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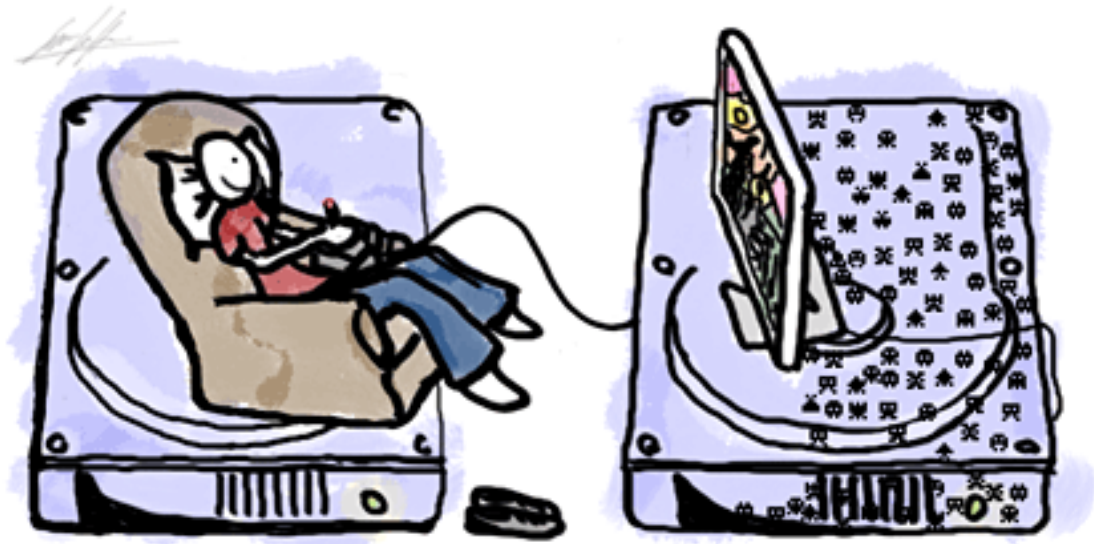
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Macintosh HD   Windows

About This Particular Macintosh: About the **personal** computing experience.™

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[1]http://www.atpm.com/about/support.shtml

Welcome

Welcome to the November issue of ATPM. This issue includes:

Mac of All Trades: On the Road Again

If you are a laptop user and a traveler, odds are that you have a collection of items you carry with you on trips. Mike Chamberlain spent five weeks in Europe this summer, and shares some insights on what to take (and what not to take) when traveling light.

MacMuser: A Song of Opposites

Written in disgust of vulgar superstition, ode to My-Book Pro and Honda Civic.

Outliners: Writing Environments, Plus Two New Outliners

In this month's *ATPO* we take a look at something that has been frequently requested: support for writing. At the end, we'll say a few things about two new products, EagleFiler and Opal.

Web Accessibility: PageSpinner 4.6.3: Quirky and Erratic

PageSpinner 4.6.3 is quirky and erratic. While Page-Spinner allows its users to create the kind of basic, accessible Web page this series has been aiming for, it doesn't make it very easy, and it sometimes work against the user. My quest continues.

How To: Activity Monitor: How to Keep Tabs on Your Mac

The Activity Monitor is much more than simply a list of active applications. Join Sylvester Roque for a tour of this underutilized application.

Desktop Pictures: Butterfly Garden

This month's photos were taken by Lee Bennett in a small butterly garden that was temporarily set up in Orlando, Florida.

Cartoon: Cortland

The misery of Cortland's search for work continues, leading him to Wieser Graphics as well as his first— and second—embarrassing moments with Angie.

Review: EarthDesk 3.5.4

We thought EarthDesk was pretty slick the first time we reviewed[1] it nearly four years ago. My, how time flies!

Review: RouteBuddy 1.1.1

For at last providing Mac-loving GPS users with a mapping tool that doesn't require a hack to connect a GPS unit, RouteBuddy gets an A for effort. The rest of the report card doesn't fare so well.

Review: VirtueDesktops 0.53

If you just can't wait for Spaces in Mac OS X 10.5, VirtueDesktops might be the answer.

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/9.01/earthdesk.shtml

E-Mail

Dream Machine[1]

I know exactly what you are feeling. I'm sitting at my desk in my home office trying to decide on a iMac 24″ or a Mac Pro to replace my aging 1 GHz G4 tower from 2001. I'm also staring at my G4 TiBook wondering when (or if) to replace it. I've been using Macs for 11 years now, and I know I would have not made it that long as a PC user. I'm looking forward to your next article.

