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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the January 2006 issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We start this new issue and the new calendar year with many unanswered questions from the year just past. This month we will travel some of the digital highways and byways of the Macintosh world to bring you the best news and reviews in our easy-to-read monthly format. This month's *Welcome* will take a few scenic stops along the way to find answers to some of last year's lingering questions and pose some new questions for the new year.

Time and the Macintosh Continuum

In a special way the Macintosh world has its own and unique continuum. The element of time establishes a fourth dimension to the dynamic universe of the Macintosh experience. Once the focus or primary measure used to gauge and benchmark the platform's reemergence and progress, time has become an essential yet virtually transparent element of the Macintosh continuum.

Not long ago the Mac community lurched abruptly and often awkwardly forward and back on the results of the semi-annual expo product release calendar and the often impractical and unrealistic quarterly expectations of industry pundits, self-proclaimed experts, and ill-informed Wall Street analysts.

Yet through the passage of time the Macintosh continuum is marked more by the virtually imperceptible changes that illustrate an almost seamless progression and development of extraordinary products and solutions that move the user experience to new levels of satisfaction and fulfillment. It is the passage of time that reveals conspicuously the distinct and often stark differences between this platform and its hebetudinous and unequal yet paralleled competitors.

It's a Macintosh continuum and continuance of development and growth. The calendar may change days, months, and even the year, but success continues as the community of Mac users continues to expand.

It's All About the 'Pod?

Forget the "O." Overstock.com has reported disappointing sales for the critical holiday sales period and publicly advised that the company will consequently miss its estimates for 2005 revenue and earnings. Electronics retailers such as Amazon.com are reporting that there was strong demand for electronic items such as video games and Apple iPods during the Christmas shopping season.

Pick up most recent news stories about Apple and an uninitiated reader might not discover that the company makes anything other than the ubiquitous digital music player. Clearly the iPod had another record-setting quarter and will most likely carry the Mac maker

to another superlative financial quarter. How long can the iPod phenomenon last? Few analysts and commentators are willing to publicly make a guess.

When Will it Be About the Mac?

Unbeknownst to most people outside the Macintosh community, the popularity of the iPod has also sparked new interest in the Macintosh and ignited explosive growth in Macintosh unit sales. But perhaps all of the attention on the iPod has done Apple and Mac users a great deal of good. Apple may have stepped down its marketing focus on the Mac as it retools production and development for the Intel chip architecture. New Macs with Intel chips will arrive in 2006. Day in and day out, year in and year out, Apple's fortune rises and falls on the Mac, not the iPod. Watch for the Macintosh marketing effort to return with a vengeance as new Macintosh products are rolled out early this year.

But Isn't it All About the Games?

No doubt computer games push computer sales. Despite serious efforts to address the platform's perceived deficits in the gaming arena, the Macintosh is still not considered the solution of choice for computer gaming. With the transition to the Intel architecture, Apple will take significant strides in first establishing parity and then supremacy in the gaming market. Mac OS X provides for a robust and stable gaming development environment, and the availability of popular video cards on the Mac following the transition will accelerate the sales of Mac among serious gamers. Watch for surprise announcements from Apple concerning the gaming market in the next few months.

Hasn't it Mostly Been All About the Price?

Perhaps one of the most remarkable transitions in the Macintosh continuum has been a change in focus on price. For years Apple was criticized for what many thought were high prices for the Mac. The Mac mini, the feature-packed iMac G5, and the lower-priced iBook have changed the debate.

This day the issue of price focuses on Apple's share price. AAPL finished 2005 trading at \$71.89, giving the company a market capitalization of over \$60 billion. This puts the company's total market value in the range of PC market leaders Dell and HP. No matter the gargantuan size of Apple's much larger competitors, the Mac maker is considered the market leader in design and feature-rich functionality. We will cover Apple's financial results in our February *Welcome*.

It's Really All About You!

Similar to the development and user communities we cover, ATPM has established a continuum of its own. The issue marks the beginning of our twelfth calendar year of publication. Day in and day out, month in and month out, year in and year out, it's really all about you, our readers. Our circulation continues to grow, and the universe of products and topics we cover continues to expand. We look forward to being with you throughout the year and providing you with our unique blend of news, views, reviews, and commentary each and every month of the year.

Our January issue includes:

The Candy Apple: Wikipedia Is Not the Lovefest We Thought

Something is rotten in the state of Wikipedia. Maybe.

Bloggable: Colder Than a Sunday in Hell

This month's blogosphere topics discuss the arrival of the Intel-powered Macs and what devices we may see first.

The Personal Computing Paradigm: Coping With Mac OS X's Font Rendering

"It's not possible to make text on Mac OS X look like it did on Mac OS 9, but with the right settings and applications you can in many cases get the best of both worlds."

How To: Curing That Newbie Feeling

When was the last time your Mac gave you that "I'm a complete newbie and don't know what's going on" feeling? Next time it happens, try these remedies.

Desktop Pictures: Wyoming

Christopher Turner offers more photos from his family vacation to Wyoming earlier this year. This set focuses on the Jenny Lake area of the Grand Teton National Park.

Cortland

This month's Cortland, (we rate it PG-13 for violence) attempts to allude to as many science fiction motion pictures as possible, as several plotlines converge.

Review: Aperture 1.0.1

We took Aperture 1.0.1 for a test ride and feel Apple is justified in believing it will become the photographic equivalent to its industry-dominating and award-winning Final Cut Pro.

Review: EarThumps

Griffin Technology's EarThumps are a nice addition to the iPod accessory family.

Review: iCash

A cheaper alternative to heavyweight financial applications, but could use some interface improvement.

Review: iMac G5 20"

The 20" iMac G5 that debuted this summer is a technical marvel on the inside, and comes with a bunch of new features. Come check out what Tom Bridge has to say about the newest member of the iMac family.

Review: iSongBook

Tivoli Audio jumps in to the iPod stereo system market with its signature styling and quality, and offers more features than most of its competitors.

Review: Mapwing Creator Pro 1.0.2

As an alternative to QuickTime VR, Mapwing is worth a look—just guard yourself against the sticker shock.

Review: REALbasic 2005, Release 4

“Since I need to create cross-platform solutions, I’ve long considered looking into REALbasic, which ostensibly gets around all of the limitations of FileMaker.”



Logitech TrackMan Wheel Review

You're almost spot on in this review. But, it doesn't take an older user to develop repetitive use injuries.

There are a couple of other points that you didn't get around to.

A trackball is a much more accurate tool for graphics work than a mouse. It won't replace a tablet but is adequate for mobile work in places where even a small tablet would be inappropriate or unusable.

I have the cordless version and find it excellent for presentations. Since it doesn't need a good mousing surface, I can walk around while talking and still advance slides or use the pointer.

On the down side, while this product is excellent for most people, it is a bit small for people with large hands or for left-handers.

—*Michael McKee*

Docktopus Review

The last time I tried Docktopus, the badges really lagged behind the dock magnification animation. I removed it right then. When that's fixed, I'm ready to try it again.

—*dope*

Outliner Styles Revisited

Ted, I have greatly appreciated all the work you have put forth on this topic. Not only have I learned about products, I have learned to think about my own thinking process: what works and what does—for me. Sometimes I think I work a certain way, but then challenged by you (and others) I find that I wasn't accurate in my self-assessment; and that has implications far beyond just software use. Thanks.

—*Rich Shields*

Star Trek Gadgets Have Arrived

Actually, we do have transporters. But on the other hand they are not very useful today (if ever). Scientists have “transported” a single electron (maybe larger objects today—like a proton or a neutron) about 10cm in very specific laboratory conditions. The experiment is very sensitive to outside disturbance (you can't even look at it—that's enough to disturb it) but it certainly is possible to do. “Transported” means that they have recreated the first object completely, in a quantum mechanical way.

—*Niklas*

Thanks

Fantastic work as usual.

Thanks ATPM crew. Happy Holidays.

—*Chip Cuccio*



Superb. Happy Holidays from Spain. Keep the work.

—*Bartolome Mayol Genovart*



I've really enjoyed ATPM, especially [Cortland](#). Please bring it back for another year!

—*Grover Watson*

About This Particular Outliner

First let me thank you for this series that you've written. Honestly, I look forward to the first of every month, hoping that you've found the time and energy to put out another installment.

If I'm being completely honest, however, I must admit there are days that I regret reading my first *ATPO* article—because simultaneous with discovering the real power of outlining (the method), I have realized the ways in which all the current software tools fall short of providing that power to the user. I wouldn't describe myself as a Grail seeker (i.e. waiting for the perfect software), but I am often frustrated by the potential that I can see and the lack of tools that harness it.

I would like to propose a model for your Outliners.org: Open Source Outlining (OSO). What I mean by this is that similar to the many open source software projects that are in development, in which contributors each take responsibility for developing and/or maintaining a portion of the project, we, as a community, would develop the field of outlining. Rather than just discuss the various features and looks of the myriad outliners available, we could (as you have aptly demonstrated in your series) discuss and develop the ideas that are the foundation of the tools. One group might concentrate on different graphical modalities for expressing and editing the structure that is inherent or applied to the data. For example, what are some visually intuitive ways to distinguish a link expressing an example of a note from a link to a counterexample. One group might focus on metadata and the ways

to leverage it for search and self-organizing data. There could also be tool-specific sections where users discuss or submit ways to implement the various ideas within existing software tools or through plug-ins or scripts. Different projects could be extremely technical (e.g. an XML alternative to OPML) or extremely “arty” (e.g. which color and font for expressing certain text semantics).

Then, rather than users of individual software tools submitting vague, redundant, or impossible “feature requests” to all of the separate developers, the developers themselves could come to the OSO pages (perhaps at the prompting of their users) and harvest more fully developed ideas and frameworks to implement in their respective tools. All of the ideas, data models, graphics, algorithms, scripts, etc. would be free for use by anyone.

While forums might form a part of this, I’m not sure if the wandering conversations and endless threads would be appropriate for more structured development of ideas—perhaps a wiki or something closer to software design teams.

In the end, its success will be dependent on the efforts of the community, but I feel that by giving people a chance to really create something, rather than just comment/criticize/discuss others’ creations, there is a chance for real development of momentum.

—*Jeff Fisher*

We’d love to hear your thoughts about our publication. We always welcome your comments, criticisms, suggestions, and praise. Or, if you have an opinion or announcement about the Macintosh platform in general, that’s OK too. Send your e-mail to editor@atpm.com. All mail becomes the property of ATPM.



The Candy Apple

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, eritterskamp@atpm.com

Wikipedia Is Not the Lovefest We Thought

It is not all fuzzy bears and bubblegum over at [Wikipedia](#), the online open-editing encyclopedia project. We already knew that the “anyone can edit” approach made it possible to distribute false information, but now it sounds like there are some folks who have very personal issues with the site. The bloom is off the rose.

Wikipedia’s founder, Jimmy Wales, has decided to tighten up on the “anyone can edit” arrangement due to [two attention-getters of late](#). One man says he was wrongfully accused of a conspiracy to assassinate Robert F. Kennedy. In the second dust-up, an MTV VJ may have anonymously edited out references to his podcasting competitors. The new policy would prevent only the first problem, as anonymous users may no longer create new articles. Since they can still edit existing articles, the second problem would not be prevented. Wales claims that careful review of changes will keep such changes at bay.

Wikipedia’s [history page](#) describes how we got here from there, explaining how the project grew from a for-profit enterprise into its current format. I read it on December 19 and saw a link to a Web site [critical of Wikipedia](#). The next day, that link was gone, but near the end of the article was an explanation of the Seigenthaler problem (he was the man accused of assassination conspiracy). I read much of the critical Web site and was astounded at the ill feeling held by a former Wikipedia staff member. I have no way to know how much of it is accurate, but if even some of it is true, there is some mud under those welcome mats at Wikipedia. I used Wikipedia’s Recent Changes feature to track down the link. It is fascinating to watch the logs, and see how often users, administrators, and Jimmy Wales himself, are editing each other’s articles.

These personal attacks make me not want to use the site at all anymore. I had already decided not to count on it for hard facts but only for overviews of a subject. It is still useful for that, as long as you verify your information before proceeding. But no way would I trust any article there about a specific person. There are too many people writing about themselves, and writing lies about each other, for any of it to be trustworthy.

Daniel Brandt has an [interesting line of argument](#): he reminds us that the danger of erroneous information on Wikipedia is not just that Wikipedia users will see it. The bigger problem is that several sites mirror Wikipedia, and Google picks up all that stuff. Be sure to check out Brandt’s Page 2, linked at the bottom of the first page.

I am not endorsing Brandt, nor the kapitalism.net piece, nor Wikipedia’s staff. It is far too messy for someone new to the game to guess at who has done what wrongs to whom. But it does smell funny. It is too bad, when people get a whiff of power, that they don’t always use it only for good.



Colder Than a Sunday in Hell

In the past few months I have learned how to say the three most dreaded and most anticipated words in Apple history: “Powered by Intel.”

At first, I found myself choking on those syllables, seemingly incapable of producing all those sounds. What’s powering those computers again? G4s? Wait? Intel chips, you say? Gah, I just can’t say it. Hopefully they won’t have those stickers on them. At least they won’t say “Intel Inside”; apparently, Intel has a [new branding campaign](#). Small consolation. Those stickers are hideous, and most users don’t realize they’re removable (or care to remove them).

There are two likely paths for the Intel chips to enter the Macintosh line-up, but almost everyone agrees on the central points: (1) the obvious, that Apple is using Intel chips in their products, which could be announced as early as Macworld San Francisco in January; and (2) the less obvious, that the first Intel Macs will probably use the chip-maker’s new low-power CPU and platform, code-named “Yonah” and “Napa,” a lower-end chip and chipset for a lower-end portable or small-size machine. I won’t go into too much detail on Yonah/Napa, except to say that they’re designed to require minimal juice and put out minimal heat, and have custom instructions for multimedia applications. (If you’re confused, just imagine Altivec.) It’s a Pentium M chip, but it’s going to be a dual-core CPU on a 65-nanometer die, which means it’s both really small and very slick.

The reason I find such universal agreement on the topic of the coming Yonah/Napa computers, either at MWSF or whenever the chips are ready for shipment, has to do with Intel’s declared road map. Intel says the chip will be in full production by late January, which is *just barely* in time for MWSF; and two other computer makers, Dell and NEC, have announced that [they, too](#), will have Yonah/Napa computers as soon as Intel has the chips out the door. *AppleInsider* reports that Apple [will be able to launch](#) *at least one* new Intel system at MWSF, though it might not ship then; they believe that an Intel iMac is a shoo-in, and they suggest that a new portable could be coming around the same time.

We Apple fans are going to have a hard time swallowing the *enormous* jump that these x86 Macs are going to make, in terms of raw clock speed: the Yonah chip should run anywhere from 1.66 GHz to 2.16 GHz, or, in other words, about as fast as a G5. As I said, the key is that they will get [more punch for the watt](#): the standard-voltage Yonah CPUs will dissipate 25–49 watts, and the lower-voltage models anywhere from 15–24 watts. [In contrast](#), the G5 dissipates 42 watts at 1.8 GHz, and a 1 GHz G4 draws 30 watts. So I will swallow my pride and say those three words.

The big speculation, then, is over where these chips will end up. There are two competing camps, at the time of this writing: those who argue that Yonah will end up in a new iBook, and those who argue that it will end up in a revamped Mac mini “media center.”

Stick It in a Cabinet

One camp believes firmly that the new Yonah product will be that Mac mini “media center,” with, one presumes, [Front Row](#) controlling the media input. This device, they say, would output to televisions—probably the return of one of my favorite Apple innovations, the A/V card, doing double-duty output to DVI and either coax or composite—and come with a complete digital content distribution system.

This “Mac mini Media Center,” since I don’t have a better name for it, would be [the holy trinity](#) of Macintoshes if properly executed: a TiVo, iTunes plus the Music Store, and a family-room computer, all at once. Add an amp and speakers on line out, and you have an entire home entertainment center just like that.

Think Secret, [seemingly lawsuit-impermeable](#), is at the forefront of these revelations. They have [all the details](#) on what this “Home Theater PC” experience would entail, including the iTMS-alike for video content and the on-the-fly delivery that Apple plans for the content. I’d just like to congratulate Nick Ciarelli, who is only about a year younger than me, for having the cojones to keep running *Think Secret* in spite of everything.

But *Think Secret*’s not the only one sitting on top of this Ogallala Aquifer of rumors. Julio Ojeda-Zapata (*Your Tech Weblog*) played [“connect-the-dots”](#) and came up with a reference to Intel’s on-chipset media digital rights management platform, Viiv, and tied it to the Mac mini—*before he read Think Secret’s piece*. What is he basing all this on? The rumors of the new Mini plus some special insider’s knowledge, that an ex-PR gal at Apple is now handling Viiv for her company’s Intel account, are the dots he puts together. Ojeda-Zapata thinks that the key will be an iPod dock built into the Mac mini, making the entire piece into a coup d’état by one-upping even TiVo. Now, that’d be a computer worth buying.

Contrarian Leander, at *Cult of Mac Blog*, finds the inclusion of Viiv, which, to be fair, *is* DRM, to be [insulting and frustrating](#) to users, though. “As I suggested before—this is the real reason Apple is switching to Intel—so that it can sell copy-protected digital entertainment securely online,” he writes cheerily. “It may not be all doom and gloom. Intel says Viiv will play unprotected content.” Now, I’d like as much as the next guy for there to be no offensive, restrictive DRM on this stuff, but the iTMS DRM has never gotten in my way before; it may be only the most passionate anti-DRM advocates who find it to be bothersome, or it may be so intrusive as to make the entire platform worthless. Much will depend. Hold on to your hat, buddy.

The Unofficial Apple Weblog, which is pretty reliable, suggests that the mini is [perfect](#) for the Home Theater PC (HTPC) assignment, as a small and inexpensive box. There’s nothing wrong with that, and I’d like to cheer that sentiment. Their commenters are even more emphatic than I expected, so I guess we can chalk up a quick win for Steve if he does announce it.

One SottoZero, too, jumps into the fray with a set of neat predictions about Apple and the tech world that [include an HTPC Mac mini](#). Other notables include Google continuing to dominate the Net, which seems like an easy bet to make since I remember when Google first took over...and it was a *long* time ago, folks. (Fair disclosure: I was dumb enough to own Infoseek stock, so I was rooting against them. However, as a chronically cash flow-impaired college student, I do not own Google stock.)

As I always say when I'm reporting on rumors, I will have to wait to hear it before I believe it. But I'd sure like to hear it.

Put it in Your Pocket

The other camp here is insistent that the coming innovation will put these new chips in a new widescreen iBook. This computer, instead, would be the first Intel Mac, which would make it super-lightweight and quite capable of multimedia applications, and would still require only as much power as the G3 iBook.

Now, before I go any further, I would like to add a few grains of Kosher salt here and remind my faithful readers that the "widescreen iBook" rumor is at least two years old. I don't believe I've reported on it before, but it has floated around persistently for as long as I can remember, and possibly all the way back to the introduction of the 15" widescreen PowerBook. (Rui Carmo [corroborates](#).) But, you never know, even hell can freeze over. Twice!

