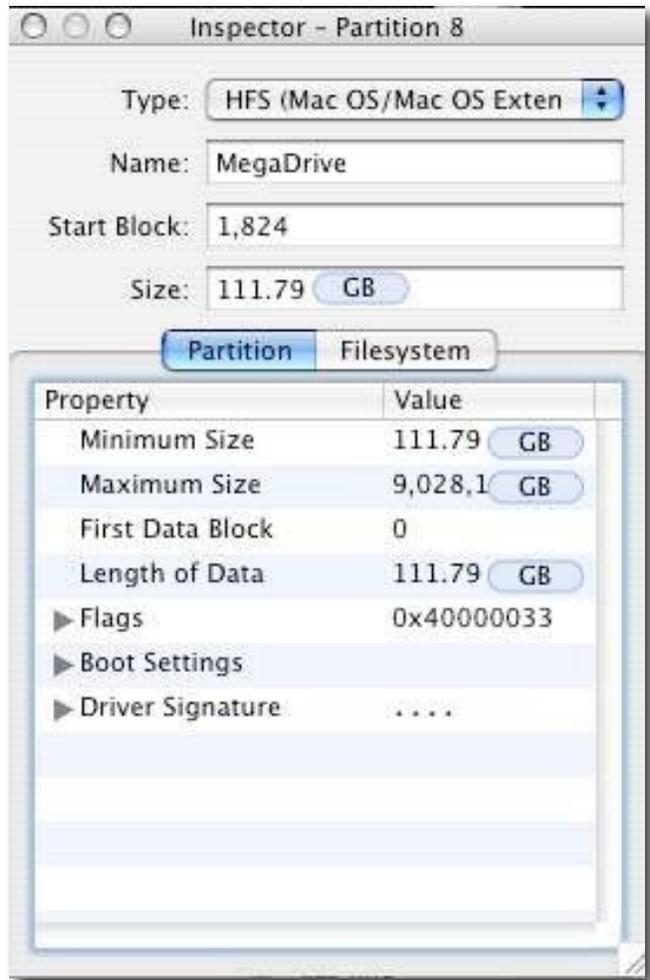
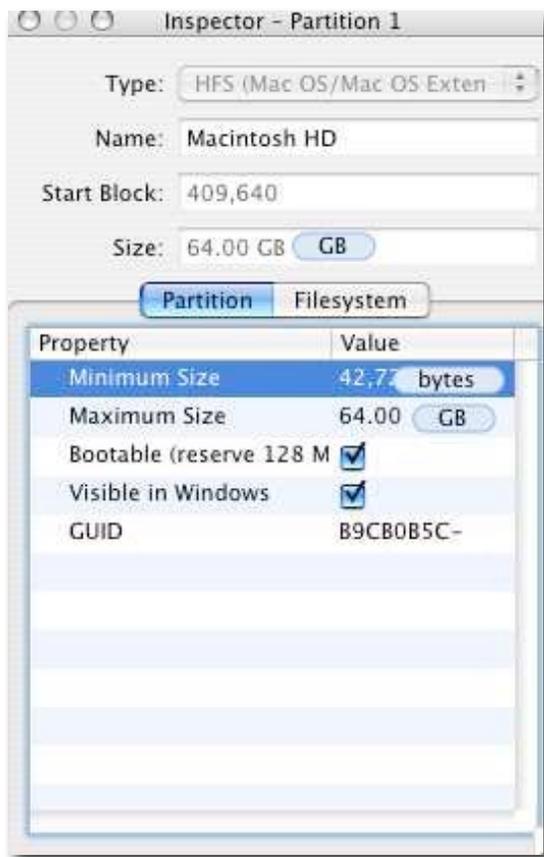
iPartition has a simple and easy to use interface, which makes working with it a breeze. When you first run it, by default, four information areas open. The main window provides most of the controls. A side drawer lists the hard drives connected to your Macintosh. The "Inspector" window provides a variety of information about a partition you select. And finally the "Pending Operations" window keeps a log of what you have set iPartition up to do. The information windows are dynamic, in that they change as you insert or remove a drive.

The main iPartition window either provides an overview of a drive, on the "Disk" tab, an overview and control of partitions on the drive selected in the "Partitions" tab, and finally a whole lot of detail about the partition map in the "Detail" section.

Manipulation of any partition can be accomplished in two easy ways. First of all, if you view the "Partitions" tab in the main window you can click on any partition shown on the pie chart there (see diagram), then grab the partition handles and change the size as you desire. Obviously, you need to have free space in order to increase a partition size.



The other easy method of changing the partition is to go to the “Inspector” window. Here all you need to do is to type in a value for the partition size. iPartition can show the size of a partition using a variety of parameters. By default, block size is used, (which can be a bit confusing), but you can easily change this to something that makes sense, such as MBytes or GBytes. Just remember, if you choose a smaller unit method, such as Bytes (rather than GBytes), the Inspector window doesn’t update its size, so part of the new number is hidden behind the parameter button.



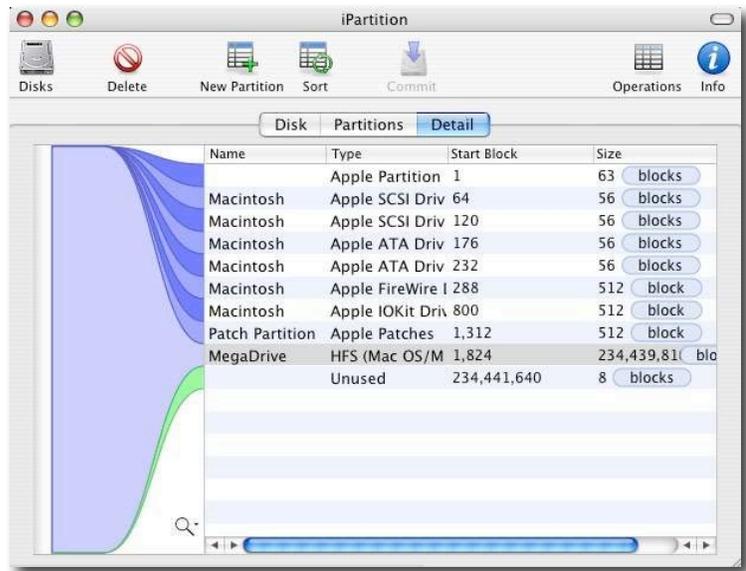
If you intend to use iPartition with an older drive, that is not one just freshly formatted and that has been in use for a while, you will need to run a disk-cleaning program to get things started. iPartition doesn’t include a built-in feature that will let you de-fragment a drive. Coriolis Systems provides a lite version of its iDefrag program, called iDefrag Lite. (It is included with the iPartition download.) You can use this or, if

you like more controls and abilities, you can purchase the full version for \$30 USD. The Lite version worked quite well and was easy to use. It cleaned up my external drive without a glitch.