—*Grover Watson*

> Thanks, Grover. It sounds as if you are having one of those "fun" dilemmas. As I am partial to the flexibility of the cinema display, my vote would be with the Mac Pro, particularly given its own inherent flexibility. On the laptop front, I was in the middle of an office computer switch and needed to get one right away. Otherwise, I would have waited on the Core 2 Duo. In any case, both have arrived and are awesome! Best wishes.
>
> —*Mike Chamberlain*

• • •

Very cool article. I've been using Apple computers for just about all my life. It started when I was in elementry school at about five years old playing educational games on an Apple IIe. My school got its first Macs when I was in the 5th grade. Those happened to be LC IIs. At first I was afraid of messing something up becuase I had never used a mouse or used a computer with a graphical user interface. I grew to really like the Mac and not be afraid of it. When I graduated high school, they had moved from the LC II to the G3 All-in-One, or the "molar" as people call them now. My first Mac of my own was a 400 MHz Blueberry iMac that my mom had bought for me in my freshman year of college. I still have it to this day. Since then, I've had quite a few different Macs being that I am now in the collecting game. The Macs I did use on a regular basis were a beige G3 desktop and tower, till I got my 450 MHz Sawtooth G4. I recently had the same dilemma of what to get for a new Mac. I had thought about the iMac, but I wanted to be able to expand, and I'm not too hip on external drives or cases for peripherals. So I

picked the Mac Pro. I have the standard configuration. I had thought about the faster processor, but for what I'm going to be doing with light to medium video work, the extra cost wasn't worth it.

So that's my Apple story.

—*Chris Ruter*

Nvu: Impressive and Powerful[2]

Nvu is a nice program for the person wanting a simple site. Coding is adequate but not great. I used it for a couple of years as the teaching tool for my Web design students. It served that purpose well.

However, you shouldn't venture to say this program is useful for pros. The lack of templating ability alone rules it out. Its awkward CSS tools are not only limited but not terribly stable. I'll stop there but could go on for paragraphs.

For the webmaster wanting to maintain a small personal or organization site, it's my first recommendation. The price is terrific. However, the difference between Nvu and Dreamweaver is as great as the difference between a Wal-Mart 1/4-inch electric drill and a 1/2-inch model for contractor use. Each is appropriate for its intended audience but unsuited for the other.

—*Michael McKee*

> Thanks for the additional perspective, Michael. That's useful to know.
>
> —*Miraz Jordan*

• • •

I tried this program but was very disappointed in it after a while. The main problem is that once it hit version 1.0, and I believe that was over a year ago—maybe longer—development completely stopped. I can live with small bugs—and there are more and more of them the further you go—and I can live with interface quirks to a point, but not if there's no hope of seeing them fixed. I also found that frequently used features or options tended to be several clicks away, while rarely used options were presented front and center; and nVu when used regularly proved to be far buggier than I expected.

When it came right down to it, it was worth paying the larcenous and excessive price of Dreamweaver.

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/12.10/mac-of-all-trades.shtml

[2] http://www.atpm.com/12.10/web-accessibility.shtml

I am glad nVu is there, but I sure wish someone would pick up development. The sponsor, Linspire, seems to have just wanted to fill in a check-box on their feature comparison chart.

—*David Zatz*

> That's disappointing indeed. Out of the various programs I've looked at so far, this one certainly seemed to have the most promise.
>
> I used it only for a short time, to make a single page so didn't notice the quirks you mention.
>
> —*Miraz Jordan*

Soundsticks II Review[3]

Let me just say that I have *never* before written a letter to a reporter/reviewer/editor about any article or review. This is the very first review I've read that has immediately prompted me to assail the author with praise. Your review was quite simply the best review I've ever read for *any* product (and believe you me…I've read quite a few). I truly wish there were more writers like yourself in the world of comparative product reviews. That bit about the Yak Butter had me rolling on the floor. Anyways, thank you for that amazingly hilarious (and informative) article. I hope you write many more.

—*James White*

> Thank you for your kind note—I'm delighted to hear that you found the piece entertaining, and certainly flattered that you would take the time to write given that, based on your remarks, this is not something you would ordinarily do.
>
> I suppose I should write another piece for this coming April, but I'll have to think of an appropriately ridiculous topic that can measure up. Any suggestions?
>
> Thanks again for reading, and for taking the time to write.
>
> —*Evan Trent*

Cortland[4]

Nice to see you're back on track with your cartoon stories. One day, you must publish a hard copy book. I would love to buy one and put it in the college library. This last one will be printed out and put on our college notice board.