The most reputable news source on record here is the *San Jose Mercury News*, Apple's hometown paper, which asks if the Yonah/Napa combo will [power the new iBook](#). Their answer appears to be yes, with the usual tantalizing details about huge performance gains over other Intel chips. It goes without saying that it would be an enormous step forward from the G4; the G5 will clearly never make it into a portable.

Both *ThinkSecret* and *AppleInsider* are reporting that the new Intel iBook will be a 13" widescreen iBook, preserving the 12" iBook but killing the 12" PowerBook at the same time. *ThinkSecret* is [brief](#), *AI* adds that they think the computer will feature a [completely new industrial design](#), especially since the computer will be significantly thinner. Rui Carmo seems to think this ought to [be a PowerBook](#), but if Apple is killing the 12" PB, that should just about do it.

Does the widescreen form factor make sense for a computer that has hit the sweet spot for so long? Andy Atkinson evaluates, and says that he thinks the form factor is awkward but that consumers [will get over it](#) if the display can do 1280×720 resolution. Why? That's native 720p high-definition video, for one thing, and would allow you to put two 8.5×11-sized windows side-by-side at a reasonable zoom. He also asks if Apple will conform to the new glossy-screen LCD craze, or stick to the matte screens that have always adorned the 'Books. I think the screens are really pretty, but they're sure a hassle, and I'm not convinced they give you a better picture—so, perhaps not. Where's a magic 8-Ball when I need one?

Anyway, this rumor doesn't sound as likely to me. Carmo agrees; he rates it at just [50%](#). Why? “[T]here is no real reason to believe it to be true...[but i]t would make a lot more sense than most rumors.”

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The Personal Computing Paradigm

by Michael Tsai, mtsai@atpm.com

Coping With Mac OS X's Font Rendering

When Mac OS X [10.1](#) and [10.2](#) came out, I wrote about my disappointment with Mac OS X's font rendering. Thanks to Apple's font smoothing technology, most everyone agrees that OS X does a great job of drawing text at larger sizes. It also does a comparatively good job at smaller sizes, for fonts that were designed for printing. For instance, I think most PDFs look better in Preview than in Mac OS 9 or on Windows.

Opinions differ, however, about the role of screen fonts at small sizes. Fonts such as Geneva and Chicago were designed for the screen, and the smaller sizes were hand-tuned down to the pixel. I think this made them exceptionally easy to read on-screen. Others think that screen fonts look chunky and prefer the way OS X draws regular fonts using font smoothing. I think that at small sizes font smoothing makes the text blurry and harder to read.

In theory, it should be possible to satisfy both preferences, but through several different decisions Mac OS X comes down on the side of font smoothing:

- It draws the user interface with Lucida Grande instead of Geneva and Chicago (or Charcoal), and in most cases this is not configurable.
- Font smoothing can be turned off for small sizes, but Lucida Grande and the other new fonts were not hand-tuned, and so the [character shapes](#) don't look very good.
- Older fonts like Geneva continue to have readable character shapes with font smoothing off, but Mac OS X calculates the spacing differently, making the [letters run together](#).

Over the years, Mac OS X has gained options for controlling the style of the font smoothing, and the font renderer has improved in that smoothed fonts are drawn darker than before, though the edges are still blurry. But the changes have not been enough to make fans of screen fonts happy, as this letter from ATPM reader Neil Rubenstein demonstrates:

I was searching the Web looking for help regarding OS X's fonts. I came across your comments in "Mac OS X 10.2—First Impressions" and saw that you were writing about exactly the problem I've been having.

For me, OS X is impossible to look at. It is primarily for this reason that I have been staying with 9.2.2. I keep thinking I'm losing my vision when I view OS X, or that I must be missing something related to settings of font sizes, or

shadowing, or anti-aliasing. I currently have 10.3.9 installed, and have seen the same problem from my earliest attempt to view OS X.

I'm using a Titanium PowerBook G4—which is the best laptop for using OS 9. I'd love to purchase a new 17", but will stay with Ti's for the foreseeable future, because OS X is just too hard on my eyes.

I've just spent about one hour twiddling with settings in OS X—with no success. After rebooting in OS 9 I breathe a sigh of relief. It's as if my 20/20 sight has been restored after a period of visual impairment.

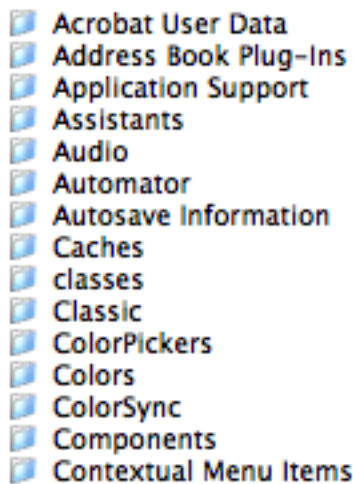
Am I missing something? Is there some way to approximate the visual clarity I experience with OS 9 while using OS X by changing some settings? Does my inability to adapt to the OS X visual experience indicate some kind of visual handicap on my part? Surely I'm not the only one who has had this problem?

Any comments, suggestions or help you might offer will be most appreciated.

I am 20/30 without glasses and, as far as I know, do not have any visual handicaps. After more than five years of using Mac OS X—and two upgrades to sharper, brighter displays—I still find it tiring to read large blocks of smoothed text (with or without glasses). Unfortunately, there is no setting to go back to the OS 9 font renderer, and I have no expectation that there will ever be one. However, there are a number of things you can do to make text on OS X easier to read.

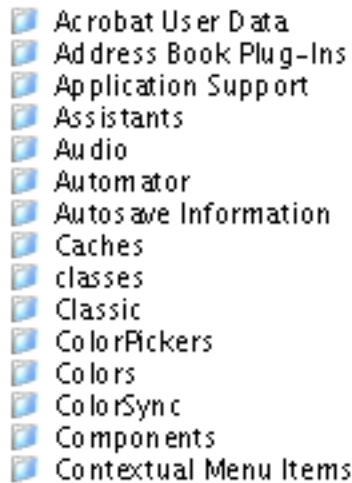
Appearance Preferences

I much prefer the Strong font smoothing style, as it makes the text blacker. Turn off smoothing for font sizes 9 and smaller. This prevents very small text from looking like smudges. However, you do want sizes 10 and larger to be smoothed:



Lucida Grande 10 in the Finder, Smoothed

Lucida Grande can look blurry when smoothed; but, because of the character shape and spacing problems mentioned above, this is probably preferable to the way it looks without smoothing:



Lucida Grande 10 in the Finder, Unsmoothed

Use Verdana

Verdana is my favorite Microsoft product. It is extremely readable when unsmoothed and looks good at various sizes and weights. Amazingly, Mac OS X can draw it without running the letters together. Many applications let you choose the font for body text, and I often choose Verdana. (For reading e-mail, writing code, and Terminal, I prefer ProFont or Monaco, two monospaced fonts that OS X is able to render well.) Here's what a Web page looks like with Safari's default font:

- Welcome Section: The welcome section with a site map.
 - No Cost or Freedom?: What does 'free ebook' mean?
 - License and Trademark information. What you are allowed to do with the books you download.
 - Linking Readme: Information for people who want to link to our site.
 - Robot Readme: Information for people who want to robot our site.
 - Online Book Catalog: There are thousands to choose from.
 - Advanced Search: search page with more search options.
 - Offline Catalogs: handy ebook Listings to consult offline.
 - Recent eBooks, updated nightly. Newly added or changed ebook files.
 - RSS Feed of recent eBooks, updated nightly.
 - Top 100 Books and Authors: the most downloaded books and authors.
 - Special areas:
 - CD and DVD. "Best Of" selections on CD and DVD.
 - Audio EBooks, both human-read and computer-generated.
 - Music. Digitized Sheet Music.
 - About Us. Quick infos about Project Gutenberg.
 - Donate. How to make a donation to Project Gutenberg.
 - News and Events. The news.
 - Contacts. How to get in touch.
 - Partners, Affiliates and Resources. A collection of links.
 - Credits. Thanks to our most prominent volunteers.
-

Times in Safari, Smoothed

And here is what it looks like with Verdana:

- Welcome Section: The welcome section with a site map.
 - No Cost or Freedom?: What does 'free ebook' mean?
 - License and Trademark information. What you are allowed to do with the books you download.
 - Linking Readme: Information for people who want to link to our site.
 - Robot Readme: Information for people who want to robot our site.
 - Online Book Catalog: There are thousands to choose from.
 - Advanced Search: search page with more search options.
 - Offline Catalogs: handy ebook Listings to consult offline.
 - Recent eBooks, updated nightly. Newly added or changed ebook files.
 - RSS Feed of recent eBooks, updated nightly.
 - Top 100 Books and Authors: the most downloaded books and authors.
 - Special areas:
 - CD and DVD. "Best Of" selections on CD and DVD.
 - Audio EBooks, both human-read and computer-generated.
 - Music. Digitized Sheet Music.
 - About Us. Quick infos about Project Gutenberg.
 - Donate. How to make a donation to Project Gutenberg.
 - News and Events. The news.
 - Contacts. How to get in touch.
 - Partners, Affiliates and Resources. A collection of links.
 - Credits. Thanks to our most prominent volunteers.
-

Verdana in Safari, Unsmoothed

To keep the text readable, go to Safari's Advanced preferences and set it to not use font sizes smaller than 9. I also like to override the font smoothing threshold in Safari so that sizes 9–12 are unsmoothed. This can be done by entering the following command into Terminal:

```
defaults write com.apple.safari AppleAntiAliasingThreshold 12
```

You can also experiment with defining a custom style sheet in Safari so that Web pages cannot override the default font.

When creating documents, use Verdana for writing and editing, even if you want to use other fonts for printing. Don't use the Font menu to format your text. Instead, use your word processor's [styles](#) feature to tag it. Set the body text styles to use Verdana while you're writing and editing. (Section headings are larger and thus easily readable in any font.) At the last minute, you can edit the body text styles to quickly change all the occurrences of Verdana to fonts that are more suitable for printing.

Use Osaka

The letters in Verdana are rather wide. This isn't a problem for pages of text, since the lines will wrap and simply take up a bit more vertical space. However, there are times when horizontal space counts, such as in a mail program or spreadsheet. In those cases, I like to use Osaka:

Suggestion for behaviour change	Jonathan Sanderson
Re: Suggestion for behaviour change	Jay Goodman Tamboli
Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Tamboli
Re: Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Tamboli
NNW not liking dc:date?	Garrick Van Buren
NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	Brent Simmons
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	Miraz Jordan
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	James Gallagher
Re: NNW not liking dc:date?	Brent Simmons
XML & Style	Daniel Jalkut

Osaka 9 in Apple Mail, Unsmoothed

Suggestion for behaviour change	Jonathan Sander...
Re: Suggestion for behaviour change	Jay Goodman Ta...
Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Ta...
Re: Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Ta...
NNW not liking dc:date?	Garrick Van Buren
NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	Brent Simmons
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy aw...	Miraz Jordan
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy aw...	James Gallagher
Re: NNW not liking dc:date?	Brent Simmons
XML & Style	Daniel Jalkut

Verdana 9 in Apple Mail, Unsmoothed

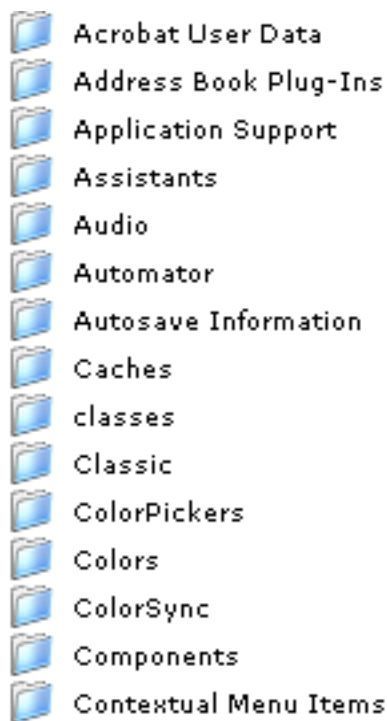
I don't think the character shapes and spacing are quite as nice as with Verdana (or Geneva on OS 9), but it is fairly readable and has very narrow letters. For comparison, here's what it looks like in Lucida Grande:

Suggestion for behaviour change	Jonathan Sanderson
Re: Suggestion for behaviour change	Jay Goodman Tam...
Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Tam...
Re: Incorrect unread post counts on folders	Jay Goodman Tam...
NNW not liking dc:date?	Garrick Van Buren
NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	Brent Simmons
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	Miraz Jordan
Re: NetNewsWire wins Macworld Eddy award!	James Gallagher
Re: NNW not liking dc:date?	Brent Simmons
XML & Style	Daniel Jalkut

Lucida Grande 9 in Apple Mail, Smoothed

Use Other Applications

If an application that you use doesn't allow you to control the fonts that it uses, you might want to look for an alternative application that does. The Finder always uses Lucida Grande, as shown above. [Path Finder](#), however, lets you change the font:



Verdana 9 in Path Finder, Unsmoothed

It also lets you control the icon size separately from the font size, so you can use a small font without squishing the icons together.

Conclusion

It's not possible to make text on Mac OS X look like it did on Mac OS 9, but with the right settings and applications you can in many cases get the best of both worlds: gorgeous Quartz-smoothed headings and sharp, readable body text.

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How To

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Curing That Newbie Feeling

It's that time of year again. By the time you read this, millions of people will have made, and perhaps broken, at least one of their New Year's resolutions. I gave up making those things long ago, but this year will be different. Recent events have caused me to make two Mac-related resolutions. Both of them involve that horrible feeling you get when, in the middle of a project, you realize something isn't working. Or worse, you have no idea why it isn't working or where to start making it work. This is all too often a common experience for new computer users. You may see it referred to as being a "newbie."

I haven't had that feeling on a Mac in a long time. Even my first Mac was an easy transition because I had been using an Apple II GS that had an interface and system structure similar to Macs. But I had that feeling a few weeks ago, and I must admit I really didn't like it. I've had problems with Macs before, but I usually have a clue where to go or why something isn't working. This time I was clueless.

You may be wondering what project could cause such grief. I was attempting to install some Unix-based geekery that might allow me to read files from my Tivo. I've been using my Tivo to transfer some home movies to DVD and edit them later on a Mac. I can see the Tivo on my network, but most of the tools to read these files are Unix-based. Ever try to install some of that stuff if you aren't a Unix geek? Not a lot of fun.

After that little experiment and the horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, I started thinking about what could be done to assist new users. To that end, I have some thoughts on how the Mac community—new and seasoned users—can help each other out when that horrible feeling occurs.

The Right Attitude

What I am about to suggest is difficult—I certainly didn't practice it two weeks ago in the middle of the Tivo project—but try to keep a positive attitude. This feeling usually occurs when you are learning something new or extending what you already know. It will pass sooner than you think. Besides, aren't scientists always telling us that learning new things and keeping mentally active are very important? Someone's just looking out for your well-being by making the task a little more difficult than you expected (LOL).

One thing that may help is to realize that you are not alone. Not only do other new users experience this feeling, but it happens to experienced users as well. After my Unix experiment went awry, I asked several members of the ATPM staff what they were doing the last time they experienced this feeling. Each of the staffers who answered the question

had a different task that he found disconcerting. Sometimes it wasn't a new task, just something that was proving difficult.

Getting the Right Information

Now that you have the right attitude, it's time to go in search of the right information. Missing one or two key pieces of information can make a task difficult if not impossible. So how do you go about getting the right information? Well, just like in your school days, you've got to find the right people and ask the right questions. I grind my teeth as I say this, but a good place to start is by *reading the manual*. I am not normally a big manual person, but sometimes the answer really is there. Several times over the last few years I have had the experience of finding a shortcut or tip I hadn't tried before.

This doesn't exempt the computer industry from writing manuals that are comprehensible and not filled with unnecessary jargon. As a service to the Mac community, let manufacturers and publishers know when they have produced a bad manual. In my early days of Mac use, I bought two different books on Microsoft Office to figure out how to print address labels. In some ways, this process has become worse, since many programs forgo paper manuals in favor of electronic ones that are often difficult to browse.

If you can't find the right information in the manual, *ask a fellow Mac user*. If you don't personally know another Mac user, [look for](#) a Mac user group. Most user groups have knowledgeable members that are more than willing to help.

Since I started writing for ATPM, I have started exploring tasks that are more difficult than basic word processing. When I get stuck on a problem, I check out the user forums at [MacMentor](#) or [Mac Owners Support Group](#). Both sites are great places for new and experienced users. I think these sites are particularly good for new users because the members go out of their way to welcome new and returning Mac users. You will have to register in order to post questions to the forums on these sites, but registration is free. When time permits, I pop in several times a day to see what's happening. Sometimes I know the answer to a question, but more often than not I find useful information or a use for Macs that hadn't occurred to me.

The forums at MacMentor and Mac Owners Support Group each have distinct personalities. But they aren't the only places I go for helpful information. You might also want to visit [OS X FAQ](#) or the [Mac OS X Hints forum page](#), which both focus mainly on OS X-related issues. As a last resort, I check out the [MacFixIt forum page](#). The fact that this site is my last resort is not an indication of its quality. I simply don't have time to go to every site every day.

By now you may be wondering why I haven't talked about the [Apple Support Site](#) or the [Apple Discussion Board](#). This is purely a matter of preference. I seem to have a much more difficult time finding the information that I need quickly on these sites than I do on other sites. This is also the reason that I try not to just search the Web for information without going to the other sites first. I get buried in more information than I have time to slog through.

What Questions to Ask

OK, by a show of hands, how many of you remember a time when you were so confused that you didn't even know what questions to ask? It happens to the best of us from time to time but will happen less often as you get more experience. When it happens to you, describe the problem as best you can. The forum denizens at the sites I mentioned are pretty good at interpreting computer-related gibberish. If the answer you get doesn't make sense, keep asking. Ask the question in a different way or to a different group of people.

Most of the forums are filled with people who share my attitude that there are only two kinds of questions: those that have been asked and those that haven't been asked but need to be. The only caveat is that it is considered good forum etiquette to search and see if the question has already been answered. If you have a question, chances are someone else has the same or a similar one.

Final Thoughts

I mentioned earlier that I had two Mac-related resolutions during the coming year. My first is to assist Mac users who are experiencing that "I'm so lost" feeling. My second is to experience that feeling more often myself. If I do that it means I will be learning new things. As a first step in that direction, next month's project will involve some simple directions for making a photo slide show. So save those holiday pictures.

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Wyoming

Wyoming

Christopher Turner offers [more photos](#) from his family vacation to Wyoming earlier this year. This set focuses on the Jenny Lake area of the Grand Teton National Park, showcasing the lake as well as the falls and streams nearby. A female elk off the trail around Jenny Lake and a raven from Yellowstone National Park are featured.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the [desktop pictures archives](#).

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

iCab and Interarchy can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once. Use the “Web ▸ Download Entire Site” command in the File menu, giving it the URL to the pictures page above. In iCab, use the Download command to download “Get all files in same path.”

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, feel free to send it to editor@atpm.com and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue. Have a regular print but no scanner? Don't worry. E-mail us, and we tell you where to send it so we can scan it for you. Note that we cannot return the original print, so send us a copy.