While iPartition is relatively easy to use when things go right, it can be a bit confusing when they don’t. When I tried to first use it, I tried it on my Intel Mac Mini’s boot volume. I clicked on the partition I wanted to shrink and discovered that all the controls were grayed out. Which led me to believe I was doing something wrong. Reading the manual (!), I discovered that I was using the controls correctly, but was trying to do something illegal. The same thing happened when I tried to repartition my slightly fragmented external drive. The point is, iPartition would be a lot better if a handy information window popped up to let you know there was a problem. Better yet, it could explain the reason and a suggestion of what you need to do.

I should note that their Tech Support people provided me with this information when I explained what I was doing. But one shouldn’t need support on a typically common issue like this.

Overall, iPartition is a handy program that lets you easily partition and control the size of partitions of your hard drives. Its ability to change a partition size of the fly, would be useful if you decided you need to change a partition size, once it has been created. Apple's Disk Utility does provide some basic partition support, but doesn't provide the ability to repartition without reformatting and doesn't have as nice an interface. iPartition provides all the tools necessary to get your drive partitioned to your satisfactions. If you are looking for a program to help control a variety of partitions, than you won't go wrong by considering iPartition. It is easy to use and offers a clear and easy to understand interface.



On The Job v2.2.1

reviewed by Mike Hubbartt



Stunt Software

<http://www.stuntsoftware.com>

Released: July 2006

\$24.95 USD

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9 or newer.

Strengths: Intuitive interface, support for creating and e-mailing PDF invoices, and client name and address information is integrated with the Mac OS Address Book.

Weaknesses: Online Help not clear on creating reports, low cost (especially compared to MS Project) maybe prevent some companies from considering it.



Keeping track of time on projects is important for employees and Consultants working in IT. Many clients have separate budgets for a multitude of work and workers must adhere to budgetary requirements while completing the required tasks in a timely manner. On The Job is an inexpensive Mac OS application that tracks time for a job, and one or more tasks related to that job.

To test On The Job, I had to write a book review for a magazine, so I added the job and created a list of tasks for the assignment. Simple. I was able to drag-and-drop tasks to rearrange as needed.

Note: This software also supports moving tasks to different jobs. While working on the review, I used the timer to keep a running count of time worked on each task, and appreciated that it was easy to switch the timer to different tasks and I could manually modify individual task times as needed.

After completing my review, I created an invoice with the time for each task, then Emailed the PDF file to the publisher. Supported invoice output formats are PDF, text, XML or CSV files. Not the greatest variety, but enough for many accounting systems.

I use the same process to review software, just as I use the same general procedures when doing web development (depended on the web technology implemented by the client). On The Job supports duplicating existing projects and the affiliated tasks, so I didn't need to manually recreate another job and associated tasks for another review assignment. And I could create a basic web development job, which I could copy and modify for different clients. Nice.

Overall, I found the software useful as a time tracking and billing system for jobs at one or more clients. I like the uncluttered and intuitive interface, that the system supported fixed and variable rate tasks, and that invoices can easily be sent by Email - ideal with today's Internet savvy business world.

On The Job Version 2.2.1 is a release that fixed problems with application Help and the width of the date column in the task list. Version 2.2 introduced several new product enhancements: adding tax to PDFs invoices, adding job folders (to group similar projects for different clients - useful) and increasing the width of the cost column. Stunt Software provides a demo download of the product at their website, and I encourage people to download and try this application to see if it fits their needs. A great value for the supported functionality.

PDF2Office Professional v. 3.1 — A comprehensive PDF document conversion and data extraction tool

reviewed by Harry {doc} Babad



RecoSoft Corporation
info@recoSoft.com
<http://www.recoSoft.com>

Manufacturers List Price:

PDF2Office v2.0 Professional Edition \$129 USD

PDF2Office v2.0 Professional Edition Upgrade License for customers with v1.x/2.x licenses \$59 USD

PDF2Office v2.0 Professional Edition Education License US \$89 USD

PDF2Office Professional v3.1 Education License US\$89.00

The software also comes in a Personal edition for those who don't need its advanced features, a choice I don't recommend. (Picky, picky doc.)



Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 and higher, It is now Universal Binary for Intel Macintosh's A Windows version is also available. PowerMac G3 with at least a 300 MH processor.

Release Date: August 2006 **Download Size:** 10 MB

Audience: All user levels.



Strength — Integrates well with Microsoft Word; batch-processing tool is convenient and fast; text-conversion feature is easy to use; new Services integration saves time.

Weakness — A very few of the conversions I tried either didn't work due either to my ignorance of a software limitation.

The software was tested on a 1 GHz dual processor PowerPC G4 Macintosh with 2 GB DDR SDRAM running under OS X 10.4.7.

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Publisher's Summary

PDF2Office converts PDF documents into fully editable Microsoft® Word, Microsoft® PowerPoint®, RTF, AppleWorks, HTML and other files recreating the original construction and layout of the document.

PDF2Office forms paragraphs; applies styles; regroups independent graphics elements; extracts images; creates tables; processes headers/footers; endnotes/footnotes and columns/sections, all automatically - without any intervention.