I am a tenured teacher at a state government Institute of Technology in Australia. But…I had

worked in industry for about 30 odd years before that. Graphic design is a more cut-throat industry than it was before the days of computer graphics. In the old days, you had to be really skilled and well-trained to get a job as a GD or Commercial Artist, as everything was done by hand or in the darkroom.

There weren't that many design courses then, either. Now, (as your cartoon shows) everyone and their dog wants to become a designer, and all that is needed is some basic Quark and Adobe skills to call yourself one. That is why some low-quality studios and cheapskate employers make use of this (as you show in your strip).

Good on you for showing things as it is. I had to laugh about the tenured prof, but I am sure he/she worked before getting the job as lecturer. Don't forget, the Design industry is also very ageist, and my final jobs were to do the typsetting and technical work, as it is OK for an older person to do it. Of course, us oldies can't do creative work for an employer; we don't look the part!

On the other hand[5], we can do other things like publish books.

Best of luck for the future and may you do many more cartoon strips. I especially like the GD send ups, and I have some print outs pinned up in my office.

—*Dr. Hilary Rhodes*

Coping With Mac OS X's Font Rendering[6]

No matter what fix I try on OS X, I still end up with bad eyestrain. Because I can't use OS X without constant blurry vision and headaches, I have been forced to remain with OS 9.2—which of course nobody is designing new software for any more. It is nice and readable, however!

When will Apple address this problem? I have been looking at new IBM-compatible laptops, but they seem to be going down the same path. My HP desktop with Windows XP and a CRT monitor is still okay.

I have been using Macs since 1984, and this whole font unreadability thing has completely taken the shine off the experience. The software that goes with it only compounds the problem.

Interesting world where new technology is worse than the old for some users!

—*Clare O'Farrell*

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[3] http://www.atpm.com/10.04/soundsticks.shtml
[4] http://www.atpm.com/12.10/cartoon.shtml

[5] http://www.mup.unimelb.edu.au/catalogue/0-522-8520 3-3.html
[6] http://www.atpm.com/12.01/paradigm.shtml

• • •

Nice article.

I am a new Mac owner (Mac Pro) after many years with Windows and am gravely disappointed with the way text looks. It looks like my monitor is running out of "ink."

Why don't more people (seemingly) care about this?

Why does Microsoft do this so much better than Apple? This may seem beside the point, but it seems a valid question when there are so few things Microsoft does better.

—*Mark F.*

• • •

I just got a 24″ iMac, but after one week I am back to Windows. The fonts just look so horrible. I admit that they are more print-like, but what's the point when you can't read them on-screen?

I have tried playing with the font-smoothing options. I also disabled font-smoothing altogether with Silk and TinkerTool. However, the fonts just don't render properly. For example, the font-spacing of Tahoma in iTunes is completely off. It works fine in Mail, though. It is funny, that iTunes looks much better in Windows than on Mac OS X.

This is my third attempt with Mac OS X (after I sold a PowerBook G4 and a Mac mini before they went Intel). At least I can use Windows on the iMac (including wireless keyboard and mouse) until Apple improves aliased font-rendering in Mac OS X.

I thought I could live with anti-aliased fonts in Mac OS X, but after a while my eyes tell me that they had enough. Hopefully, Apple will do something about it.

I realize that it is really a matter of personal taste, but Apple should know this. They should give us the option to turn anti-aliasing off *and* provide us with properly tuned fonts for smaller font sizes.

—*Roland*

> I've been seeing all these comments and just felt like a brief mention from my own perspective. Yes, the fonts are soft, and yes, it's completely a matter of personal taste. However, I, for one, have no issue with OS X's font smoothing. I can read it perfectly fine. So clearly it's different for each person. I simply wanted to say this because it should be noted that the smooth fonts aren't universally terrible. Only to some.

> In many cases, the only people who get involved in a forum like this about any "issue" are only the side who are complaining. Nothing wrong with that, but people who are happy with "the issue" are less inclined to spend time writing a comment. Being upset about "an issue" is what motivates people to leave comments.

> Thus, I'm breaking that mold and just saying that I think OS X's font smoothing looks fine, to my eyes.
> —*Lee Bennett*

• • •

A couple of additional remarks. Sorry to go on about this, but I am complaining because I have been left stranded in a computer desert!