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x and 10.4.x

Choose “System Preferences...” from the Apple menu, click the “Desktop & Screen Saver” button, then choose the Desktop tab. In the left-side menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Select the Screen Saver tab which is also in the “Desktop & Screen Saver” System Preferences pane. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, click on the Pictures Folder in the list of screen savers. Otherwise, click Choose Folder to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

Choose “System Preferences...” from the Apple menu and click the Desktop button. With the pop-up menu, select the desktop pictures folder you want to use.

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Choose "System Preferences..." from the Apple menu. Click the Screen Saver (10.1.x) or Screen Effects (10.2.x) button. Then click on Custom Slide Show in the list of screen savers. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, you're all set. Otherwise, click Configure to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

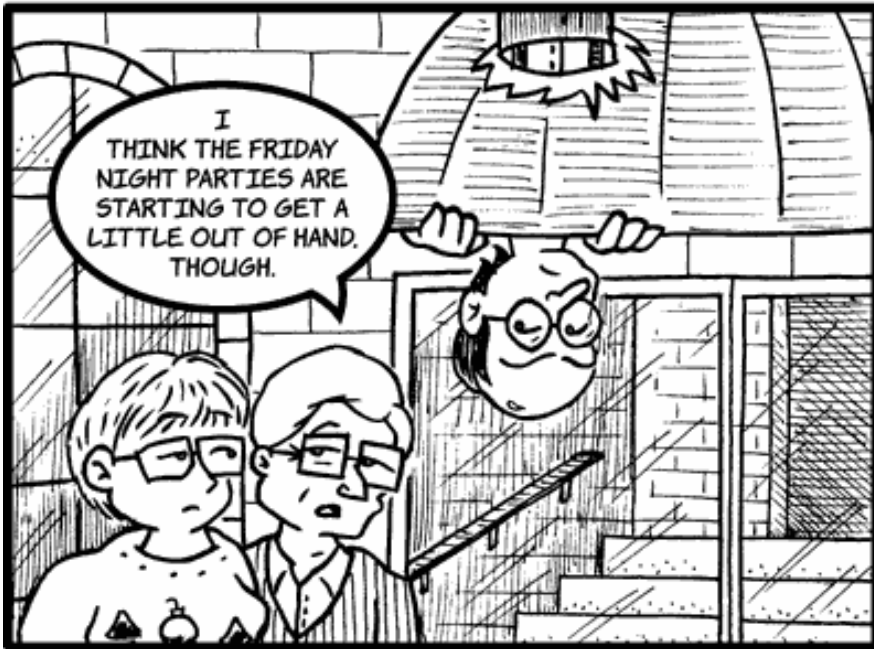
Mac OS X 10.0.x

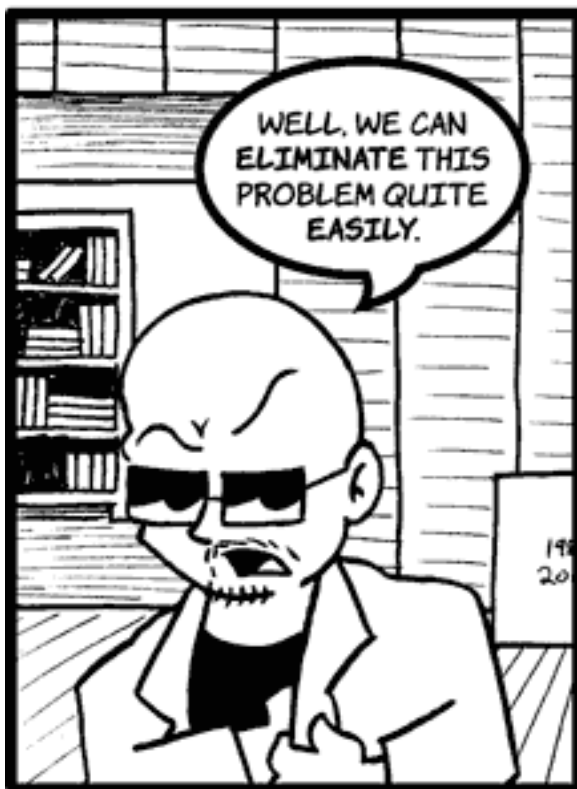
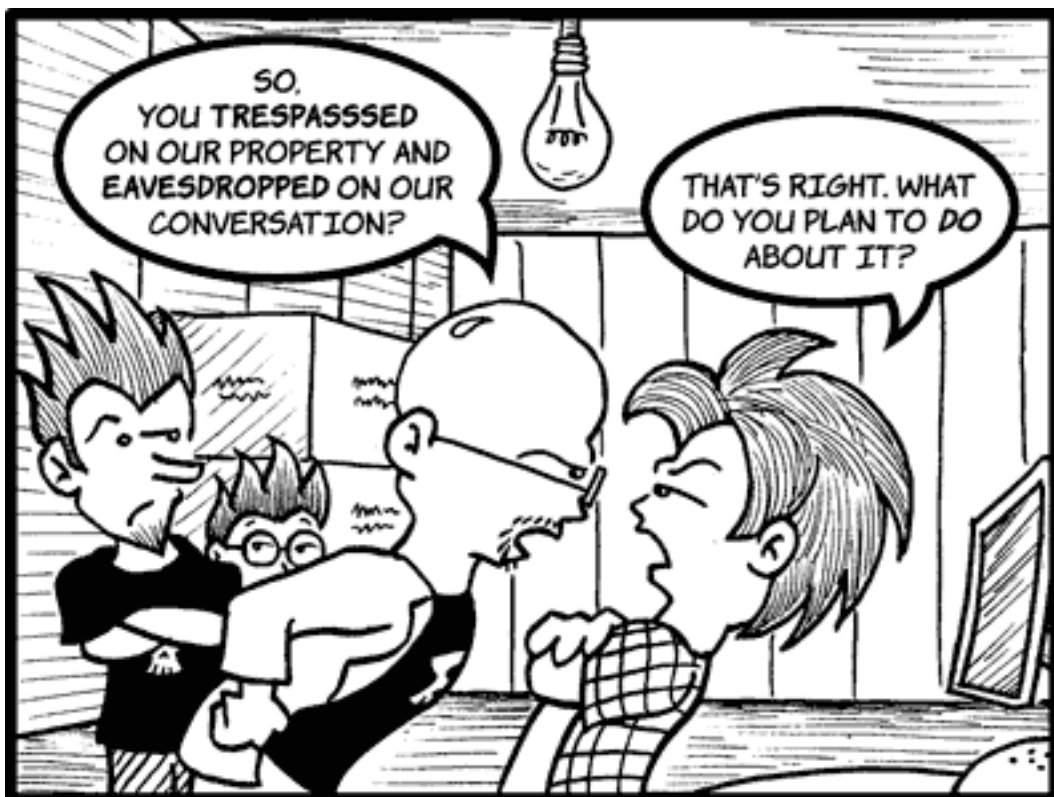
Switch to the Finder. Choose "Preferences..." from the "Finder" menu. Click on the "Select Picture..." button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the "Finder Preferences" window when you are done.



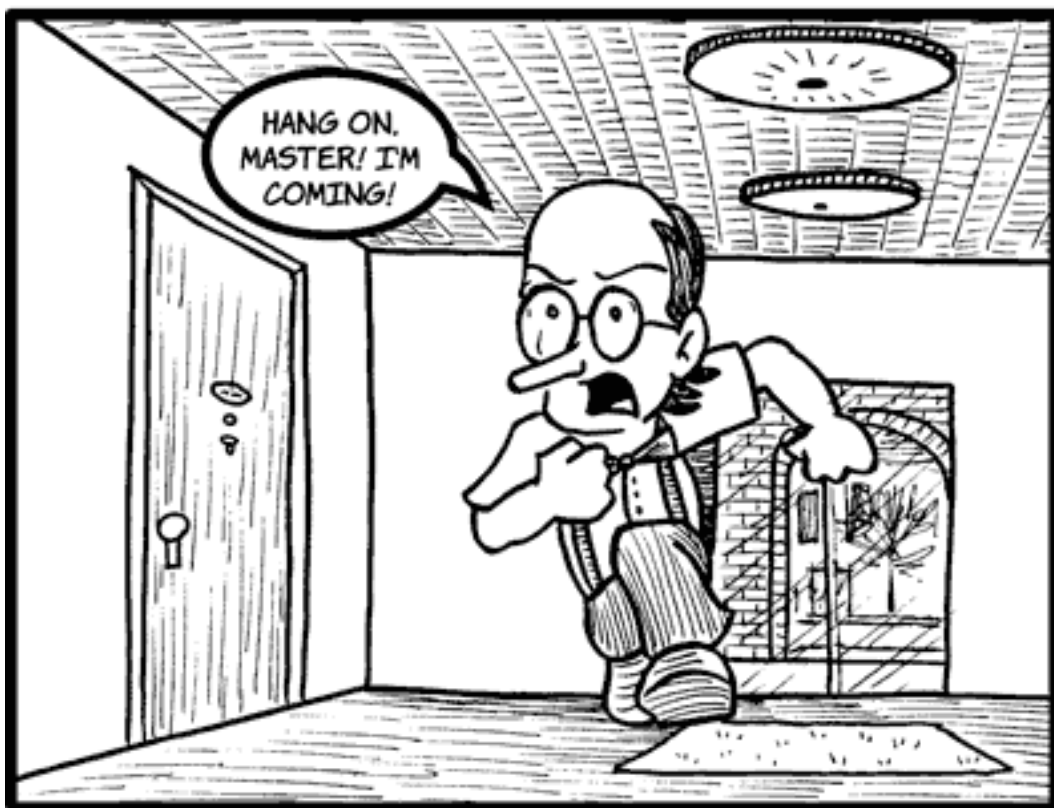
Cortland

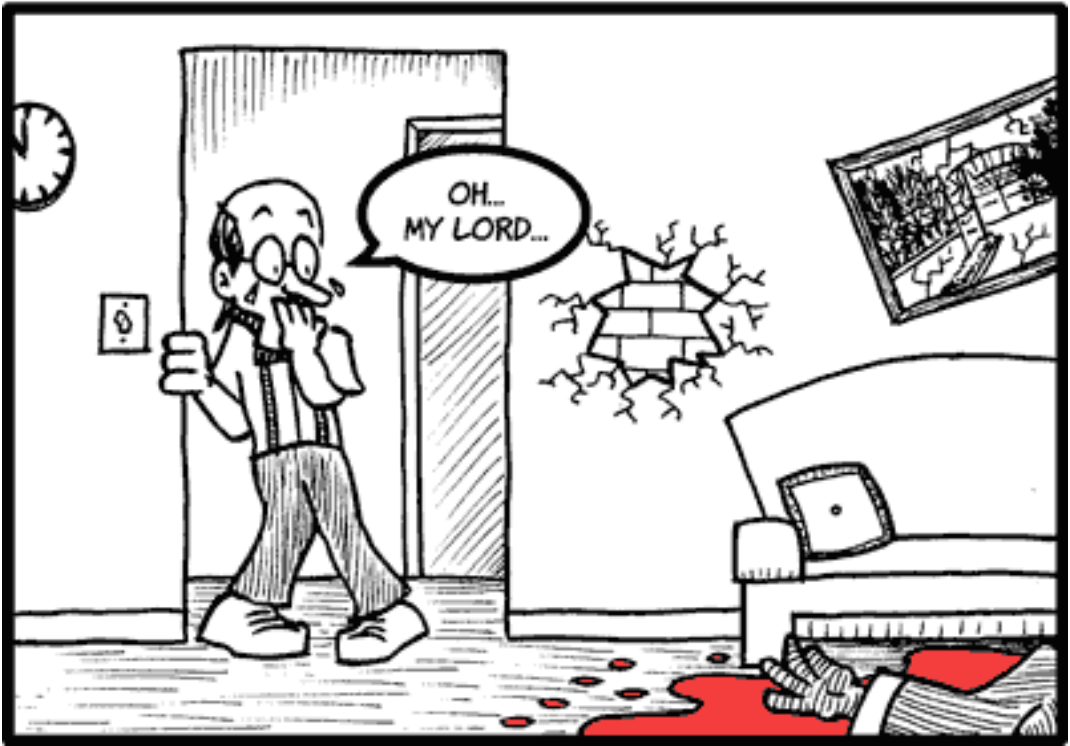
by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com