Introduction

I own a variety of software that allows me to work with PDF files; including Acrobat Pro 7, PDFpen Pro 2.4.1 and ReadIris) Pro 11 (OCR. These tools give me enormous flexibility in working with PDF files either scanned with my ScanJet HP 8250 (graphics formatted) or rendered as postscript from the web or other sources. In addition the software that supports my scanner allows scanning to 'text' that allows a somewhat hit or miss text or RTF extraction from scanned graphics.

With all these tools available to me, I was curious what more I could gain by using the new updated PDF2Office software. I had previously tested and reviewed a much less capable version of PDF2Office version 2.1 in the February 2005, Volume 3 Issue 2 macCompanion. At that time the product was focused on output to MS Word, RTF, AppleWorks, HTML or graphics files. I had lower expectations for the product than I do now, and what it did seemed miraculous so I gave it a rating of 5.0 macC's. [Remember earlier version of Acrobat which I owned at the time were also severely limited compared to Acrobat 7.]

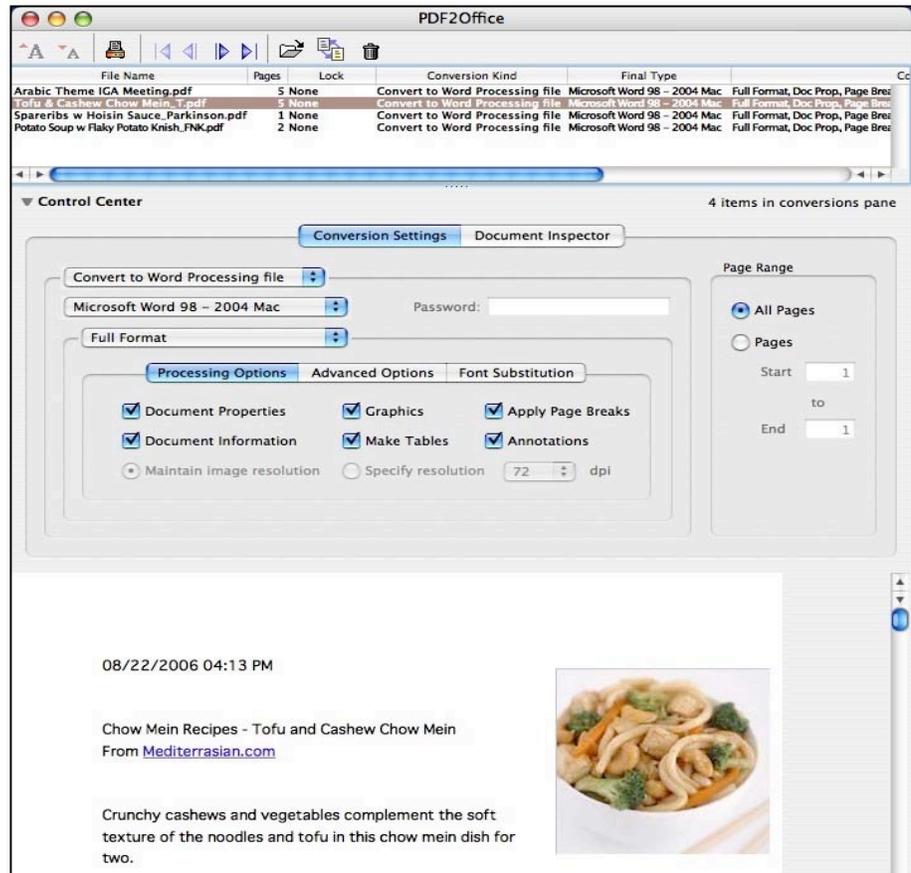
When version 3.1 became available, having read the developers new specifications, I instantly knew I had to test and review the product. The resulting testing clearly demonstrated that the developer had vastly enhanced the product in ways I describe later in this review.

My needs are simple

Accurately extract text and graphics, from a PDF into editable form maintaining formatting as much as possible.

Allow working with PDF files within a no-brainer, simple interface that works for me whether I'm tired or fresh.

Batch process multiple PDF files at once minimizing drudgery with a minimum of interface fuss.



Extract and tweak graphics that that are part of a PDF file for use in other documents. [Yes I own software to both change graphics file types and do simple image editing. But that's an extra step.]

Working With PDF2Office

Installation was simple and I was ready to go.

PDF2Office's main window is attractive and its interface is easy to understand. Simply drag PDF files into the Conversions Pane, adjust the conversion settings, and click on the toolbar's Convert icon. Or, you can convert numerous files at once via the Batch Convert command. PDF2Office gives you a choice of converting a PDF file to text only, images only, or converting the entire document into an image.

I ran the following groups of conversions –

I, both individually and batch, converted seven variously complex PDF recipes, with and without images. I had downloaded these from About.com, Foodnetwork.com, Williams-Sonoma and other sites. I also used Acrobat Pro 7 on the PDF files to convert the individual and groups of recipes to RTF.

In addition I had two files that contained a collection of recipes from the International Gourmet Association. Normally extracting such material mean working with an RTF file, or cutting and pasting the information from the website into black MS Word documents. The later, sometimes takes two steps, copying first the text and then pasting in the images. The goal in this test was to see whether I could more easily convert the multiple recipe information into individual recipe files.

I also tested a few recipes I scanned from magazines to see if I could extract text from them, something I usually do with ReadIris Pro.

Converting copies of several of my articles, extract from macCompanion was simple and accurate. I still hate serif fonts so I concerted everything in the reclaimed MSW document back to Lucinda Grande. Indeed, the before and after MS word documents were very close in format and complexly similar in contents. I suspect the difference is due to the editing my document receives before it is published.

Finally, I worked with both semi-technical and informational magazine articles from *Consumer Reports*, *Business Week*, *Time Magazine*, *Technology Review*; all downloaded from their respective websites. I ran out of time before I could test article from *Science*, a technical magazine. For the articles tested, my main goal was conversion to MS Word,

The results were, in all but two instances, impressive.

But before I share them, I must make a confession. Since I'm a Macintosh user, I did not read either the help files or watch the PowerPoint tutorial, before using the software. Both sources of information turned out to be excellent. In order to test the software, I even ignored the readme file. In addition to how-to the help sources contained a number of useful trouble shooting tips.