For some people the anti-aliasing is far more than a matter of mere personal taste—it is the difference between a system they can use and one they can't.

This issue only appears to affect a minority of users such as myself. Most people have no trouble reading the smoothed fonts and like them, which is great for them—but there are a number of people like myself for whom it is a serious problem that renders OS X unusable.

I am happy for everybody who likes the smoothed fonts to keep using and enjoying them. But as Roland says above, why not just provide an option for the rest of us who can't actually read the smoothed text?

I would be perfectly happy with such an option and would never complain again. None of the fixes outlined in the article work for me and believe me, I have tried them all. The base vector font drawing on which the anti-aliasing is built is too wispy once you remove the anti-aliasing, and you simply can't remove the smoothing on some software packages.

Perhaps super high resolution screens are the only answer.

—*Clare O'Farrell*

• • •

I think this is more than just a matter of "preference." Arial vs. Verdana—that's personal preference. But is it "personal preference" for me to say that I want black text to be black (rather than having what amounts to white streaks in it)?

Nobody here is saying they "can't" read the fonts. No more than would we say that anyone "can't" read the fonts displayed on the first EGA and VGA screens that came out many years ago. But if Apple's text

of today looked like that perfectly legible text they would not exist for long.

Those screens of before rendered both graphics and text in a way that was representative of the limitations of the time. However the text on my Mac looks bad not because of the limitations of the hardware but because of the fact that somewhere along the line Apple apparently broke it. If the latter weren't true, it would look just as bad in Windows on the same hardware, and it doesn't.

Apple goes to a lot of trouble to make things look sleek. If there are that many people who really don't care that the text is ugly, then I guess we'll wait a while. I suspect people like me are here "complaining" because they have made an investment in what otherwise is a fine system and they want to give it a chance. And if more people would actually say something about what is lacking I think this will get fixed.
—*Mark Fraser*

• • •

I just want to re-iterate and insist again that for me (and for others) it is not just a case of "preference" or taste, or "ugly" fonts; it is a matter of actually being able to read the text (in any font) and use the computer. I have never had any problems of this kind before with reading computer screens, and still don't have a problem with OS 9 or with Windows. (I sincerely hope Windows doesn't go down the same path or I will really have a problem.)

After consultation with an optometrist, this was the explanation offered: if you zoom in on the characters in a smoothed font you will see they are made up of a whole lot of different colored pixels. Without smoothing, the pixels are all the same color. Some people's brains are able to detect the different colored pixels and aren't able to process where to focus the vision. Result: headaches and blurry vision.

As I said before, I would like to lobby Apple about this but don't know how to reach them. There are a whole set of advanced "universal access" options in OS X—I really think this problem needs to be attended to if "universal access" is going to be anything more than fancy "window" dressing.

As I said above, I have been a Mac user since 1984 and love the functionality of OS X—I just want to be able to access it—hence my insistent complaints on this matter!
—*Clare O'Farrell*

On the Road Again

Fittingly, I'm writing this column at the Park Cities Hilton in Dallas, Texas, where I find myself spending a quick evening and day in meetings. I don't travel nearly as often as I did in my former career, but there is still the out-of-town requirement that occasionally takes me away from hearth and home. This summer, however, was a different sort of a trip as I used a portion of a summer-long sabbatical to head back to Europe and see things that I had missed during my assignments there. That meant time in Oxford visiting my son, a week in a peaceful rental in the south of France, five full-throttle days in Rome and, finally, two weeks exploring selected parts of Spain. The trip totaled five weeks, and I knew there was no way I was going to be without my computer for that long. OK, the truth is I *never* travel without my computer. I know, it's a weakness, but it *is* a Mac!

Base Equipment

As I planned the electronic portion of the trip, I remembered the last time I was in London scurrying around trying to find a replacement cord that I had left behind. I was determined not to suffer a repeat. At the same time, however, my wife and I had made the commitment to travel light. Since I had the smaller of the two bags (no surprise there), I had to be practical and space/weight conscious. I decided to take my G4 PowerBook, a digital camera, a PDA, and my 40 GB fourth-generation iPod. That was the base requirement. Minus the camera, that's what I carried to Dallas this afternoon. The more difficult piece of the techno-puzzle was deciding what peripheral and supporting items I might need. What follows is my thinking on "the way to go."