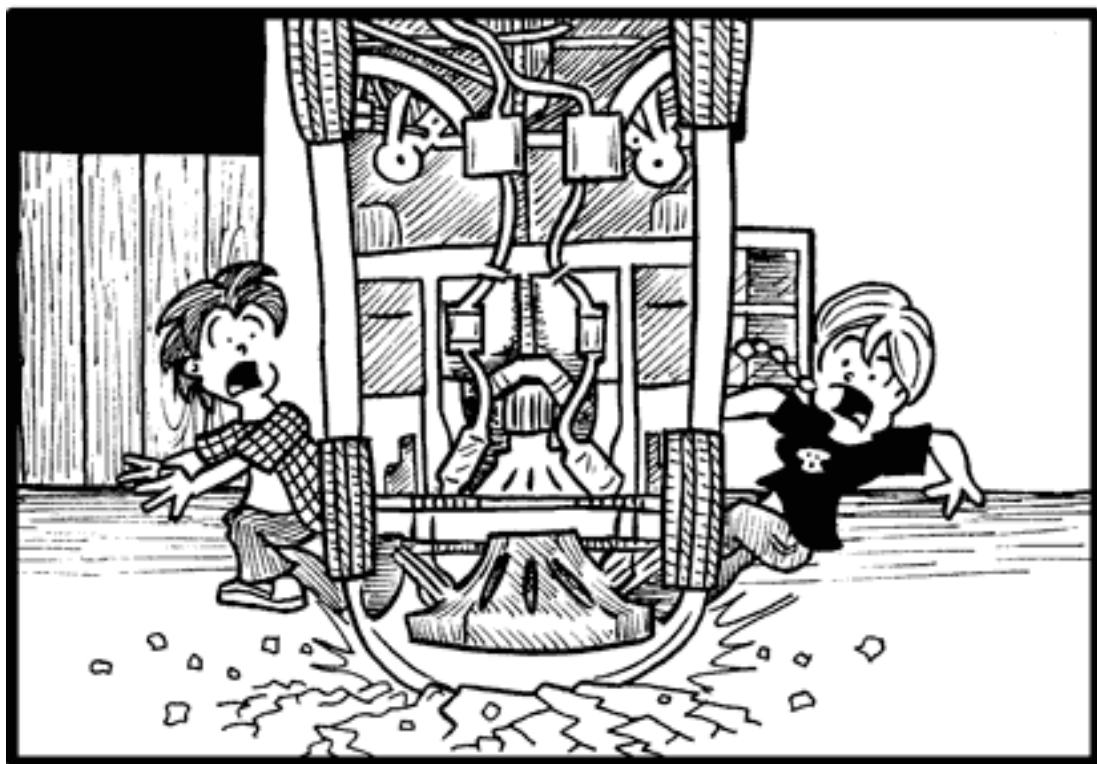


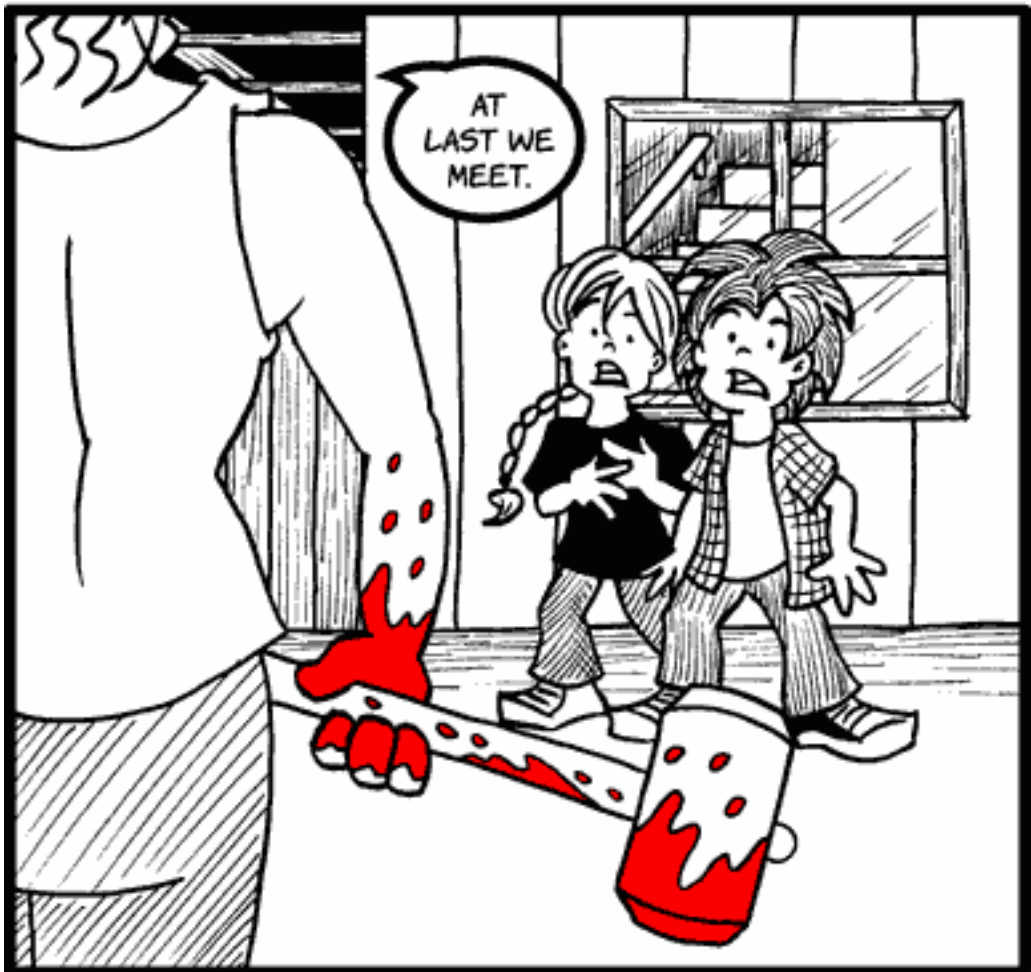


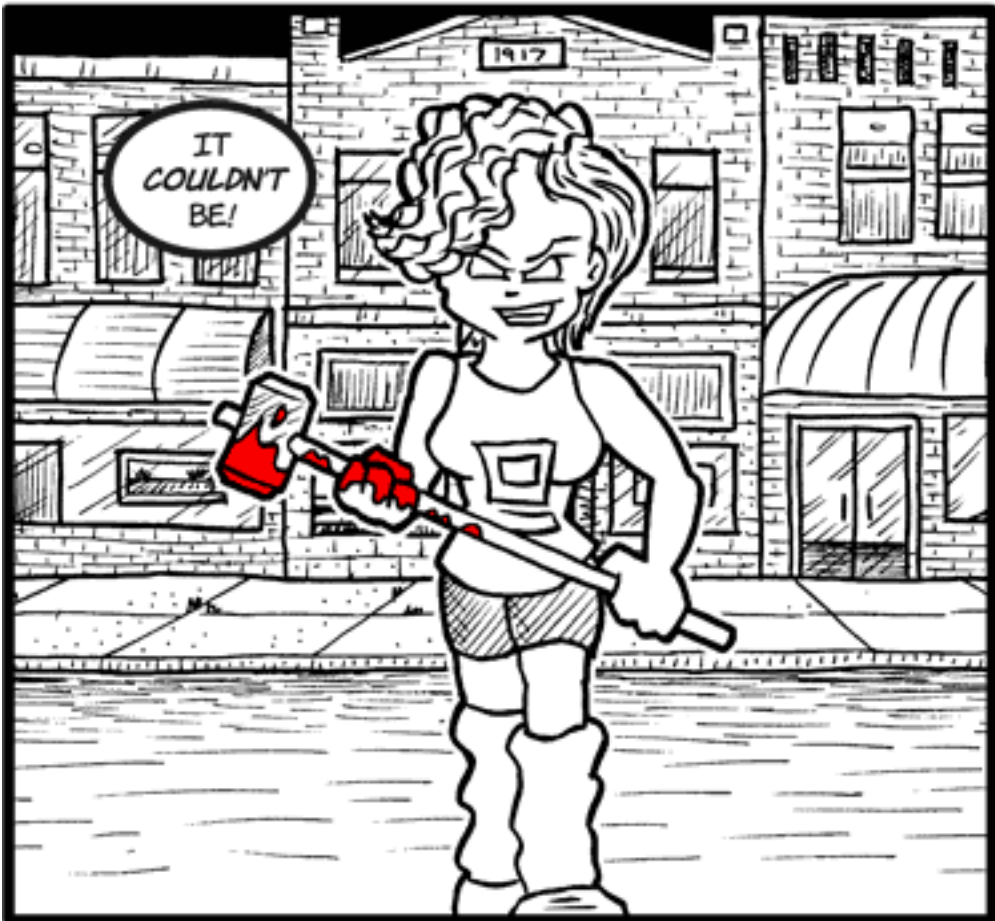














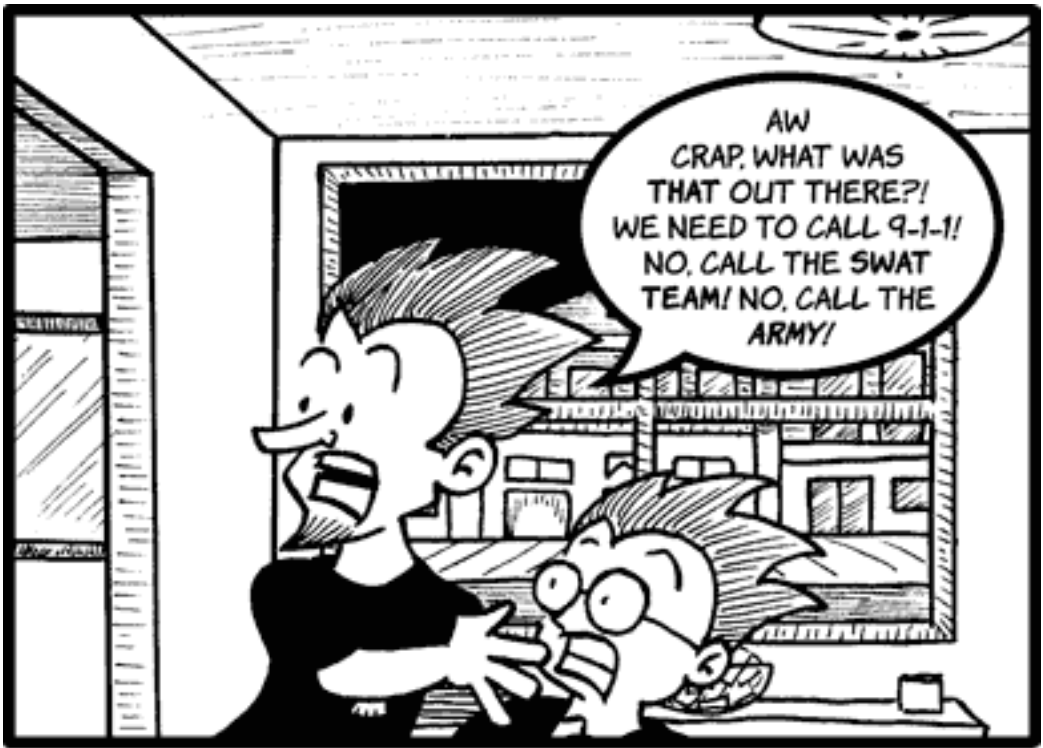






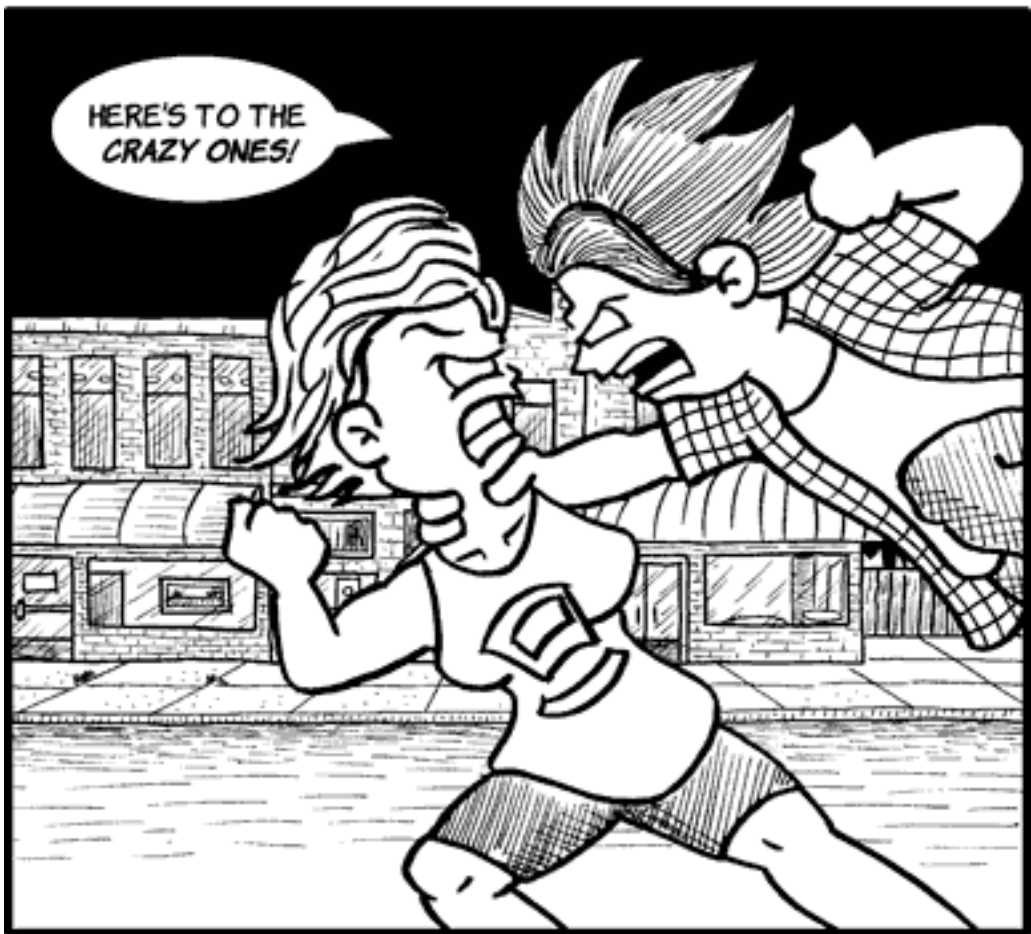
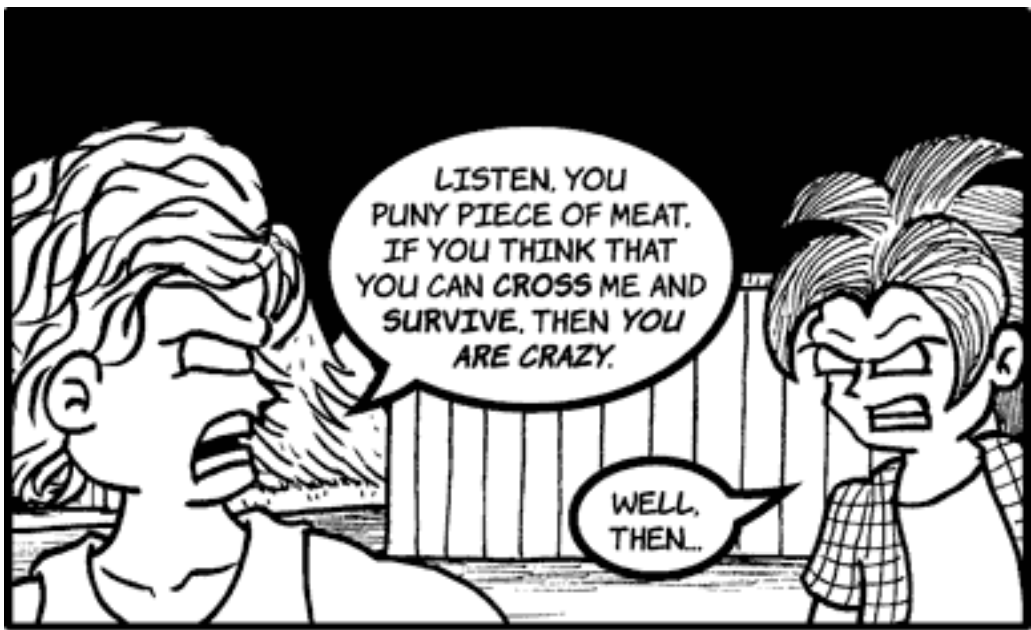












Here's to the
crazy ones

*...the misfits, the rebels,
the troublemakers,
the round pegs in the square holes,
the ones who see things
differently.*

**We are ONE PEOPLE,
with ONE WILL
ONE RESOLVE
ONE CAUSE**

**Our enemies shall talk themselves
to DEATH and we will BURY them
with their own CONFUSION!**

**WE SHALL
PREVAIL!**







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Software Review

by Tom Bridge, tbridge@atpm.com

Aperture 1.0.1

Developer: [Apple Computer](#)

Price: \$499; \$249 (educational)

Requirements: 1.8 MHz G5 or 1.25 GHz 15- or 17-inch PowerBook G4, 1 GB RAM, 5 GB disk space, DVD drive, [supported video card](#); or use the [compatibility checker](#).

Recommended: dual 2 GHz Power Mac G5, 2 GB of RAM

Trial: None



When you ask most professional photographers what their workflow contains, those shooting in Camera RAW will say “Adobe Bridge and Photoshop.” Adobe cornered the market a long time, with excellent RAW conversion and more effects than you could shake a stick at. But, you could say the same thing about Avid back before the debut of Final Cut Pro. Final Cut brought about a major revolution in the digital film editing world, allowing relatively inexpensive software and off-the-shelf hardware to take the place of tens of thousands of dollars of professional hardware. Is Apple in a similar position today that they were in 1999? Well, not quite.

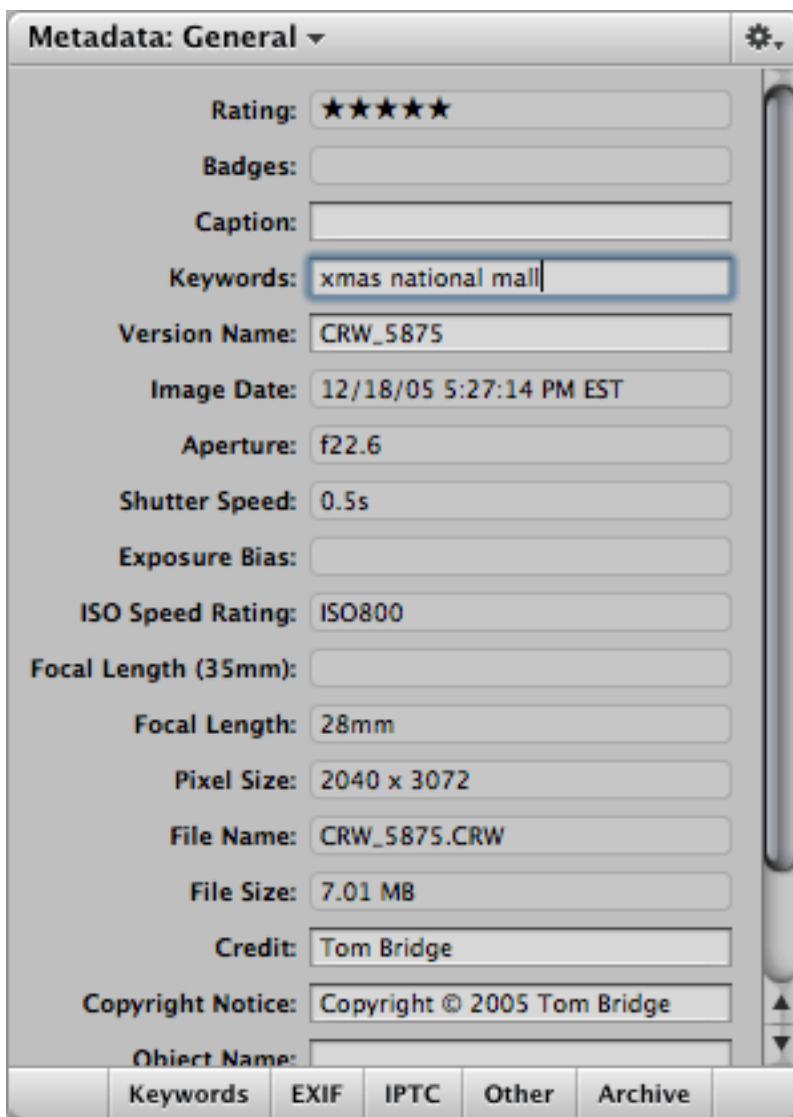
Let me first say that I am, at my best, a talented amateur behind the hood. The cameras that I used to test Aperture were a Canon EOS 10D (6MP dSLR) and a PowerShot S410 (4MP point-and-shoot). The machines that I tested Aperture with are a PowerBook G4 15” with a 1.5 GHz G4 and 1 GB of RAM, and an [iMac G5 20”](#) with a 2.1 GHz G5 and 1.5 GB of RAM.

The idea behind Aperture isn’t that it’s an end-to-end photo solution, a replacement for Photoshop, but rather that it’s a workflow whereby original photographs are taken from the camera, stored in a vault, then edited originals are exported in the form of files, Web galleries, or books. Aperture is a very able photo retrieval tool, allowing you to choose, much like the venerable Image Capture application, which photos you retrieve from your camera’s memory card. As you perform imports, you create projects in which to store them. These projects, like rolls in iPhoto, are the primary level at which you deal with photos. From projects, you can easily create albums, books, light tables, Web galleries, and smart albums.



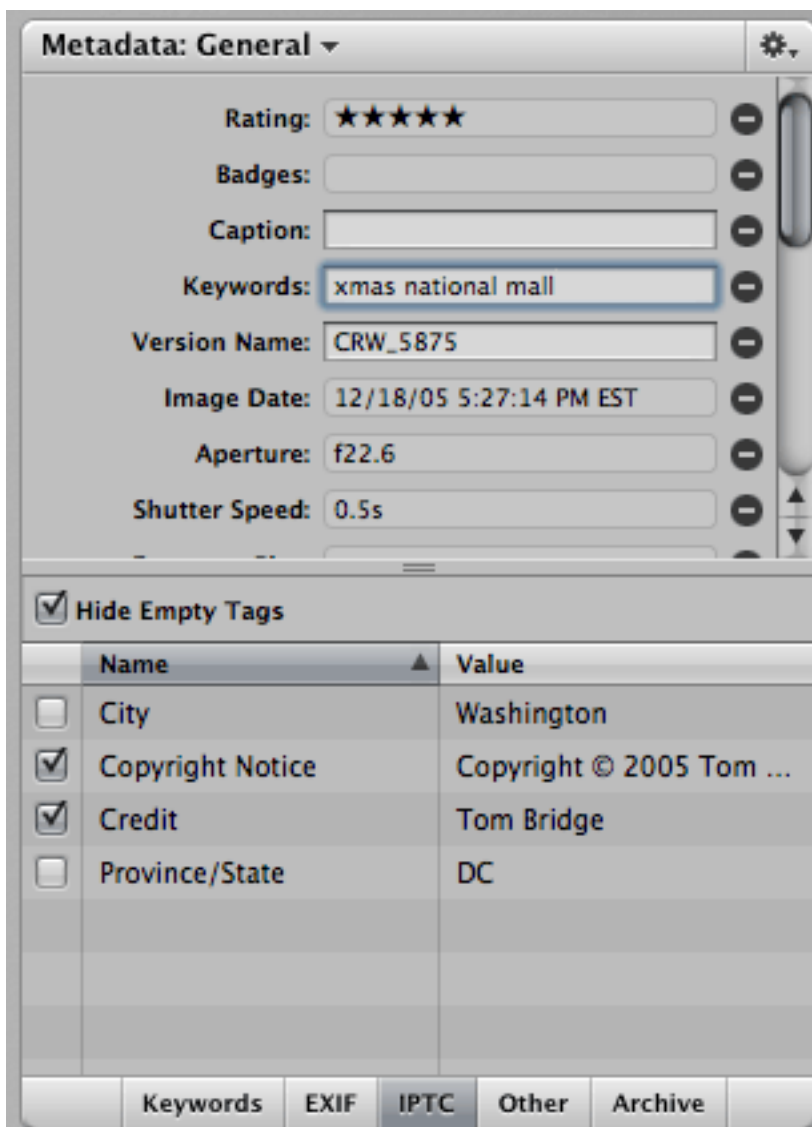
“Regular” View

Aperture’s got a very flexible workspace, featuring four configurations that Apple considers standard, including a mode for rating and organization, a mode for organization, a mode for adjustments and filters, and a “standard” mode that will be immediately familiar to anyone who’s used Final Cut. Aperture also features a full-screen mode that blocks out all other applications and handles all of its interface in Heads Up Displays. The interface for managing your photos is a wonderful hybrid between OS X’s aesthetic and the Pro Tools aesthetic, featuring one of Apple’s most intuitive user interface to date. I wouldn’t be surprised to see some of the enhancements specific to Aperture make their way into Motion, DVD Studio Pro, or Final Cut. The flexible workspace changes easily between modes of work from import to keywords to edit to project management, easily handling the transitions between common tasks.



Aperture's Metadata Interface

What Aperture is really about is metadata. This is information that is stored specifically with your photo, including detailed EXIF notation, as well as keywords, copyrights, captions, credits, and expanded IPTC (International Press Telecommunications Council) information that includes City, State, Country, Byline, and many other fields. If you're into keywords, tagging, and folksonomy, Aperture will make dealing with keywords a real treat for you.