All files converted were created either using Acrobat Pro or downloaded from the Internet (e.g., recipes, magazine articles.) In addition to converting PDFs some of which contained images to MS Word 2004 documents, I also used Acrobat 7 Pro to convert them to RTF files.

Comparing the two kinds of outputs (MSW and RTF), in all but one case, the capture of the text occurred flawlessly. More about that later.

In addition, the PDF2Office files (MSW) were true to the formatting of the original document. Paragraphs, text styles, indentations, margins and page breaks were where they belonged. The RTF files from Acrobat Pro contained all of the contents (text and images) but were poorly formatted. Interestingly, I compared the document sized for the original PDF, The RTF file and the MSW document and in all cases; the MSW document was the smallest size. --- Strange.

In one case, a PDF recipe file could be converted to a RTF file (Acrobat Pro) but gave me a blank MSW document. I cured that case by again downloading the file again, the recipe transformed correctly with PFD2Office.

The longer multi-page articles I converted with PDF2Office also were very accurate in both their contents and their formatting.

Review Limitations

Tables in PDFs — I did not attempt to work with Table Rich PDFs due to a lack of time. The developer notices that table capture, for feature rich formatting, is still a somewhat trial and error process and recommends extracting to text and reformatting tables.

Overlapping Graphics — Since none of my test cases contained such materials I did not work with regrouping interesting and overlapping graphics.

Equations Rich Documents — I did not attempt to work with highly mathematically complex documents despite the fact that the software has the potential capability to “form mathematical formats where possible”. It is one of the preference options when working with an individual document.

Problems Found

Converting Scanned (Graphic) PDFs — Despite information in the help files and tutorial, I was unable to extract text graphic formatted scanned PDF recipes. I tried the recommended extract as text, but either I misunderstood the instructions, or this simply doesn't work.

“The developer notes: Certain types of PDF data are not supported including (but not limited to) transparencies, clipping paths, certain graphics operations, graphics filtering, certain text operations and PKCS/AES encrypted documents.”

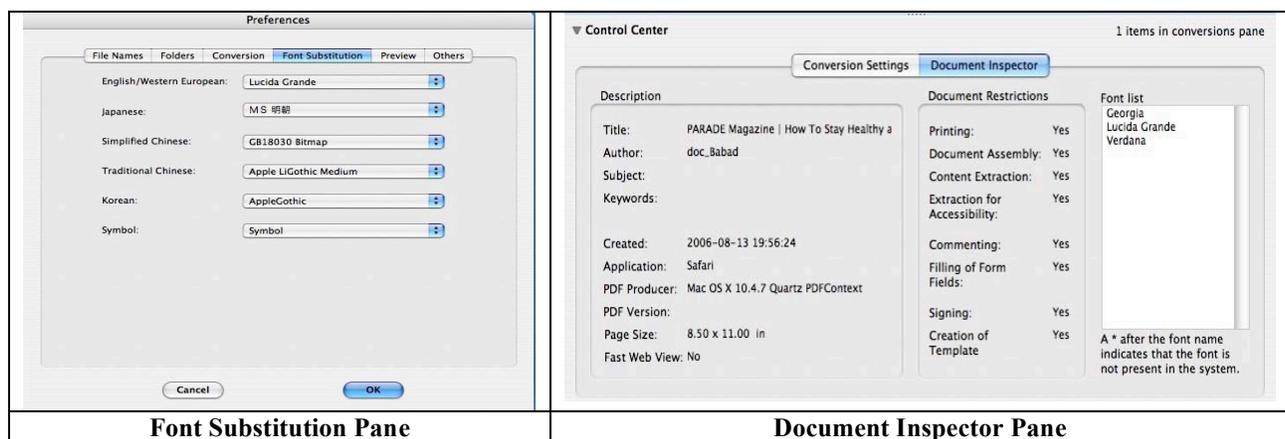
Creating PowerPoint Slide shows from PDFs— I attempted to convert both outline formatted PDFs and a document with short paragraphs into PDF using a variety of alternative software settings. Not only didn't this work, but also I got some weird what appeared to be FileMaker 8 progress windows. The later software is not yet installed on my computer.



The Developer has claimed that the software can “Convert PDF files to Microsoft® PowerPoint® files. Create slideshows instantly by simply converting PDF files to PowerPoint® files. Recover and re-use data in existing PDF files in your PowerPoint® documents.”

Package Features

“PDF2Office sports an easy-to-use interface that allows you to set the target type on a file-by-file basis. To facilitate the conversion process, PDF2Office even provides layout preview and navigation of a PDF document within the application itself enabling you to identify which pages to extract.



“Convert PDF documents to Microsoft® Word, RTF, AppleWorks and other common files. Convert PDF documents into fully editable Microsoft® Word, Microsoft® PowerPoint®, RTF, AppleWorks, Unicode, Text and HTML files.

PDF2Office recreates the original construction and layout of the document - forming paragraphs; applying styles; regrouping independent graphic elements; extracting images; creating tables; and processing headers/footers, endnotes/footnotes and columns/sections, all automatically - without any manual intervention.

“PDF2Office provides options for converting all or a range of pages in a PDF document into popular office format documents as well as image types such as JPEG, Photoshop, PNG and TIFF. Furthermore, it offers the capability to extract images from specific pages within a PDF document.

“In addition, PDF documents can be opened directly within Microsoft Word X/2004, and from within other applications which support Apple’s Services function, such as Keynote, Pages and TextEdit. By control clicking on a PDF file you can also sent it directly to PDF2Office

“A new font substitution panel has been introduced in PDF2Office allowing substitution fonts to be specified per file and font substitution can now be specified for Symbol based encoding

“Multilingual Versions — Supports English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Western European-language data contained in PDF documents.”

Conclusions

For those of you who often need to convert PDF files to editable text or graphics format’s PDF2Office Pro is a must buy. Since PDF2Office is a standalone tool, it is not necessary to acquire and install additional PDF editing software and tools, resulting in savings in both time and money. [I never follow my own advice, and do indeed own many tools – It’s a little bit like a wood carvers chisels, you can never have enough.]