The "Must-haves"

Clearly, the first thing that you need to take along is the power cord for each of the items in your equipment list. With laptop connectivity, however, there are some space savers. No need, for instance, to bring anything for your iPod other than a FireWire or USB connection cable. Apple kindly provided a common syncing/charging solution. On the PDA side, most PDA-makers market a USB syncing cable that does

the same thing. When shopping for a PDA cord for travel, though, beware of buying a "travel kit" that terminates in a plug instead of at the computer. If you get the plug version you will still need to bring a sync cord if you plan on connecting to your computer, and if you are traveling to a foreign country, plugs will be an issue—more on that in a minute.

I am unaware of any cameras that charge using USB, so don't forget that you will need your camera's battery charger. If you are leaving the country, that may well mean that you need to buy a new charger that is designed for the electrical system of the part of the world to which you are traveling. A bit of surfing will lead you to a number of possibilities, but I recommend, if you will be using a car, that your charger include an auto lighter charging option. Additionally, if you haven't already sprung for an additional battery, do it before you depart. In fact two extras wouldn't be a bad idea. You don't want to run out of power standing in front of Big Ben. Naturally, you will also need your camera-computer connection cord. That connection is one of the main reasons for taking your computer with you. I took over 3,000 pictures on our recent trip and was able to see the results each day. iPhoto is a great friend for the picture-taking traveler. By downloading every day, I automatically had a date-stamped record of the pictures I'd taken and was able to organize with ease.

Chief among the reasons for taking peripherals with computer connections is that, in so doing, your Mac acts as a power converter for them. All you need to do is plug your Mac into the local wall outlet and you're home free. But plugging into the outlet raises the issue of plug adapters. There are standard generic plug adapters but I recommend you stick with the Apple World Travel Adapter Kit ($40 in the power section at the Apple Store). The kit contains prongs for six different power systems around the world. Since your Mac's power system senses and adjusts to the power it finds, all you need is the replacement prong for your power brick—that's why the prong part is removable. I took two different prongs to Europe: one for England (nice people…weird plugs!) and one for the continent.

I recommend that when you get the adapter set, you use a permanent marker to indicate on each prong the region it supports. Some of the plugs look almost identical. They're not! By the way, using the adapters also means that you don't need to take the thick power cord. Save the weight. Also, if you're only taking an iPod, the kind people at Apple have standardized the plug assemblies on all the Apple power bricks, so this travel kit will allow you to charge your iPod as a stand-alone as well.

The Other Stuff

In addition to the basics, I decided to add a few extras. All of them were light-weight, and I thought they would be good to have along. As it turned out, some yes-some no.

The first item I added was a Belkin Digital Camera Link. About the size of an iPod, it allows you to insert a media card from your camera and upload your images to your iPod through the dock connector. I thought that there would be times when I was out for the day and would need to dump my pictures to make space for more. I did it once in five weeks. A much better solution would have been to use the $80 (they're now $40) to buy another media card.

Another not-so-good idea was the purchase of an airplane power cord. I had visions of connecting to aircraft power and having my own in-flight movies without worrying about battery life. I carried the cord from the US to England to France to Italy to Spain to England and back to the US and *never* saw a power outlet that looked remotely like the "universal adapter" in my briefcase. Can you spell e-B-a-y?

The most expensive extra item I purchased for the trip was a SecuriKey. The SecuriKey package (Pro package—$130 at the Apple Store) consists of two identical USB "keys" and associated software that allows you to restrict access to your computer or chosen files unless one of the keys is present. I have a lot of important and sensitive information on my laptop. I felt that I had to have a means to protect the data if I was going to carry it along with me, so I thought the expense was worth it. Did I use it? Almost all the time, and especially when we were moving from place to place. I would have hated losing my computer but I would have really hated somebody getting into my Quicken files.

I normally travel with two sets of earbuds: my Apple buds and a pair of Shure E3c's. The Shure pair is primarily for flights as the buds are very effective at blocking out ambient noise (they're great for lawn mowing also), but for sitting around I prefer the Apple set for comfort. As my wife was traveling next to me, I also brought along a splitter for my iPod headphone jack as well as a cassette interface for our car rentals. All the cars had CD players only—thanks.

The final thing that I added to my electronic kit was a headset with a boom mike so that I could use Skype VOIP. When I had Internet access, that was a real savings, as phone calls from Europe are ridiculously expensive.

So How Did It Go?

With the exceptions noted above, everything went pretty much as planned. I had absolutely no problems with computer power or using my computer to keep both iPod and PDA well charged. For the most part, I used my computer to keep photos organized and stored, as a Skype VOIP tool, and to record my travel journal while actually traveling.