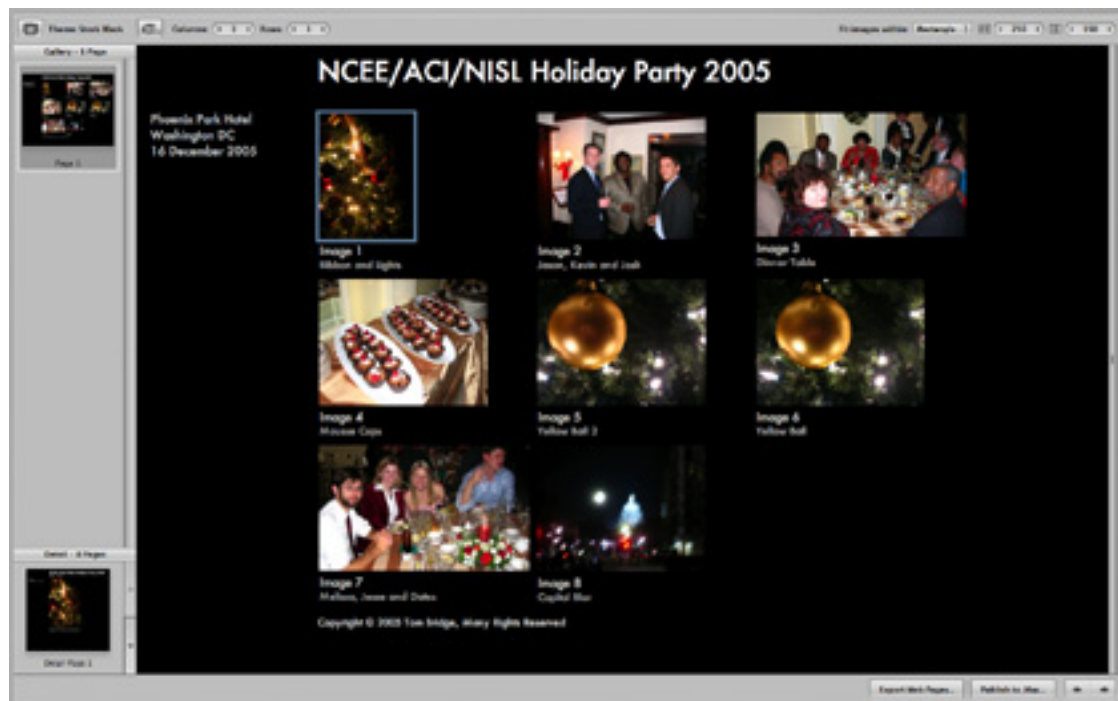
More Metadata Tagging

As libraries grow, keywords make it easy to find the portrait you took of Aunt Mildred by searching for Family + Portrait tags together. Much like iPhoto, Aperture has a star rating system that is very easily accessible and understandable from the beginning. The idea behind this metadata is that it follows the photograph when you take it somewhere besides Aperture (i.e., Photoshop).

The original remains in a vault somewhere for safe keeping. This allows for non-destructive edits of your photos. For anyone who's ever seen what an eight-year-old can do to a photo with ten minutes of unsupervised time in iPhoto, you realize this is a good, good thing. Aperture, instead, stores each and every change you make as a separate file, but don't worry about eating up disk space, it stores the changes to each photo as a series of actions, allowing multiple versions in small amounts of disk space. You can also have any number of

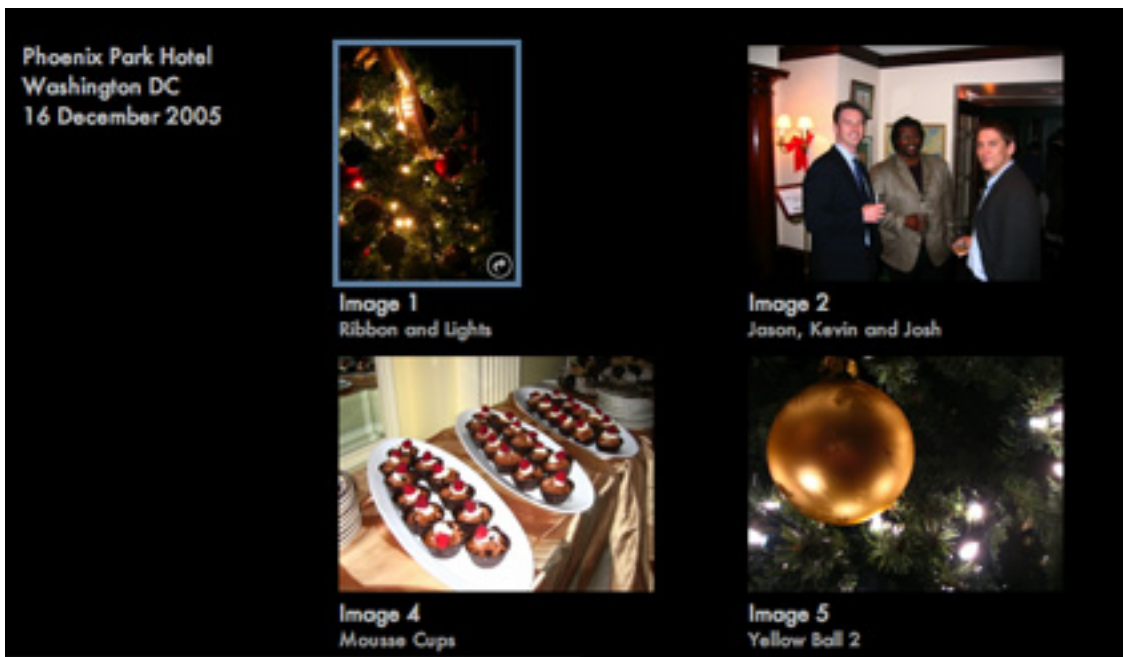
different versions of the same original, allowing non-destructive edit after non-destructive edit.

The main reasons to buy Aperture as a talented amateur are readily apparent the second you get into making Web galleries, either for display at .Mac or wherever you'd like to FTP them. The new photo galleries come in six different basic templates, but those same templates are extensible with the same metadata information that you've tagged your photos with. In addition, the photo galleries tend to be much more configurable than the equivalents in iPhoto, giving you the choice to display EXIF data, keyword, IPTC, or titling data as well. The new galleries are elegant and simple, and I'm hopeful that developers will be able to add further gallery options, as the details are mostly just CSS.



Working With an Album

A well-made photo-album makes an incredible keepsake, and iPhoto has served me well since its creation in this regard. Sure, it requires a lot of massaging to make your photo-album book work, and this is made harder by a difficult interface in iPhoto. Not so, Aperture. Making a book is much like using the hotzones in an iDVD template. Select the photos that you want to work with, and place the photos in the zones that Aperture designates with a cross. You can then add text to your heart's content, and then order the books through Apple. Prices are [fairly reasonable](#) and delivery is fairly quick. The book designs that Apple has provided are also flexible, allowing for even the most creative of edits.



More Album Displays

Much has been made of the RAW interpreter in Aperture, including a fairly [scathing look](#) by Dave Girard at *Ars Technica*. The thing you have to realize is that for 90% of digital cameras the image processing is handled inside the camera itself, turning the sensor's interpretation of photons into pixels with specific color values. For the other 10%, there's a format called Camera RAW that captures just the individual sensor data and allow post-production interpretation in software. That's what makes Aperture special, the same way that Photoshop is. Both of them interpret Camera RAW data. The trick, however, is the interpretation of that data into displayable pixels. This requires a rendering engine, much like the one that Final Cut Pro uses to read and display the DV stream as moving pixels. All was not well in Final Cut Pro 1.0 with the DV Codec, which was revised in 1.2, 2.0, 3.0 and on and on. The Photoshop RAW engine that Aperture competes with contains some of the most refined image rendering that we have today. If you're that serious about your color space, Aperture 1.0 isn't in your future. I would imagine, though, that updates of Aperture will make refinements to the RAW interpreter and that should satisfy most of the imaging concerns.

If you're a talented shutterbug and you don't depend on the Photoshop RAW interpreter, Aperture should serve you more than adequately. . .provided you have the hardware to hack it. Unless absolutely necessary, don't bother using Aperture on a PowerBook. Neither the 15" nor the 17" has the hardware to make Aperture work quickly. The delays just between switching tools in Aperture on a PowerBook are enough to drive someone just a bit nuts. However, on the iMac G5, Aperture is in its element. The X600 XT video card does most of the heavy lifting on the iMac, making changes nearly immediate. I far prefer working on the iMac than the PowerBook when it comes to Aperture.

Aperture is a solid 1.0 release, the likes of which Apple hasn't seen since Final Cut Pro. Will it capture the pro photography space with Aperture? It's too early to tell. Between the issues with the RAW converter and the real requirement of a G5 system, I don't think the 1.0 version will be rocking any boats. However, the potential exhibited by Aperture is impossible to ignore. Strong metadata management and search, coupled with the ability to handle literally tens of thousands of original photographs, and improved Web galleries and book design make Aperture into the beginnings of a real heavy hitter for Apple.

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Accessory Review

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, eritterskamp@atpm.com

EarThumps

Developer: [Griffin Technology](#)

Price: \$20 (list); \$18 (street)

Requirements: audio device with mini-phone jack

Trial: None



I am not an audiophile. By that I mean I am not one of those folks who can tell the difference between one high-end sound system and another. I use inexpensive (\$12) headphones with my iPods and slightly more expensive ones (\$29) with my portable DVD player, because there is more noise to block out where I use it. But I have never owned fancy expensive earphones or headphones.

These EarThumps made me feel as if I've stepped it up a notch, or even several notches. The audio folks may sneer, but for us regular folks who don't know the difference, these earphones are terrific.



Griffin EarThumps

Griffin Technology is the first place I go to look for iPod accessories. Its branding has been successful in that regard. EarThumps are designed for use with iPods, although I had great experiences with them with my cheap portable DVD player as well. I had been using a set of behind-the-head headphones, which were functional enough at the gym. My first trip

with EarThumps relegated those old headphones to the scrap heap, or would have if I had a scrap heap.

I have not been a fan of in-ear phones in the past. The buds that come with iPods have always given me a headache—it is something about the way they change the shape of your ear because they are metal. The EarThumps, though, have soft rubber on each post, which adapts itself to the contours of your ear. Griffin thoughtfully includes three sizes so you can find the right fit. The coolest part of the whole deal, for me, is the little case that comes with it, so I can wrap up the cords and keep them from getting tangled. I am easily impressed.



The soft carrying case with webbed pockets protects your EarThumps.

There is something about the in-ear experience that screens out most of the external sounds, in ways the cheap headphones never will. It was so protective that it made Jon Secada sound good. The high points seem to be comfort and the blocking out of external sound. Griffin sent two pairs for review, so I had a friend who uses Apple earbuds try the EarThumps. He says they were comfortable, and the proper size did keep out more street noise. He was not uncomfortable with the Apple buds, though, and does not use them often enough to keep them, so I get two pairs!

I'm glad I have two pairs, because I did not look forward to using the same pair for exercising at the gym and for watching movies on the portable DVD player. These are separate locations, and it's handy to keep the listening devices separate, too. I want to describe the DVD experience, because it was much more profound a difference than the gym experience. It is what sold me on the product.

Without going into too much detail, the place where I watch movies is very loud sometimes. The speakers on the unit are cheap, so it is not designed to go very loud. I needed headphones to be able to hear it at all. Then I found that the unit just would not go beyond a certain loudness, and it was insufficient. I gave in and bought some \$39 headphones with padded earpieces that blocked out most of the noise.

Then I tried the EarThumps and had to turn *down* the volume on the DVD player. These earpieces are so good at keeping out ambient noise that the volume was too high! I was

delighted. Now I leave a pair of EarThumps at that location and keep a pair in the car for the gym.

They do not keep out so much sound that you can't hear a car horn or fire alarm; I don't mean to say they could be dangerous. I rated them Very Nice because I have a nagging suspicion that folks who know sound systems would find them inadequate. But for me, for my everyday use, they are excellent—and a great value.

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Software Review

by Matthew Glidden, mglidden@atpm.com

iCash 3.0.3

Developer: [Maxprog](#)

Price: \$39 (as of writing, on special for \$30)

Requirements: Mac OS 9 or Mac OS X

Trial: Fully-featured (30 days)



Looking for a cheaper alternative to home finance heavyweights like Quicken and Microsoft Money? With iCash, you can chart everything from checking accounts to your 401(k) to the bills in your wallet, but spend less green doing so. You can import and export in a variety of formats (including Quicken and Money), easily report on spending categories, and do budgeting without jumping from a check register to a spreadsheet and back.

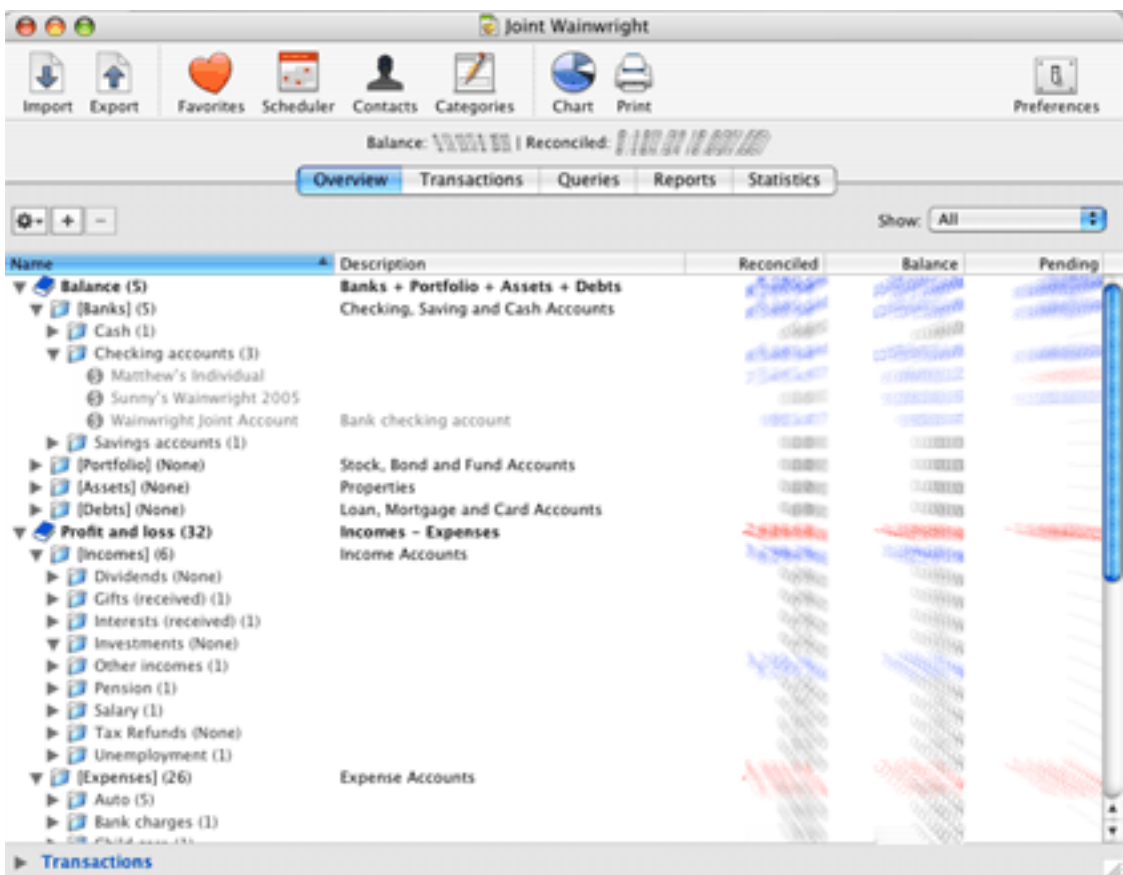
Installation

It's very easy to download and install iCash from the Maxprog site. In Mac OS X, installation creates a folder in your Applications folder that contains the main application and its support files. When you have questions, you can refer to the manual from the installation directory. (There's also an [online version](#), which may get updated more often.)

Features

You can manage any kind of financial transaction in iCash (any I could think of, anyway: checking accounts, salaries, tax refunds, and so on). Transaction categories can be as specific as you want—iCash itself comes with things like “auto fuel” and “home maintenance.” Connecting a transaction to a category tracks where you're spending the money, and on what. (Of course, maybe you don't want to know.) The pre-defined categories cover most options, but maybe you want to know how much went to something more esoteric, like eBay.

The [iCash screenshots](#) page shows the program's interface well. One slight difference is the tab bar above the account register. For version 3.0.3, it lacks the “Accounts” tab. (My own screen shot is below for comparison, with money amounts blurred.)



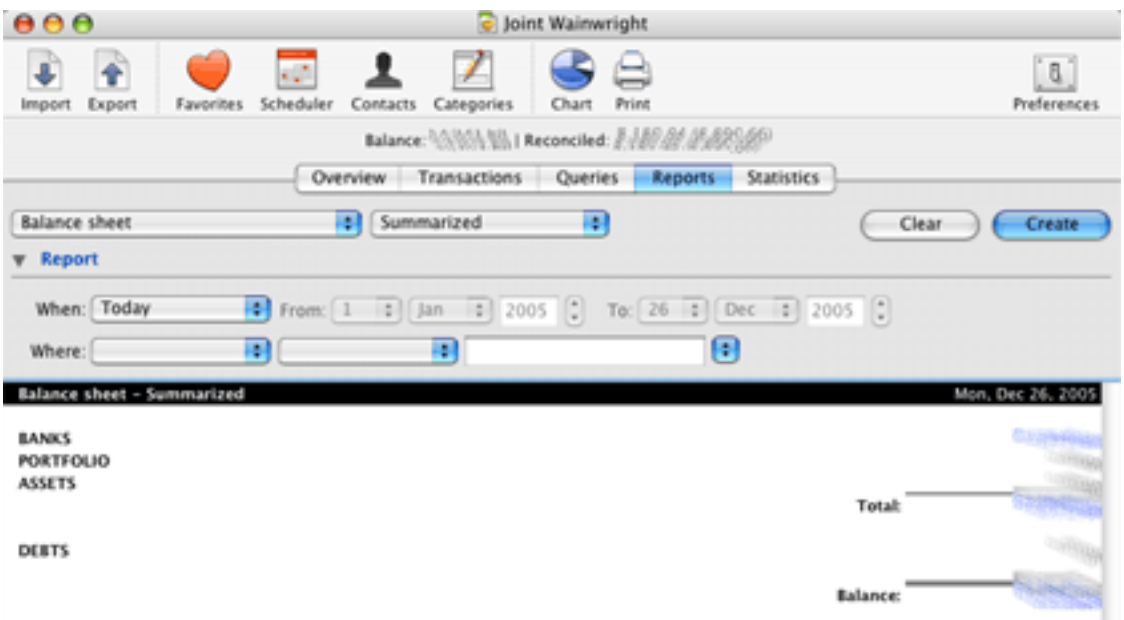
In the main window, the categories and accounts expand and collapse in an outline structure. Click a triangle to toggle, or double-click to change its name. Select the Transactions tab instead to see all income or debits for the selected account. The Pending column shows the amount of transactions that haven't "cleared." You can verify or reconcile them from the Transactions tab, as well.