For those of you who have both Adobe Acrobat and OCR software, this software can add to the flexibility and speed with which you can concert PDF files to well formatted text and graphics. The product is well tuned to MSW and I continue to find it a great buy despite having other ‘work a round’ tools in my software arsenal.

Alas, converting a few complex PDF files with just the click of a mouse may isn’t as simple or as accurate as I’d like. I’ll check out those Science Magazine articles I mentioned earlier next week. Never the less, version 3.1 is several orders of magnitude better than version 2.1. I have little use for PowerPoint so the conversion of PDFs to that format, with which I had problems, was of little interest to me.

Note that RecoSoft suggest containing customer support with any conversion problems you may have. Their technical staff works continuously to improve their conversion engine, as version 3.1 clearly demonstrates. I have taken advantage of this service with version 2.1 and found the staff both responsive and helpful.

Buy this product, it may be the only PDF conversion tool you will ever need.
I rate this product 4.5 macCs.

PS

In a nutshell - the difference, according to RecoSoft’s Paul Chadha, between PDF2Office Pro v 3.1 and PDF2Office Personal is:

PDF2Office Pro v 3.1 delivers a full PDF to Office formats conversion (Word, RTF, PowerPoint, AppleWorks, Text then image related conversions and converting each page in a PDF as an image - a true PDF File recovery, program.) It gives a plug-in for Word so that you can open PDF's directly in Word. Parts of PDF2Office Pro are a Universal Binary (about 25% of the total software at present)

PDF2Office Personal [ca. \$60 USD] on the other hand requires Office X/2004 to run as its configured as a plug-in for Word X/2004 and strictly gives PDF to Word conversions. Now, PDF2Office Personal v3.0 is a complete Universal Binary. Even though Word X/2004 are not, we've done some smart engineering called client-server so that PDF to Word Conversions execute natively on the Intel-Mac's.

Swift Publisher — Easy page layout on your Mac

reviewed by Harry {doc} Babad



Developer: BeLight Software, Ltd.
PO Box 47 65005, Odessa Ukraine
Voice: +380 48 738-08-49
Support@Belightsoft.com
<http://www.belightsoft.com/swiftpublisher/>
Release Date: 28 June 2006



Manufacturers List Price: \$39.95 (Box), \$34.95 (Download USD). Academic pricing is available. Boxed and download editions available. The download edition comes with fewer templates (about 80) and limited clipart (about 800 images).

Download Size: 7.9 MB

Requirements: G3 or later; Mac OS X 10.3 or later; 50 MB hard drive space or 1.8 GB for full clipart install; CD-ROM drive (for install from CD); Printer. Core Imaging requires Mac OS X 10.4 or later. Universal Binary version runs natively on both PowerPC and Intel-based Macintosh computers.

Audience: All user levels except DPT professionals working on high-end projects.



Strength — Doing DPT with Publisher makes desktop publishing fun, easy and intuitive. Choose one of ready-made templates, use a set of editing tools to control transparency, tiling, apply masks and fills, crop images, and enjoy the result. Or start from scratch. It's all easy.

Weakness — Page to page template background rollover issues and as Robert Pritchett noted in an earlier review, still no direct HTML exporting.

The software was tested on a 1 GHz dual processor PowerPC G4 Macintosh with 2 GB DDR SDRAM running under OS X 10.4.7.

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Publisher's Intro

No doubt that staying in touch with your customers and group members is important for you. Publishing good looking and informative documents for business, social and home activities has become easy. Swift Publisher is an excellent Macintosh page layout application for designing and printing colorful flyers, newsletters, brochures, letterheads, etc. Its detailed choice of templates inspires your creativity and a variety of editing tools lets you quickly apply it.

Introduction

In years gone by, I've had a number of occasions when I wanted to create a brochure or newsletter that was more creatively designed, and therefore hopefully, more attractive than I could do in MS Word. I had taken two courses that focused an introduction to Adobe Illustrator, and even started to read a book or two on the subject. Motivation, all of Robin William's books focus on design tricks and discipline, using QuarkXPress, Illustrator or InDesign. My copy, bought at a MUG raffle, of InDesign CS2 is still an uninstalled bargain.

For my needs, I concluded I did not need work with the top DTP programs, feature laden, and with a price tag to match. Why you might ask? It's all about learning curve. I was and still am not willing to learn a program that I will only use 2-3 times a year. [This paradigm also serves me as well in ignoring Excel [three courses later] when most of what I need can be done in FileMaker Pro.]

Since I on occasion create a newsletter (in this case, my folk music oriented eTalk found at <http://www.3RFS.org>) is just a bit plain and constrained for my Robin William's educated tastes. Over the years I've found many of the flyers and brochures, used as hand outs by the non-profits for which I volunteer, are less than eye-catching. So are the newsletters we occasionally produce in MS Word.

Therefore when I read about the new 1.3 update of Swift Publisher, I jumped at the chance to learn and review it. This review also serves to update Robert Pritchett's assessment of version 1.0.3 in the October 2005 *macCompanion*. I also hoped that if the software had the ease of use and robustness of BeLight Software's other products [*Disc Cover*, *Business Card Composer*, and *Mail Factory*.] If so, I would have my DPT needs handled.

Working With the Product

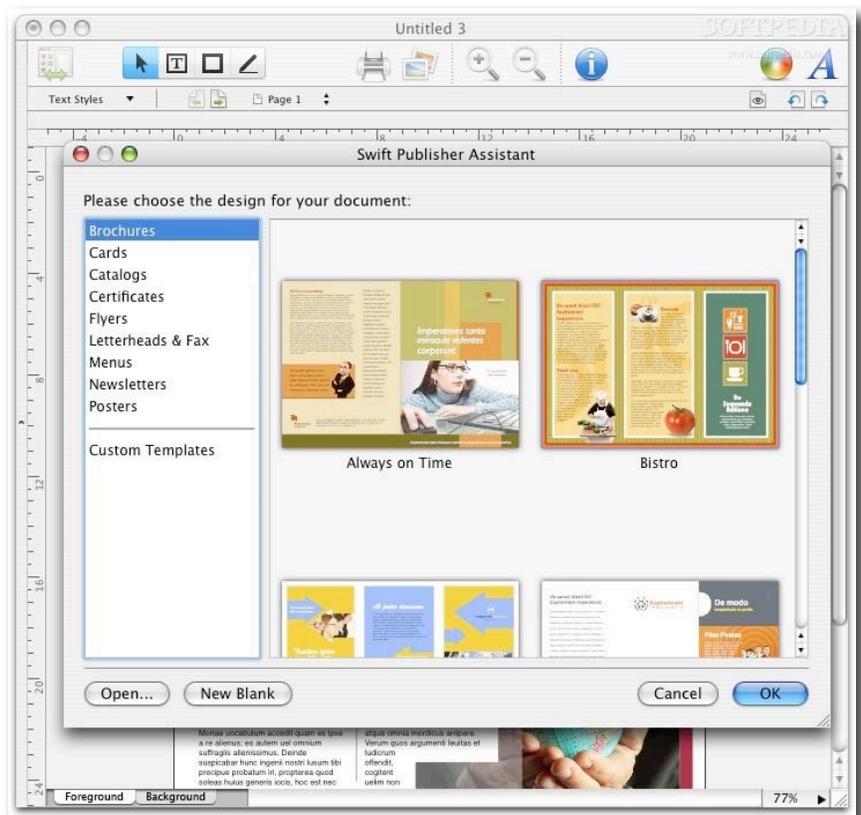
Installation is easy and intuitive. The application is installed in the applications folder (user level) and the remaining materials which include the template and clip art are installed at the root level *Harry's Tiger > Library > Application support > BeLight Software > Clip Art or Swift Publisher > Templates*. Although I have *Disc Cover* and *Business Card Composer* installed, only one folder of clip art [23,608 Images] and an equal number of thumbnails allows working with all of the BeLight programs.

When launching Swift Publisher you are presented with the "Swift Publisher Assistant", which displays the available document templates categorized by a an end product such as a flyers, newsletters or menu.

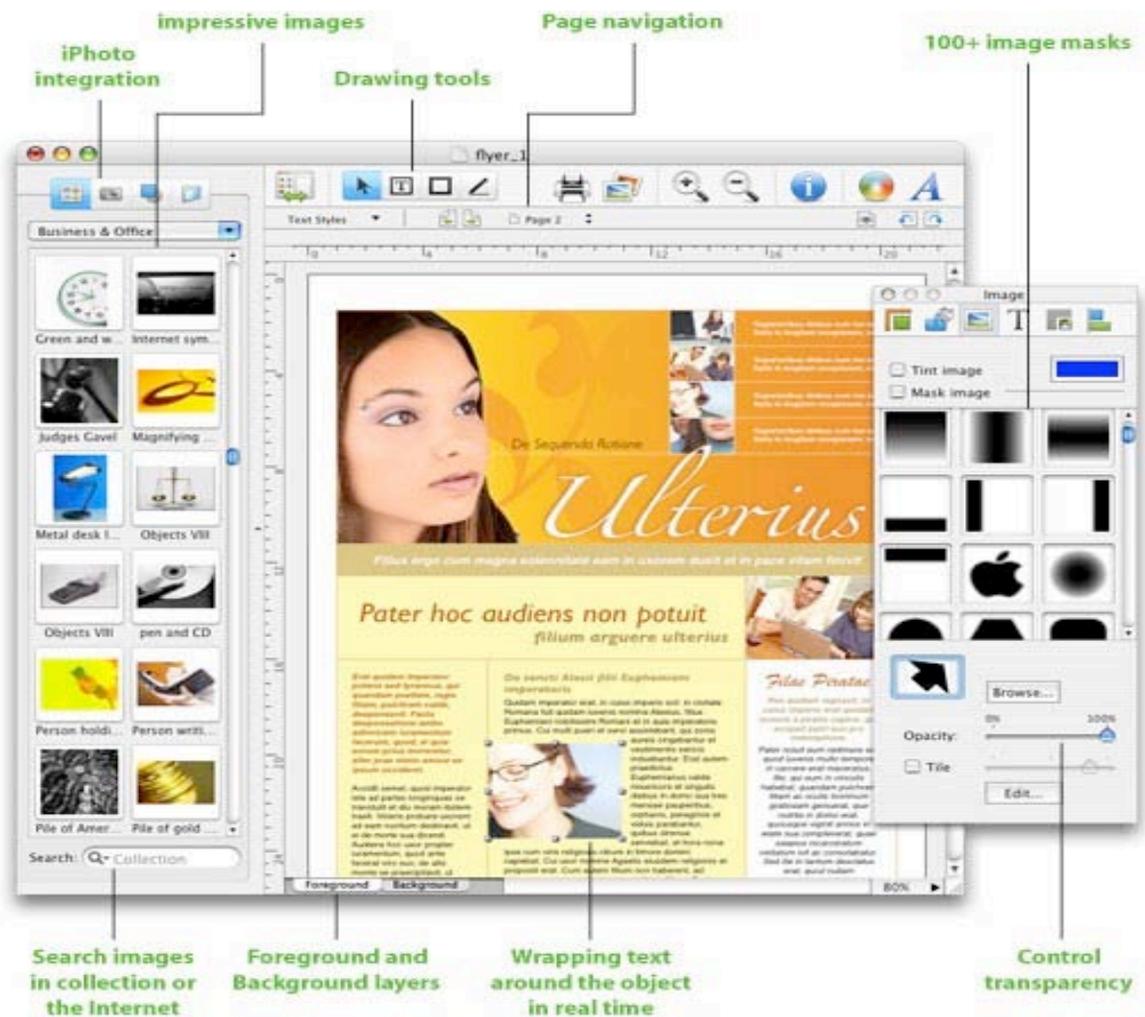
Once you have selected a template or a blank document, the editor window opens; this is divided into a main editing area, a multi- tabbed media browser and a floating window for adjusting attributes on the selected page element.