Recording Transactions

Transactions have types (such as cash, charge, or billed), an "origin" account (such as your checking account), and a "target" account (such as the cable TV bill). Use the pop-up lists to pick one or type in a few letters to see matching previous entries. (If you're tracking business expenses, you'll also need the invoice and taxes fields.) Add the transaction once you're done.

Reporting on Transactions

Reporting on finances makes the world go around and sells a lot of papers. It's also easy to do in iCash. Select the Reports tab to assemble data by time range or account.



If you want to report by expense type instead, use the Statistics tab. This view creates a report by month for all categories. Since I collect sports memorabilia, it helps to know I still spend more money on, say, food and shelter.

Account	Jan-05	Feb-05	Mar-05	Apr-05	May-05	J
"Default Account"						
Auto fuel	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Auto insurance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Auto other	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Auto service	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Auto taxes	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bank charges	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bank savings account	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cable TV	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cash	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Child care	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Clothing	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Dining	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
EMC	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Education	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Electricity	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Entertainment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gas	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gifts (given)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gifts (received)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Groceries	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Health care	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Home furnitures	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Home insurance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Usage Notes

When you first open iCash, you name a new “master account,” which is basically the box you keep everything in. Unless you keep separate finances for each iCash user, you only need one to track everything, since it can hold any number of “real” accounts.

The program seems cluttered at first look, since iCash opens directly into the main window, a cascade of folder icons. The top-level folder, Balance, has the financial accounts; and Profit and Loss mark the transaction categories. In Quicken, you usually pick a category by typing in part of a type, which it fills in for you. In iCash, you pick it as the “target account” in a transaction window. (This wasn’t immediately obvious for me.)

Importing data from my bank’s online service was no problem. I exported everything in a supported format, ran an import, and each transaction appeared as expected. Some had cryptic names, though. Fortunately, you can change the name to something more useful in the transaction log. Later on, iCash will use your updated name when it imports something with the same transaction comment.

Should You Stop Using a Checkbook?

I moved to iCash from Quicken, where you typed everything into a virtual checkbook register. If you’re still using paper and pen, there’s a lot of benefit in skipping the math and easily categorizing where your money goes. It really does make a difference in time spent.

Should You Stop Using Quicken or Money?

This is tougher. If you’re comfortable with an existing program, I doubt iCash will sway you away. Its target market appears to be the people who don’t want to pump more money into the coffers of multinational corporations that already have plenty.

If you rely on spreadsheets or something similar that does math for you, but still requires a lot of hand entry, iCash is a reasonable option. It’s been through a few versions, has decent online support, and isn’t bad to use once you adapt to the visual clutter.

Annoyances

There’s a lot more clicking in iCash than there has to be. Moving across a half-dozen fields for each transaction is visually tiring, what with all the buttons and pop-up lists. It gives an impression of managing a database, rather than a checkbook or register. Even if the contents end up in a database, it would feel more natural to have a single-transaction interface for things like a checking account.

Perhaps it’s Macintosh heresy, but it’d be nice to have a more keyboard-friendly transaction mode. In everyday, add-a-check-to-the-ledger use, there aren’t many things to organize and click. Tabbing across a few fields and hitting Return for entry would be more usable.

Bugs

Every now and then, changing the width of columns in the Transactions tab would pop up an error window with an inscrutable message. No data was lost, so it didn't hurt me, but it could be worrying for most users.

Summary

This is an application with good features but only an average interface. It has a lot of power in an inexpensive package, but could do with a transaction-oriented facelift. If you'd like to manage your finances in something other than a spreadsheet but don't want to pay Quicken or Microsoft Money, iCash is a good alternative.

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Hardware Review

by Tom Bridge, tbridge@atpm.com

iMac G5 20"

Developer: Apple Computer

Price: \$1,699 (list); \$2,152 (as tested)

Trial: None



When the new iMacs were announced this summer, much of the world took notice. The flat panel iMac received a significant upgrade inside, including a new video card, faster RAM, and a built-in iSight camera. The showstopper, though, was Apple's new Front Row interface, designed to be an iPod-like interface for your movies, TV shows, and music.

Over the past few years, since the iMac made the transition from CRT to flat panel, I've looked at the iMac and come close to buying each time. With the latest revision, and the release of Aperture, I was helpless before its 20" screen. The baseline iMac G5 20" ships with half a GB of 533 MHz DDR2 SDRAM, a 250 GB S-ATA hard drive, and the ATI Radeon X600 XT with 128 MB of DDR SDRAM. The model this review is based on, however, has a 500 GB S-ATA drive and 1.5 GB of 533 MHz DDR2 SDRAM. This revision of the iMac form, a floating screen with ports along the bottom and a slot-loading optical drive along the right edge, has subtle but important changes from the previous generation: the optical drive is vertically centered, making for a more symmetric design. The new feature that was touted at the release, however, is an iSight camera built into the facing of the iMac, allowing for seamless video chatting with other iMac or webcam users.



The feel of this machine is just about perfect. The display looks great sitting or standing, and as it's the same resolution as a 20" Cinema Display (1680 × 1050), it ought to look this good. Setup with the Bluetooth keyboard and mouse was fairly straightforward, though I find myself wishing for a Bluetooth version of its more capable brother, the Mighty Mouse. Had the option been available, I would have ordered a Mighty Mouse instead of the Bluetooth Mouse as an in-box option. It's not that the Bluetooth mouse isn't a capable

device—far from it—but I greatly prefer a mouse with a scroll wheel and right button. The lack of a good wireless option here from Apple hurts the wireless movement that Apple is going for.

I put the iMac to work right away, installing Aperture and Final Cut Express HD, as well as a few games. Stepping up from a PowerBook G4, the advantages of the G5 CPU in the iMac are readily apparent. Actions that were slow in [Aperture](#) on the PowerBook were nearly instantaneous on the iMac. Rendering times were cut from several minutes to mere seconds.

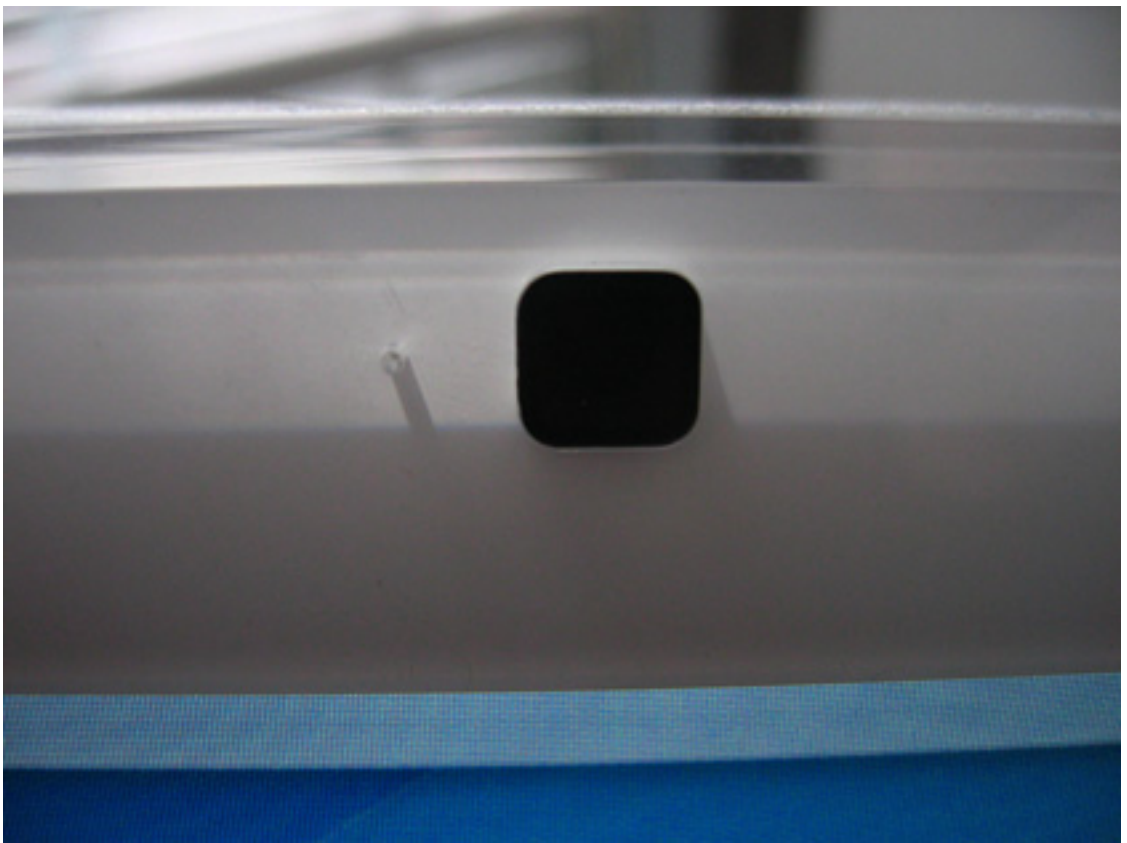


The 2.1 GHz G5 processor that represents the core of the current generation iMacs, backed by a much faster front-side bus, makes this a fantastic workstation for creative professionals. Once I'd done some work, I figured some play was in order, as the 128 MB graphics card in the iMac is vastly improved, not to mention that the display is significantly brighter and

has a higher contrast ratio, making for more crisp, responsive imagery. Now, I realize it's been a long time since I was a real gamer, but I did have a couple recent titles that would give the graphics card a good workout. Little did I realize it would take the tasks given it by Railroad Tycoon 3 and Tropico 2 and ask such questions as "Is that the best you can do?" and "Can't you give me something hard to do?" Each of these games has real graphics needs that get far greater the longer you play. The longer I play on my PowerBook, the slower the game gets. Not so the iMac. Not only could it handle the game at full resolution, it did so with aplomb.

Once I was done playing games, it was time to take a look at the other major new feature of the iMac: Front Row. Front Row is touted as a way to make your iMac into a personal entertainment system. It features iPod-like menus, and a small infrared remote that clings to the side of the iMac with a magnet. The remote's button cluster is remarkably similar to that of the original iPod: a central button, with buttons that ring it. Overall, it works adequately.

There are four central areas that Front Row focuses on: music, movies, pictures, and DVDs. It pulls music from your iTunes library, pictures from iPhoto, and DVDs from your DVD drive, but the movies area adds more than just your home movie creations; it also includes Apple's [Movie Trailer Web site](#) and any TV shows that you've bought from the iTunes Store. The display resolution is wonderful for DVDs, but not quite as good for the smaller TV shows, which don't entirely scale well. It's watchable, but I'd rather keep it in a window at original or double resolution. I would love Front Row if not for its complete inability to handle a DVD menu. Don't bother trying to navigate a menu with Apple's swanky new remote. You'll get nothing but frustrated. This has to get fixed before I can really justify using Front Row.



There are a few things that take away from the beauty of the iMac, and I realize that they are minor, but still, for a company like Apple, that treats the details with great respect, they truly are the difference. The camera, though nice, seems an afterthought. It's functional, sure, and [PhotoBooth](#) is a hoot, but where's the real use for this? It's not going to come to fruition so easily. So why break the plane? The black mole on the iMac's perfect face is hardly Marilyn Monroe. The remote's attachment mechanism, via magnet to the outer portion of the iMac's right bezel seems odd to me, simply because it doesn't have the Apple-esque precision I'm used to seeing; it moves around quite a bit in its magnetic moorings. Overall, the iMac has wonderful lines and an incredible desk presence, making it both a pleasure to look at as well as a pleasure to use.

If you're looking for a computer with brains, brawn, looks, and good works, the iMac G5 20" is your computer. If you're looking for a home media center, perhaps it's not time yet. Overall, the new iMac is showing signs of becoming the flagship of Apple's design, both inside and out, and it represents an incredible value on the market.

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Hardware Review

by Christopher Turner, cturner@atpm.com

iSongBook

Developer: [Tivoli Audio](#)

Price: \$330

Requirements: iPod with dock connector

Trial: None



I have long been an admirer of Tivoli Audio's products. I dig the postmodern retro styling of their designs, especially the wood cabinetry many of their models are clad in. Tivoli is one of those rare companies, much like Apple, that *gets* design.

I've been noting the many iPod music systems on the market, but none of has been particularly appealing. Most are simply portable speaker systems you plug your iPod into, with little more in the way of features. The iSongBook was the first of these systems that caught my attention, because it offered everything I was looking for.



The Ugly

Let's get this out of the way so we can enjoy the rest of the review, shall we? The iSongBook is expensive, with a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$330. A [Froogle search](#) yielded nothing available online below this price point. Granted, Tivoli's iPod music system is full-featured and of the exceptional quality one would expect from a higher-end manufacturer like Tivoli. Still, I think a price over three hundred dollars is too much for most people, given what I didn't like about the system. I think a price point of \$199 would be reasonable.

The Bad

Other than bedside clock radios, there are two audio systems in our home. The first is a Bose Lifestyle home theater system, located in the living room. The second is an Aiwa shelf stereo system, hooked up to my G4 Cube via an Onkyo USB audio processor, in the study. This is the frame of reference I'm working from when listening to the audio quality of the iSongBook.

Overall, the audio quality of the iSongBook is very good. It's not great, because it doesn't do well with low frequency output—that would be your heavy bass sounds. I would slot it in as way better than your average clock radio, but not as good as the Aiwa shelf stereo sitting in my study. And no wonder, since the Aiwa's speakers have separate treble and bass, and are about two-and-a-half times as deep as the iSongBook.

Tivoli recommends, in the manual, that you turn your iPod's equalizer *off* when using it in the iSongBook. I can confirm this is needed. Listening to the same rock song with the EQ on, at the same reasonable volume, was annoying versus with the EQ off.

The Good

The two aforementioned issues—the price and the lack of good low-frequency audio quality—keep the iSongBook from getting an Excellent rating, the highest that ATPM awards. Otherwise, I *love* the Tivoli iSongBook. It looks great, and has proven to be very versatile. My wife remarked that she likes how sleek it looks, and how it takes up very little space for the volume it is capable of producing. With its “iPod white” fascia, it looks great on the island in our kitchen. We can crank the volume to 20 and easily fill the entire downstairs with music.



Like many Tivoli Audio products, the iSongBook features the distinctive singular speaker in the front, but your purchase includes a second speaker that attaches to the main unit for the full stereo experience. It has a very slick docking attachment, including a built-in cable roll-up, and the second speaker can be placed up to six feet away from the main unit. Looking at the front of the unit, the second speaker attaches to the right. The speakers are shielded, to protect your iPod and any other gear that may react negatively to the presence of magnets.



The iPod dock is on the left, and flips down from the main body. The iSongBook comes with a kit of seven different adapter cups for the iPod dock. The manual has a list that shows which adapter to use depending on which model iPod you're using.

Unlike other iPod stereo docking units, the iSongBook has an AM/FM tuner built in, with a telescoping antenna. It got excellent reception on the full range of stations we listen to on both bands, including a particular AM station that tends to come in worse at night. There are five preset buttons on the front of the unit, so you can plug in five FM stations, and five AM stations. At the end of the row of preset buttons are tuning buttons. A headphone jack is on the upper left side of the unit, which accepts the 1/8-inch stereo male mini connector.

The iSongBook is powered in one of two ways. First, there is a 12-volt DC external power supply included. Second, the unit takes six AA batteries. Tivoli thought of everything, however, and not only can you use NiCad or NiMH batteries instead of alkalines, but the iSongBook will also charge those batteries when the power supply is connected. There is a switch on the rear of the unit that you set depending upon which type of battery you choose to use. The iSongBook also charges the iPod in the dock when power is connected.

The small digital display is located in the upper left of the front of the iSongBook, and shows the time when the unit is off. When on, the function dominates the display: "iPod" if switched to the iPod function, the station number if switched to AM or FM. The time then reverts to a smaller font in the upper right of the display. A blue backlight has an

on-demand button on the front of the unit, as well as on the credit card-style IR remote. The remote duplicates the iPod's controls, but you are unable to switch from listening to the iPod to the radio from the remote. This is due to classic Tivoli design with regard to the manual knob on the unit. The knob has four settings: Off, FM, AM, and iPod/Aux.



The iSongBook comes with an alarm function, and with the second speaker detached it makes a great bedside clock radio. The well-written manual details the alarm setup, which is very easy. You can choose to wake up to the radio station of your choosing, or any song on your iPod. Should you choose the latter, you'll have to navigate to the specific song, press Play, then instantly press Pause. The other alarm caveat I ran into was if you've set the alarm, then change the function knob to something else, like from iPod to FM, the alarm is cancelled. This makes sense, given the interface Tivoli chose for the iSongBook, but I thought it worth mentioning.

One area Apple continues to dominate in is product design. People *do* care about design, about aesthetics, and Tivoli Audio gets this, too. If my wife, who normally doesn't pay as much attention to such details, is telling me, unsolicited, how much she likes a product because of its design, I had better listen. Tivoli has a hit on its hands with the iSongBook; I just wish it would lower the price.

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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

Mapwing Creator Pro 1.0.2

Developer: [Redbug Technologies](#)

Price: \$295

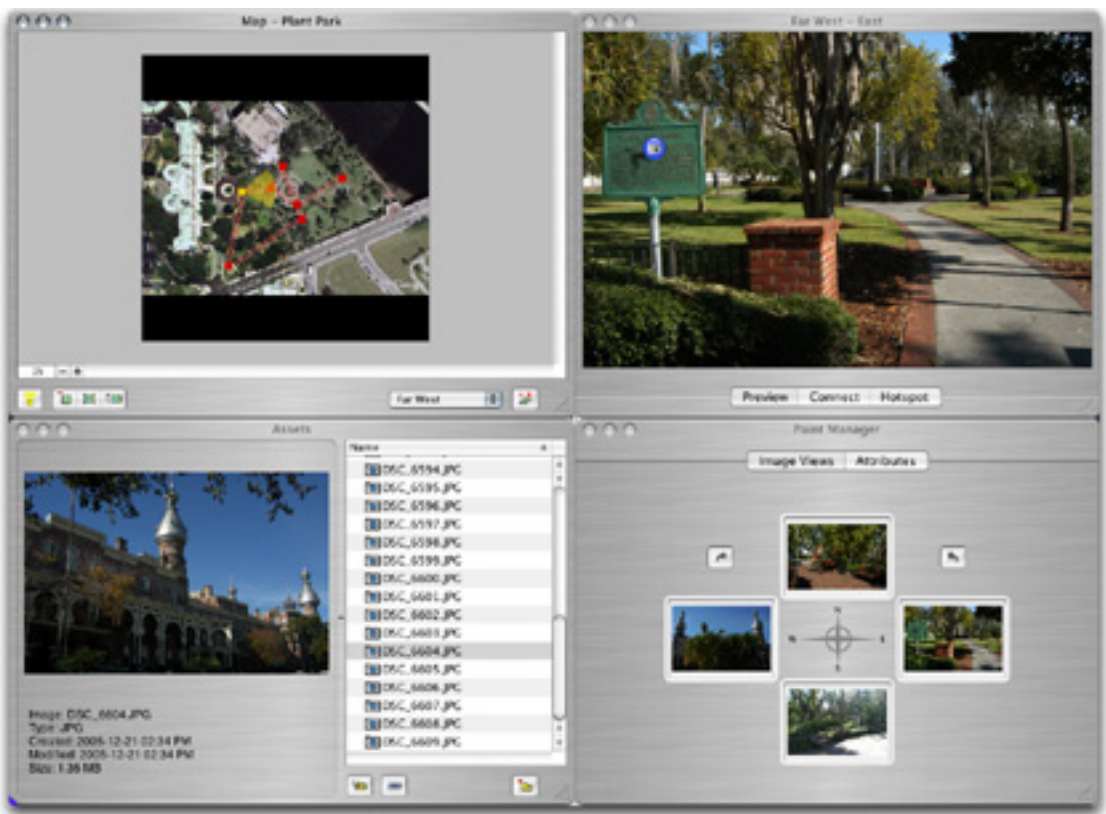
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2.8, Rage 128.

Trial: Feature-limited (tours are limited to three points, Mapwing Flash Viewer not included)



Mapwing Creator Pro provides an alternative to Apple's QuickTime VR for creating virtual tours. In a few respects, the Mapwing tool suite even has strengths over QTVR, such as the display of an overview map and the ability to define hotspots that display an alternative photo when clicked.

Even though I enjoyed creating a virtual tour and didn't have too much difficulty using the tools, Mapwing's status as a version 1.x product is extremely apparent. Moreover, its price point reflects an apparent desire by the developer for it to be a solid, high-end, commercial application. Unfortunately, Mapwing Creator Pro felt more like \$30–40 piece of shareware. Even if the quirks and bugs I discovered were squashed, Mapwing does not, in its existing form, stand up as a near-\$300 workflow solution.

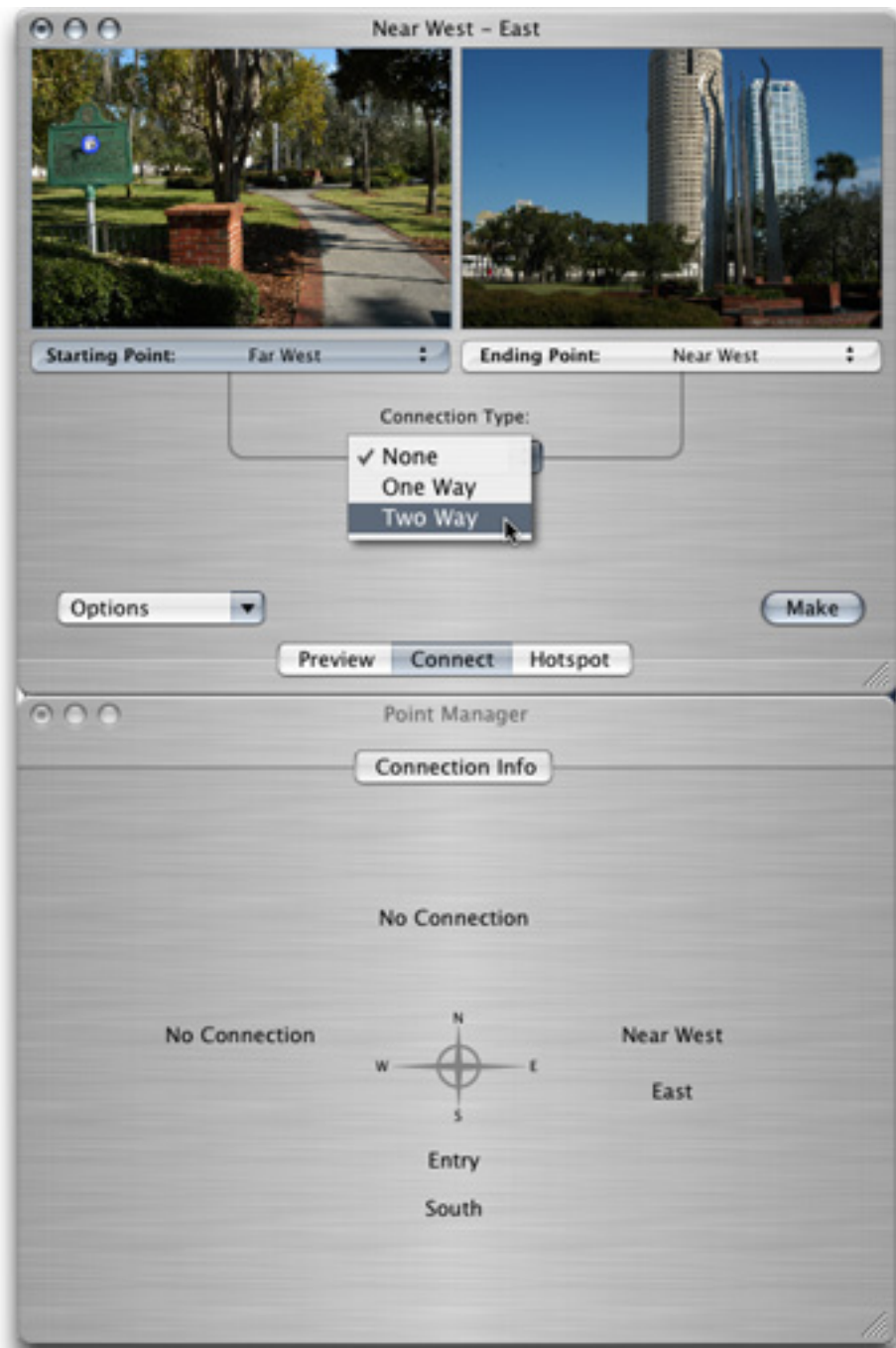


A Mapwing Creator Pro tour in its final stage of completion.

Mapwing Creator Pro tours are created in a four-window interface for defining the optional (but recommended) background map on which to create your tour, managing assets, and creating tour points, plus a preview window that is also used to connect points which form a tour and to define clickable hotspots. Creating a tour isn't difficult once you've familiarized yourself with the application's controls and window tabs. Mapwing Creator Pro's documentation is well-written. Both it and the application's help files guide you through the process of creating a tour.

You may notice in my sample tour that I utilized a snapshot of the park from Google Earth. For most uses, this is probably fine, but you will likely need to generate your own map or work out licensing with Google if you wish to use such images in a commercial/for-profit capacity.

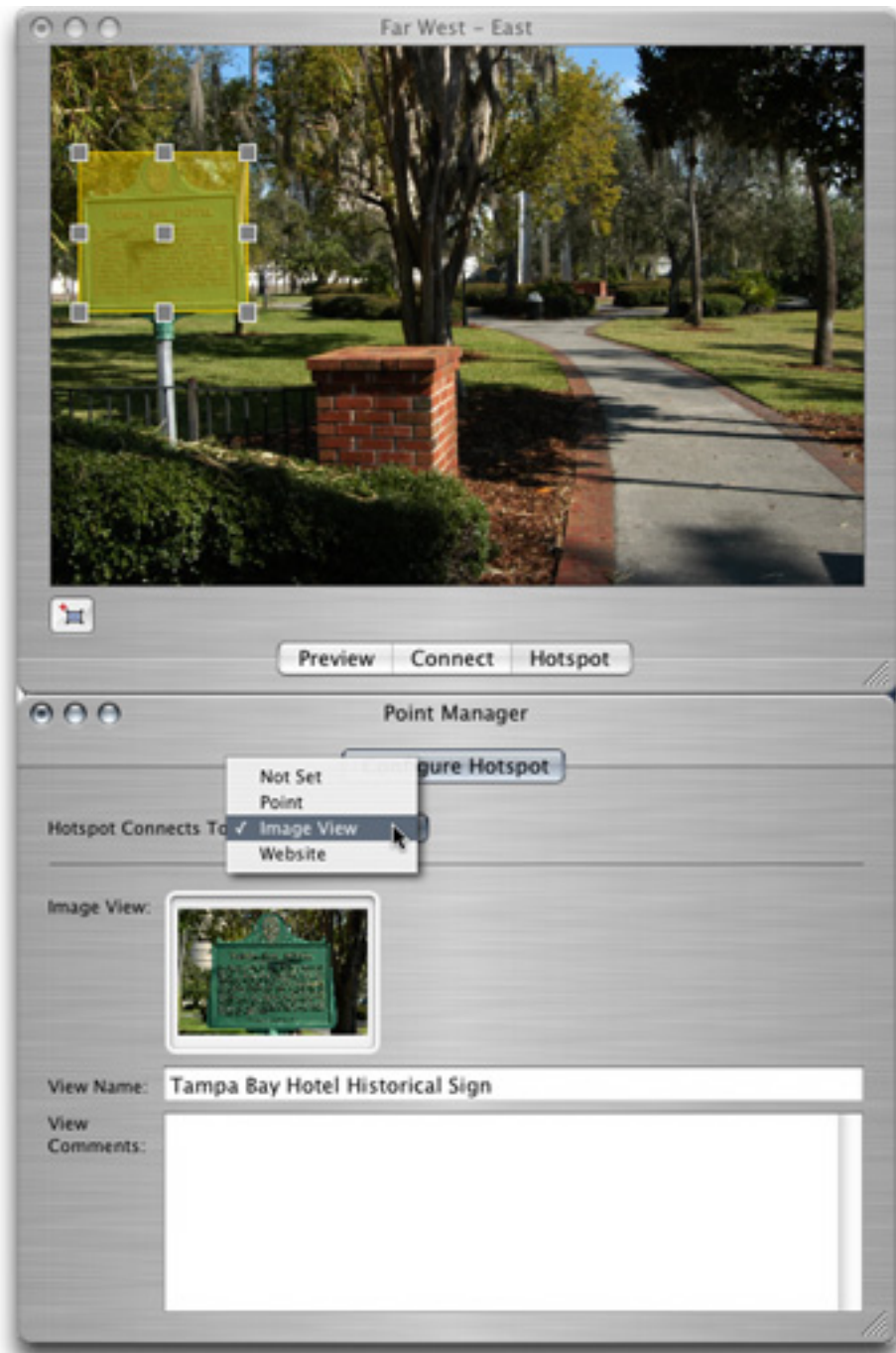
For the most part, you can perform the steps of building a tour in any order that works best for you. You may wish to define all tour points, assign all photos, then connect all the points *en masse*. I preferred to first import all my assets (I could also have sorted them into folders in the Assets window, if I had wanted to.), then set up one point at a time, dragging in the asset photos for all four views as I went and connecting points as I was able.



Tours are built by connecting the view of one point to the view of another, and choosing whether you can travel in one direction, or both directions.

Connecting points is fairly straightforward—simply select a directional view of two points and choose what type of connection to make. The Point Manager window changes in this mode to show what connections already exist.

Personally, I would rather see a tool in the base map window to drag connections between points. This window already gives color-coded feedback for connections and uses single lines to denote a one-way connection and double lines for two-way connections.



Hotspots allow you to highlight certain items within your tour for additional views or information.

Creating hotspots is just as straightforward. Define an area, then choose whether you want a click to that hotspot to link to another point in your tour, to one of your asset images, or to an external Web site.

Once you've created a tour, all that's left is to make it available for others to view. The simplest way is provide a direct link to the tour document file and instruct viewers to download the free *Mapwing Viewer* <<http://www.redbugtech.com/viewer.html>>, which is available for Mac OS X and Windows 2000 or XP. The tour document can either be downloaded separately and opened in the viewer, or you can provide a Web link to it which will open in the viewer.

Alternatively, if your Web server supports PHP and Flash documents, you can use the Mapwing Flash Viewer to display tours on your Web site. Flash-based tours can either be directly linked, such as in [my example tour of Plant Park](#), or presented in a pop-up window. If you're ambitious, you can incorporate the code to display the viewer into your existing Web page design. Also, you can choose an option while viewing a Flash-based tour to open the tour in the client-side viewer application.

A page on Redbug's Web site has many more [examples of tours](#).

The most glaring problem I found with Mapwing is that there is very poor tolerance for varying image dimensions and/or orientation within a tour. When you begin a new tour, you have the option to select 4:3 or 3:2 as the view ratio, as well as an estimate of overall map size and viewing resolution. Tour photos are *always* presented in landscape orientation, and you have to completely start over if you change your mind about which view ratio you wish to use. As you browse [my example tour of Plant Park](#), you'll find hotspots of the sculpture and of the John F. Kennedy memorial. Both these hotspot photos were taken in portrait orientation and Mapwing stretched them to fit a landscape space.

Another problem is that there is no clear workaround to navigate a tour if one or more hotspots cover an entire photo, and there is no warning when hotspots are created in this manner. Hovering the mouse over the photo would no longer show the arrows to turn left, right, or move forward. You can see an example of this phenomenon if you navigate to the Far West point in my example tour and look to the west at the Plant museum. This caveat may seem like a no-brainer, and the best solution is to not create hotspots that fill an entire photo, but be aware that it is not impossible to do so. You can use the left, right, and up arrows on your keyboard to navigate instead, but only in the client-side Mapwing Viewer—not in the Flash viewer.

Another oddity is that the viewer seems to lock-up/crash if data from a Web server isn't available, even though the application is really just waiting for the data. At one point, I suffered a complete loss of all four photo definitions in one of my tour points when I edited a previously defined connection to another point. This only happened once, and I couldn't reproduce it. Another quirk that I couldn't reproduce on a subsequent launch of the program was that the selection highlight in the Image Views tab of the Point Manager window only appeared if I clicked the North and South views—not East or West. The next

time I launched Mapwing Creator Pro, all four views would display a selection highlight when I clicked them.

Cosmetically, I'd rather see an integrated editor window instead of four independent windows, but that's personal preference. And, since there appears to be enough screen real estate, an option to display the buttons as text instead of icons may help some people.

Mapwing's potential is pretty slick. I look forward to trying to create a tour that is more the calibre of some of the samples on Redbug's Web site. I *might* be receptive to a price around \$100 if the interface were polished, dimension/orientation bugs were fixed, and there was an integrated tool to generate the files needed to present a tour on the Web instead of having to copy a folder of files that are bundled with the software and hand-edit them for each tour. But, in its current form, I found nothing about the software that justifies a \$100 price tag—let alone \$300.

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Software Review

by Charles Ross, cross@atpm.com

REALbasic 2005, Release 4

Developer: [REAL Software](#)

Price: \$100 (standard edition); \$400 (professional edition, introductory price)

Requirements: 600 MHz G3 with Mac OS X 10.2.8, 512 MB of RAM; executables require Mac OS 9.1 or Mac OS X

Recommended: 800 MHz G4 with Mac OS X 10.3.9, 768 MB of RAM

Trial: Fully-featured (15 days)



I have long been searching for my Holy Grail of database development. My primary job is to create software to allow users to access databases in a business environment. Usually, I create this software on my PowerBook, but when the client is using it, it generally needs to run under Windows also.

So, the Holy Grail for me is going to be an environment that allows rapid development and cross-platform builds. For over a decade, I've been using FileMaker Pro to accomplish these two goals, but FileMaker, even if it's easy to use and allows powerful custom databases, has a number of limitations that have grown more and more annoying over the years. FileMaker doesn't create compiled software, which means that to use a FileMaker database you need to either have FileMaker or a runtime version of it. Capturing events with FileMaker (such as when a user exits a field) is difficult at best. This means that many things users request either require a plug-in or some fancy programming, when, in my opinion, it should be easy. Finally, the interface of FileMaker databases has to be built from scratch. If I want the system to look like a Mac's Aqua interface, I have to recreate the graphics for such an interface, and when the program runs on Windows, it will look exactly the same, rather than like a native Windows program.

Now, if I were building just for the Mac, I would use AppleScript Studio, part of Apple's Xcode development environment. But since I need to create cross-platform solutions, I've long considered looking into REALbasic, which ostensibly gets around all of the limitations of FileMaker. This review is written from that point of view, so you'll often find comparisons between REALbasic and [FileMaker](#), as well as [AppleScript](#), which is another language I'm familiar with.

What Is REALbasic?

REALbasic is a complete object-oriented programming environment available for either Mac OS X, Windows XP/2000, or Linux. In addition to being able to create software for all three of these platforms, it can also compile for Mac OS Classic.

REALbasic is an integrated development environment, which means that everything is done within the program, from laying out the interface widgets to writing the code that gets executed. It comes in two editions: Standard and Professional. Given my cross-platform requirements, the Standard edition is useless to me, as it will only compile for the platform it runs on. The software comes with a built-in single-user database engine, although the Professional edition is required to connect to a database server. That server can be any of a number of SQL servers, including MySQL, or even FileMaker Server.

The pricing for REALbasic is somewhat complex. You can buy the Professional edition for \$500, although at the time I write this it's available at an introductory price of \$400. The Standard edition is available for \$100. Whichever edition you purchase includes six months of updates. In general, REALbasic is updated every 90 days or so, which means that the purchase will include at least two and perhaps three updates. Once this subscription expires, you can continue to use the version you have, or renew the subscription for one year. This annual subscription seems to be half of the purchase price, so that the Standard edition subscription is \$50 while the Professional edition subscription is \$200.

Although these prices are comparable to the prices for FileMaker Pro and Advanced, two facts should be kept in mind: first, when building a system in FileMaker Pro, the only way it can be used over a network is if each of the client Macs has its own copy of FileMaker. Since REALbasic programs are compiled, this isn't an issue. Second, REALbasic offers many options for the backend database server, including MySQL. Depending on how you are licensing your own software, you may be able to use the MySQL server for free, or for as little as \$295 (or as much as \$4,995 for higher levels of service from the publishers of MySQL). In all likelihood, the lower cost license, if a commercial license is required, will probably be sufficient. The point being that using REALbasic with MySQL will probably result in lower costs to your customers.

BASIC in REALbasic

As the name of the product suggests, REALbasic uses a dialect of the BASIC programming language, which was actually the first programming language I ever used, back in the Atari 800 days. REAL Software has extended the language to include object-oriented features. For a programmer, learning the language will only take a half hour or so, but it's also simple enough to be a good introductory language for the beginning programmer.