As noted by Victor Mihailescu, Apple News Editor on the Softpedia website:

“You have four basic design features to work with. These are graphics, text boxes, boxes and lines. You can flow text between multiple text boxes and everything can be filled, borders or shadowed. Another great little feature is the ability to add masks to any image. Those little masks can make all the difference between a boring old square picture that has things sticking in at the edges and a very cool image with a mask and a shadow.



The program works in two layers, the background and the foreground, meaning that you can use the same background and only change things in the foreground.” <http://www.softpedia.com/reviews/mac/Swift-Publisher-Review-14424.shtml>

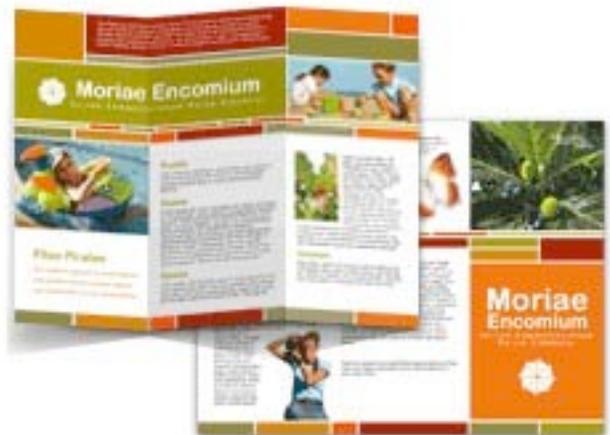


The background holds large graphics, textures shapes, and colors that don't have to interact with text elements. They stay put when you work on your foreground elements — usually the text and text specific graphics.

Using the Software

I took several product created in MS Word and attempted to beautify their design in Swift publisher. No, there shall be no before and after images. Suffice it to say the result of replicating the MS Word files when tweaked in BeLight's software had (I believe) a cleaner look. However, I did study Robin Williams design books and MS Word is a severely limited tool for DPT. I also took and personalized a few of the templates, including a booklet I liked, that was provided with Swift publisher.

This was a straight-forward effort, once I got over a few minor program quirks on how to replace temple images with those I wanted. Hint, first delete the template image, and then replace with your own clipart.



If you, as I am, are an occasional user of layout programs, you will appreciate the ease of use features, the next time you have a special design need. True: whether that's in a few days, few weeks or a few months. It's so easy to use that it could be addicting. I might even abandon MS word for such tasks as creating even simple flyers, newsletters, catalogs, brochures, letterheads, fax covers, certificates, menus, posters, and greetings cards.

To Summarize the Features

Although not one the expensive (ca. \$700), leaning curve intensive high-end DPT packages, Swift Publisher's feature set is quite impressive. For example, as noted in a May 2006 MacAddict review, "typographic features include line spacing (leading), space before paragraphs, standard alignments (left, centered, right, and justified), hyphenation, kerning, baseline shift, drop shadows, OpenType support, and text and paragraph styles. You can also crop, scale, flip, tile, and colorize any graphic." My favorite Swift Publisher features are:

Ease of Use — One of the things that made learning Swift Publisher easy for me is that I had already mastered, almost, both BeLight's *Disc Cover* and *Business Card Composer*. Wisely, the publisher has used most of the same interface conventions and tools in the publisher software allowing me to focus on design details specific to page layout.

Help Files – The software contains an easy to understand extensive well-illustrated help support- you guessed it, under the *Help* menu. Although the publishers English is somewhat flawed, it is easy to understand. (Something is obviously lost in translation from Ukrainian.) I worked extensively with the help menu pretending I knew less about the user interface that I do. Guess what I really did lean some new methods, shortcuts and tweaks that I will use in future DPT projects.

Thousands of Images and Designs - 23,000 high quality images, 100 unique masks and about 120 professionally designed templates (flyers, brochures, letterheads, newsletters, catalogs, etc.) is what you need for creating high-impact documents. Insert images in many supported formats — TIFF, JPEG, GIF, PDF, EPS from your computer, network. Apply your iPhoto pictures by taking advantage of the built-in iPhoto integration. One minor gripe, many of the templates are so professional looking that I felt they would not represent the *real* me.

Advanced Page Layout - Flow text from column to column or to another page entirely. Adjustable layout guides are convenient for precise object placement. Text Wrap feature will be helpful if you need to combine graphics and text on a page. Take advantage of rotating each page of your multipage document on a fly. Switching between Background and Foreground layers enables you to create and edit complicated designs.

Shortcomings

While you can add, delete, and move pages, there aren't any master pages, per se (each document page has, or can have, its own background). Unless I did something wrong, alas, the templates are only single page long, meaning you have to create complimentary styled background layouts for subsequent pages. But that's simply a cut-and-paste procedure.

Conclusions

Publishing software should have a wide choice of professionally made designs (120 templates on the CD) and the advantage of simple to use but advanced editing capabilities. Swift Publisher not only provides you with intuitive tools, but also makes page layout process pleasant and easy to learn and fun to use.

As noted in a MacAddict Review (May 2006 issue) “Even if you’ve spent lots of time with Adobe Illustrator, InDesign or QuarkXPress, you’ll be impressed with Swift Publisher, a consumer-level word-processing and page-layout app. It combines an intuitive interface a limited but versatile feature set, and gobs of templates and clip art.

As MacAddict’s John Cruise noted: “Swift Publisher doesn’t have nearly as many word-processing features as Microsoft Word (thankfully), nor does it have as many typographic, page-layout, long-document, or printing features as high-end page-layout apps. Then again, Swift Publisher isn’t aimed at high-end publishers. It’s more for schools, students, nonprofits, churches, and small businesses that want to produce nice-looking color publications in small quantities, but don’t need an expensive, industrial strength (and expensive hard to learn) app.”

A very affordable application that you can use to get into DTP to fulfill your layout needs beyond those of your word processor. As noted, it is easy to so you can be up and doing layout work within minutes, well an hour at most. I rate this product **4.5 macCs**.

PS

I own, but have not checked out Apple’s Pages (a part of iWork software), so this review ignores that product.