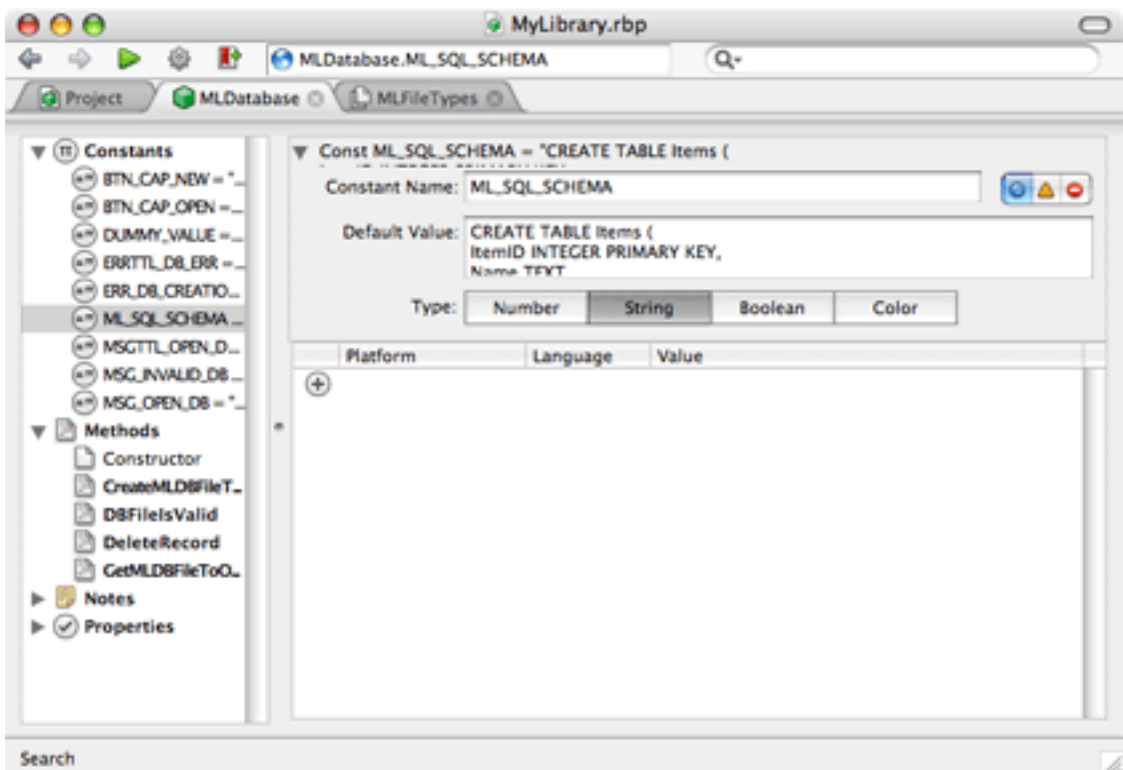
In fact, sometimes I find the language a bit too geared toward the beginner. For instance, in most programming languages, the case of variable names matters. A line reading `a = 7` and another reading `A = 7` are completely different in, for instance, Objective-C or PHP. In REALbasic, these are the same. Case never matters in REALbasic. Not only are variable names case-insensitive, but the language keywords, such as `if` and `dim` can be written in lower case, upper case, or mixed case. I personally prefer lowercase, which is what I use, but REALbasic occasionally uses initial-caps without letting the user change it (when defining methods that return a value), leaving me with the choice of either ignoring the instances I can't change, or of ignoring my preference to be consistent with the default.

A prime feature of object-oriented programming is the ability to define a new class that has all of the properties of another but that can be customized with new features, a process called subclassing. For instance, REALbasic comes with an `EditField` class that allows users to type information into a text field, among other things. However, by default, the text within an `EditField` object isn't selected when the user enters the field. I can subclass `EditField` and change the behavior so that my subclass does select the text when the field is entered.

REALbasic doesn't allow all of its built-in classes to be subclassed, which just defeats the purpose of subclassing, or more precisely, REALbasic blurs the difference between raw data types (such as integers and strings) and class data types (such as windows and edit fields). A string is a raw data type in REALbasic; it can often be treated as a class, but it can't be subclassed because it isn't a real class.

Most languages include not only variables, but also constants, named pieces of data that do not change. Unfortunately, constants can't store just any data type. Classes seem to be off limits, and so are arrays, which means that when a constant of either type is required, a variable or property has to be used instead, which defeats the whole purpose of constants. I should note that this is a common complaint for me with regards to programming languages. I've recently found myself complaining of the same limitations while programming with PHP.

Even with the data types that can be stored as constants, if a string constant is very long, editing it is difficult because the text field for doing so is rather small. This is especially an issue with database development, as the code that defines the database's table and fields should be a constant (as it won't change during the execution of the software), but can be rather long, since the single string is defining the entire database. I did find a workaround, but it shouldn't be necessary.

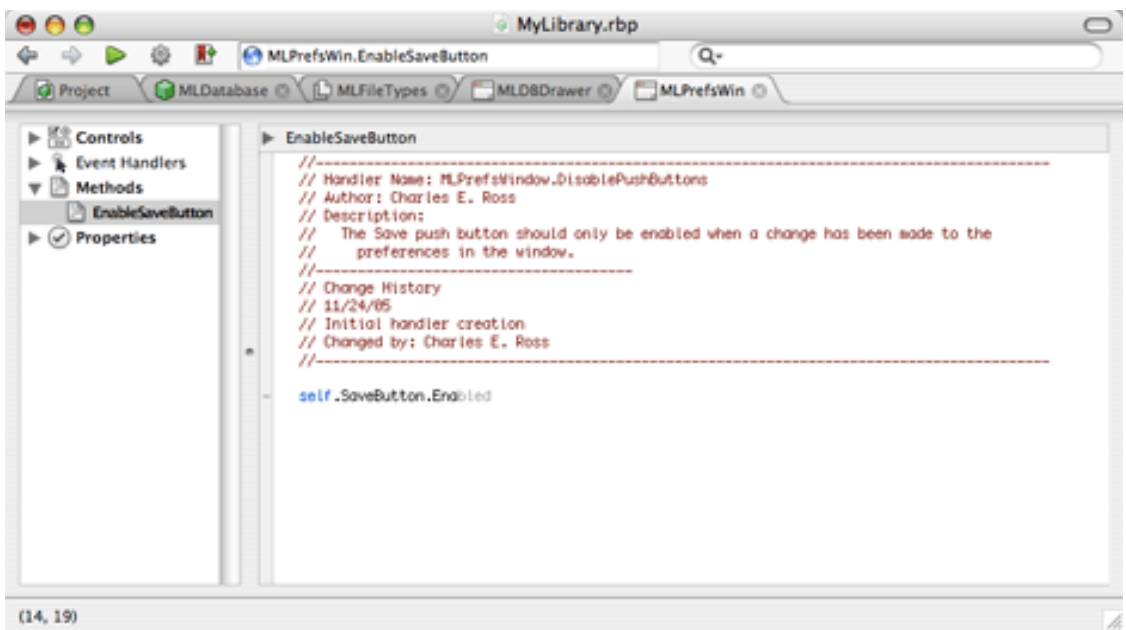


Editing a Lengthy String Constant

Regardless of these minor annoyances, REALbasic makes object-oriented programming easy to understand and easy to use.

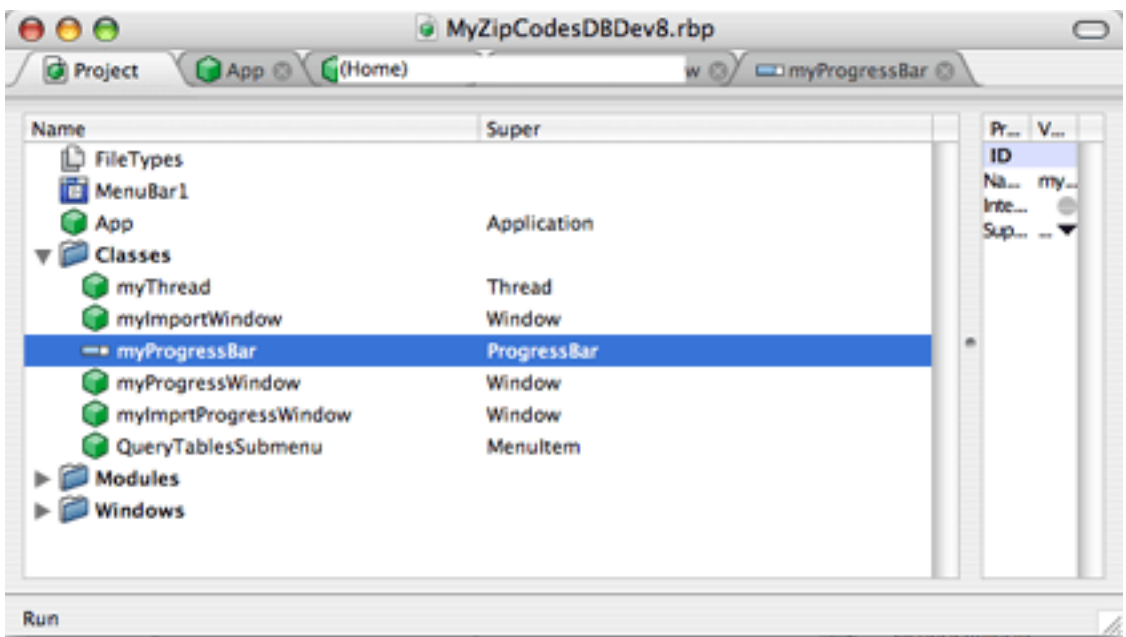
Editing Code

The greatest portion of programming is spent typing text, so the code editor of a programming environment is key to how efficiently software is created within it. In this, REALbasic again makes things easy. FileMaker effectively has two code editors: one for entering calculations, which are typed directly, and another for creating scripts, where each script step isn't typed in, but selected from a list. After one becomes proficient with FileMaker, double-clicking a script step every time gets tedious, and it's refreshing to be able to simply type all of the code. In fact, REALbasic has spoiled me in at least one major sense: the text editor includes auto-complete, where a language keyword or variable name can be entered by typing the first few characters followed by the tab key. After using this for a while in REALbasic, I'm sorely missing the feature when creating calculations in FileMaker and Web sites with PHP in BBEdit.



Auto-completion of Code

There are some interface glitches within REALbasic that are annoying. For instance, you can choose from the menu to hide the toolbar (which I never used). This tool bar has a location field that displays which object of your software is being viewed. But even when the toolbar is not being viewed, sometimes the location field still shows up over the tabs of your objects. It seems that this happens after running the project, and I believe that REALbasic was written with REALbasic, which brings up the question of whether this kind of interface glitch will show up in software I create.



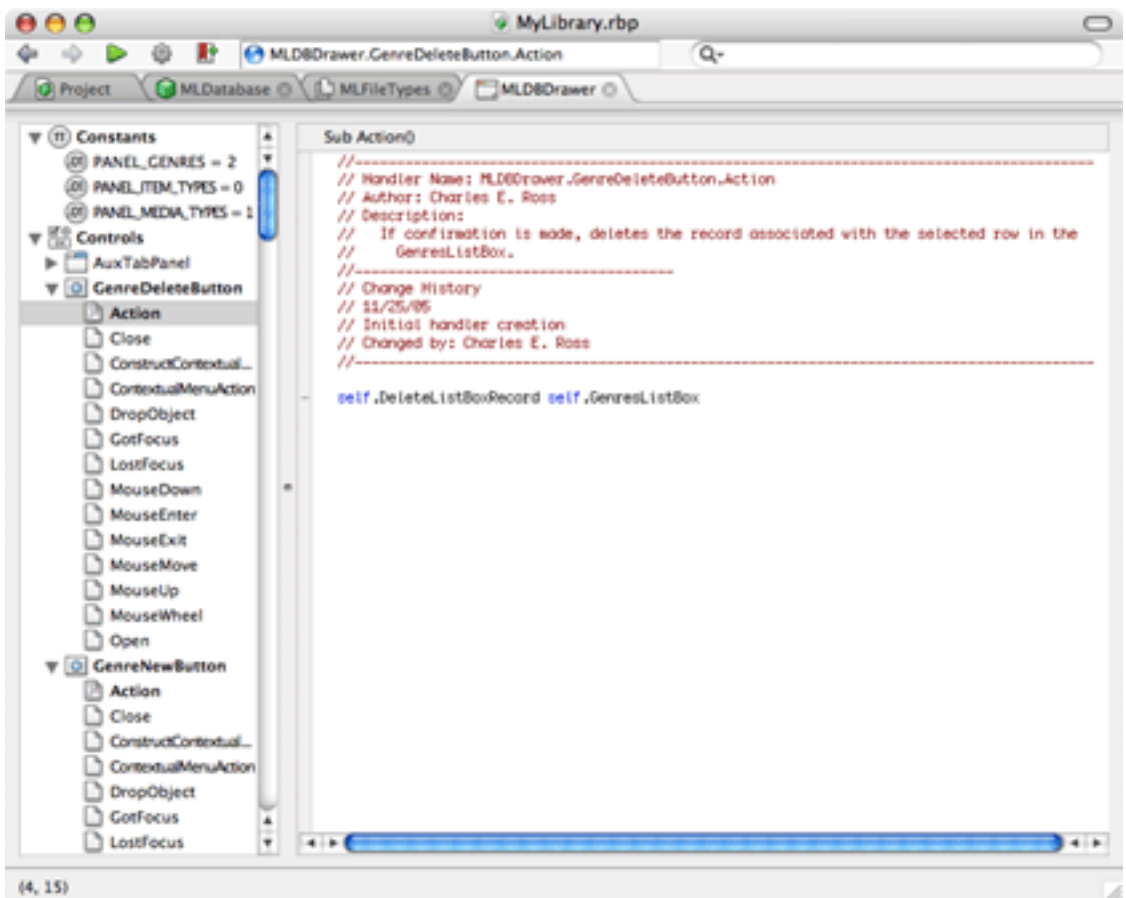
Tabs/Location Field Interface Glitch

Navigating Classes

When creating classes, REALbasic offers a hierarchal system for navigating all of the parts of the class, such as constants, properties, and methods (functions and procedures). Except for event handlers, anything listed is created by the user.

Event handlers are available methods of interface controls that will execute code when the event takes place. For instance, if I have an edit field in a window, an event handler exists called `GotFocus`. Any code within that event handler will execute whenever the user enters that field.

Most event handlers of most interface controls remain unused and empty. Generally, the only event one needs to capture for a button is the Action event (when the user clicks the button). If I remember correctly, FaceSpan, an environment that works similarly to REALbasic, offers the ability to hide event handlers that are empty. Such a feature would be nice in REALbasic. When a window includes dozens of interface controls, showing all of the event handlers, including the empty ones, makes for a cluttered window and requires a lot of scrolling.



Navigating Event Handlers

Documentation

Probably the most important piece of a development environment after the program itself is the documentation, and this is REALbasic's weakest area, especially when compared to FileMaker. FileMaker's built-in help system is easy to use, complete, and accurate, and I use it daily to look up functions and script steps. In contrast, REALbasic's documentation is mediocre to use, incomplete, and inaccurate in many places.

The documentation comes in two primary forms: a user's guide, which supposedly covers how to use the program in general (i.e., how to create a subclass or edit the layout of a window), and a language guide (describing how the language works and providing a reference to the built-in objects).

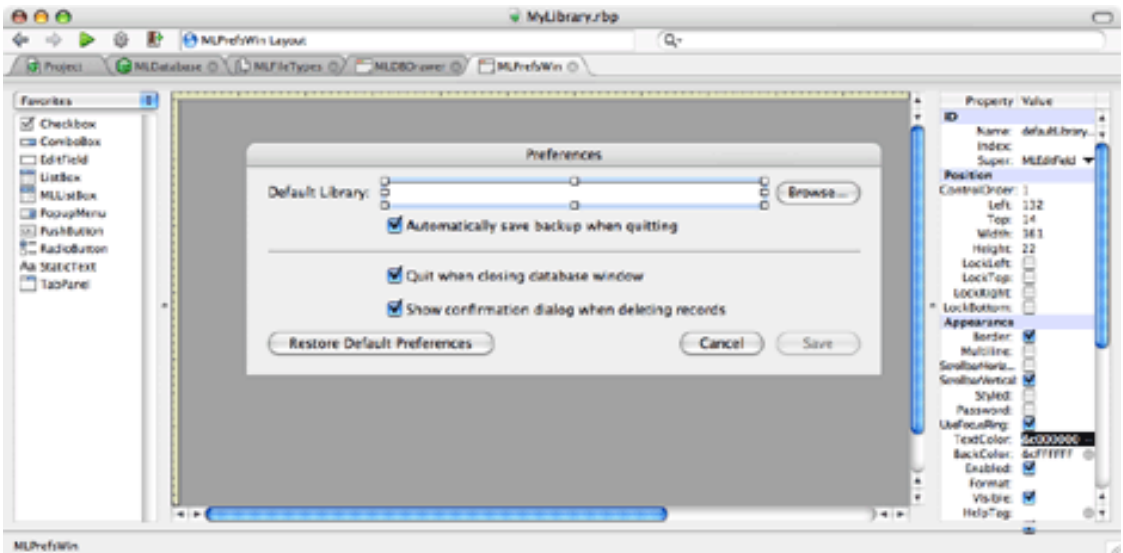
The language guide is the most important part of the documentation. The user's guide is great when you're first learning the program, but once you know how to use the software, if you're using it regularly, you're not going to forget how to use the software. Remembering each and every built-in class and each and every method and property of those classes is impossible, however, which means that accessing the language guide is a regular occurrence,

and it needs to be complete and accurate. However, after using the software for only a couple of months, I've found numerous places where the documentation is either unclear, incomplete, or inaccurate. The language guide includes non-existent methods while it's missing methods that are available, and given that my primary use for REALbasic would be to create database applications, I found the information regarding databases to be rather sparse.

Here is where REAL Software's Getting Started mailing list has been invaluable. A number of times more experienced users who frequent this list were able to help out where the documentation failed. Honestly, if you begin using REALbasic, I can't recommend highly enough [joining](#) this mailing list.

Interface Creation

REALbasic does an admirable job of guiding interface creation toward human interface guidelines. When building an interface, the final look of it will depend on the platform the software is run on. REALbasic goes toward assisting with this by allowing the ability to view menus as they will look on any of the platforms, but the final look of windows can only be checked by running the software on each platform. A nice feature would be the ability to see what windows will look like as we can with menus.



Creating the Interface

Possibly because of the cross-platform nature of the software, not all of the Aqua interface elements are available, and those that are don't include all of the options one would have if creating software with Interface Builder. As an example, Interface Builder offers different sizes for many interface elements. Checkboxes can be either regular, small, or mini sized, and I actually prefer the small size to the default regular, but REALbasic only offers the regular size. There's no option for an oval search field like what is shown in Safari. After

some searching on the Internet, I've found custom classes and plug-ins that will offer these features, but these generally seem to be platform specific, and therefore not an option for software I write.

Basic Conclusion

REALbasic's target market seems to be divided between two types of users: the beginner and the professional developer. If you're trying to learn programming on the Mac, you'll save some money by beginning with AppleScript as the language and AppleScript Studio when you want to build software with a graphical user interface. Everything you need comes with your Mac, and the programming concepts you learn in AppleScript are easily carried over to REALbasic if you later need cross-platform compilation.

If you make your money from making software, and need a cross-platform solution for a backend database, REALbasic is a good solution. It has its own, different, imperfections when compared with FileMaker, and the documentation issue, while major, is offset by the helpful and experienced people on the mailing list. The simple ability to capture events, enabling much more powerful user experiences, makes REALbasic at least worth looking into. A major question for me that only time will answer, is how quick development will be within the software once I'm familiar and comfortable with it. My gut feeling, however, is that the learning curve will be worth it.

Copyright © 2006 Charles Ross, cross@atpm.com. Charles Ross is a Certified FileMaker 7 Developer and the Chief Technology Officer of [Chivalry Software, LLC](#), a company specializing in custom database, web and automation software and publisher of [Function Helper](#), a FileMaker calculation debugging tool. He was a contributing writer and the technical editor for [The Book of FileMaker 6](#) and has contributed to [ISO FileMaker Magazine](#) and [Macworld](#) in addition to his series on AppleScript for ATPM. Reviewing in ATPM is open to anyone. If you're interested, write to us at reviews@atpm.com.



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