PPS

For a relaxed review of an earlier version of this product check out [\[http://www.belightsoft.com/products/swiftpublisher/reviews/mac360.php\]](http://www.belightsoft.com/products/swiftpublisher/reviews/mac360.php)

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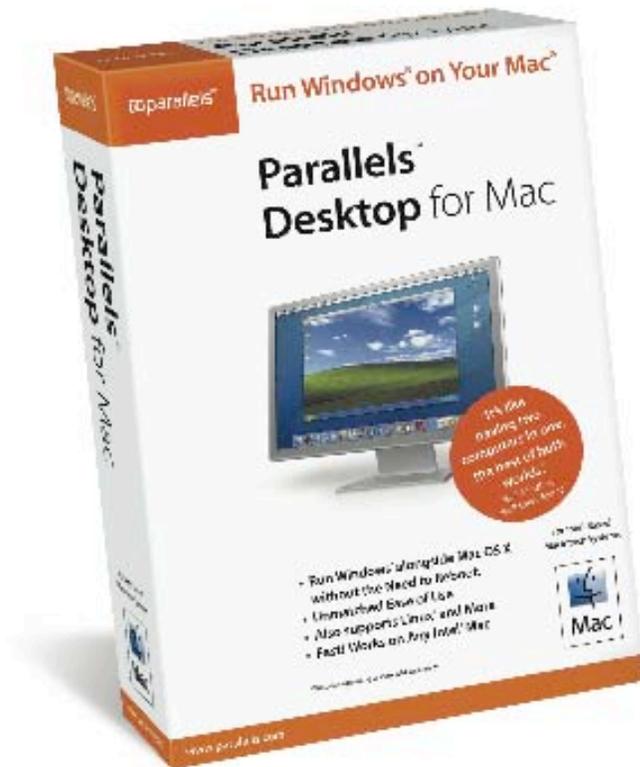
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We are the Macintosh® Professional Network (MPN), Limited Liability Corporation (LLC). MPN, LLC continues to evolve, ever since its creation in 1996 as a way to reach out to those who use computers for a living in an effort to make their lives easier and their work both enjoyable and profitable.

Besides consulting efforts, we also provide monthly book, hardware and software reviews at [macCompanion](#). We offer ways and means for folks to get comfortable using the Macintosh™ created by the Apple® Corporation in the multibillion-dollar computer industry. We know that bad software doesn't live long in the Mac™ environment. On the other hand, good computer equipment and software becomes great as the word spreads, and we are very good at helping to spread it. Our suggestions over the years have also helped improve many successful products in use today. Through kind and gentle efforts, we have been able to help many people move to better tools-of-the-trade so they can be more productive in their work.

Besides our website, we also create *macCompanion* as a freely available PDF-based monthly. It averages about 100 pages per month. July 2004 is the first-year anniversary of this labor of love. The *macCompanion* staff is an all-volunteer team of writers and reviewers from many parts of the globe, and they also have a great wealth of knowledge and experience in their backgrounds. That base of talent also continues to keep growing as the Macintosh Professional Network expands.

Statistical Analysis

We are very excited about our site statistics! The multilingual-capable [macCompanion](#) website is close to 2 million page views a month and readership continues to increase rapidly through our "whisper campaign".

We continue to get greater visibility every day. Many of the various 35 computer operating systems (with many moving towards the Mac® OS X™ environment), 115 online search engines, 269 countries and domains and 319 online robots have discovered us – and continue to do so. So far, over 201 other websites have also linked to us. Many of our readers have made our site one of their favorites. While nearly 70% of our readership stops by for a quick visit via RSS feeds, over 23% spend between 1/2 to 1 hours at a time going through over 250 different pages on our site (mostly archives). Many of those who quickly drop by, come to get the monthly PDFed issue of *macCompanion*. Over 35GB of bandwidth was used in December 2005 alone for download purposes. Previous months have averaged around 20GB. Trend analysis indicates that will continue to increase as folks decide to "Move to the Mac".

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We have four advertising options you may choose from, and multiple months will receive a 20% discount for both website and PDF-based ads. All advertising must be paid in advance. We accept credit card payments via PayPal, checks, money orders by regular mail and cash in US currency by hand.

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We offer site ads for a fixed-budget price of only \$100 per month on our site. Following the KISS principle, we accept banner ads in only one size at this time - 468x60 pixels (per the [Interactive Advertising Bureau](#) standards for a Full Banner Ad Interactive Marketing Unit.) The ad will be rotated through with other ads, and there is no limit to how many you want to include.

The billing cycle begins based on the first day the ad placed on the site and is renewable on a monthly basis. This can begin immediately or at any time.

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The published monthly version of *macCompanion* has a closing date of the 25th of each month for ads. Our target date for distribution begins the 5th of each month. Placement of the ads will be at our discretion, but we do listen to your suggestions.

Each ad will require a site link so our readers can click on the PDF ad and go to your site. Ads need to be submitted as PDFs with at least 300 DPI resolution.

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Style	Rate	Size Fractional	Size Decimal	Size Centimeter
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1/8th Page Vertical	\$50 USD	2 1/4 x 3 1/2 in	2.25 x 3.5 in	5.7 x 8.9 cm
1/4th Page Vertical	\$60 USD	3 1/2 x 4 3/4 in	3.5 x 4.75 in	8.9 x 12.1 cm
1/2 Page Horizontal	\$100 USD	7 1/4 x 4 3/4 in	7.25 x 4.75 in	18.4 x 12.1 cm
1/3rd Page Horizontal	\$70 USD	7 1/4 x 3 1/4 in	7.25 x 3.25 in	18.4 x 8.3 cm
1/3rd Page Vertical	\$70 USD	2 1/4 x 9 7/8 in	2.25 x 9.875 in	5.7 x 25.1 cm
2/3rd Page Horizontal	\$150 USD	7 1/4 x 6 1/4 in	7.25 x 6.25 in	18.4 x 15.9 cm
2/3rd Page Vertical	\$150 USD	4 3/4 x 9 7/8 in	4.75 x 9.875 in	12.1 x 25.1 cm
Full Page	\$250 USD	7 1/4 x 9 7/8 in	7.25 x 9.875 in	18.4 x 25.1 cm

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