Internet access along the way was a function of where we were at the time. In Oxford, a university town, I had no problem. In rural France, I had nothing. In Rome it was Internet cafes. In Spain it was hit or miss. A few cafes had wireless access points but not many. Wireless access is much less common than in the States.

Finally, one last word. Before some thoughtful person sends me e-mail suggesting that if I was serious about "getting away from it all" I should have left my computer behind, let me state for the record that I did take my office e-mail offline before departure, put up an away message, and didn't check my inbox until I was back home. I think that it's helpful to take a lot of things along for a trip, but there are absolutely some things that need to be left behind.

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MacMuser

by Mark Tennent, mtennent@atpm.com

A Song of Opposites

This time of year is always a bit Keatsian. No more the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, or at least not in the southeastern corner of the UK. Our gourds have swollen, and we have drunk the oozings from the cider press, just as John Keats[1] wrote in the 1800s. He was possibly the first Macintosh fan as well, penning his poem on hot-desking, "Sharing Eve's Apple." We do still have tomatoes growing outdoors, but our apples are long since eaten, and the plums and pears have already turned into jam and chutney. That is, those pears the darned gray squirrels didn't get their teeth into. These North American immigrants decimated our conference pears this year but were too scared to tackle the tree of unknown variety overhanging the pond.

We head towards gaining an extra hour in bed at the end of the month when the U.K. returns to GMT, a strange custom of playing with time. It was first mooted by Benjamin Franklin in 1784, largely as a joke, and 200 years later adopted around the world for some arcane reason ostensibly to do with giving longer hours of sunlight in the evenings. So why do we lose them in winter when we need them the most? The one hour of extra time is a poor substitute for dismal dusk starting halfway through the working afternoon. One year, the UK tried remaining on summer time, which I thought was brilliant, but apparently the Scots had different ideas—but then the men do wear skirts, so should we trust them entirely?

That's just what I feel about my new hard disk, a Western Digital MyBook Pro 500 GB.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats

Western Digital MyBook Pro external hard disk.

I bought it following glowing reviews in the computer press and mainly because it has USB and FireWire 400 and 800 sockets. My G5 has a front FireWire socket to spare, so it seemed time to start filling the unused 800 sockets at the rear. And all was well in the beginning. The drive, looking a little like a metallic dictionary in size and shape, is extremely rapid and comes complete with a full set of cables. The installation booklet is mainly for PC users with page after page of advice about connecting to Windows. The Mac section, one sentence or so, says "Bung it on and plug it in," or words to that effect.

After a few days, one becomes aware of an irritating hum coming from the drive that even now, propped on two thick pads of sponge, still manages to transmit to the sounding board of my desk. Not a big problem, but it adds to the humming, whirring, clicking cacophony of the office.

Then there are the enormous lights on the front, twin circles of tasteless design that must have seemed

a good idea at the time but, like the new Honda Civic, the verisimilitude is flawed in reality.

Honda Civic's new design, a matter of bling over taste.

The final straw came when, after installing Mac OS X 10.4.8, the drive no longer functioned properly on the FireWire 800 circuit. If the Mac goes to sleep when the drive is mounted, it won't be there when the Mac wakes up, requiring either a reboot or yanking the leads on the drive. It works fine under FireWire 400, though I haven't tested the USB operation (having no spare port).

Western Digital has told me: "There is no workaround. This is a known issue. We are aware of the problem and working on the solution." But as it also said, "We do not provide firmware updates." It will be interesting to see how Western Digital solves this one. Consequently, I cannot recommend the drive. Unlike the Honda Civic—which goes like a rocket on rails—if only Honda would redesign the rear end and dump the excess chrome, which, I understand, is considered de rigueur for the North American market. You can have your squirrels back, too.

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Writing Environments, Plus Two New Outliners

What a Writing Environment Is

This *ATPO*, we go back to our roots in one way, and stray in another.

To judge from the links to past columns, the most popular ones are those that listed the types of things that an outliner might do. Then we gave examples from existing outliners. The idea was that outline uses vary all over the place, and outliner users are often highly individual in how they work. So rather than talk about whether one product was better than another, it would be better to note what the various capabilities were and let readers decide which might suit them, and then follow the chain to a product.

Or bug the heck out of a developer to add a certain capability.

We'll do that now with writing environments, or at least begin to. Here's the method I plan. This column we'll just note the types of things I suppose should be on a list of capabilities to consider. You might call them features. We'll list them this time, with another list of the products we'll draw from for our examples. Then you'll have some time to set me right, correct, and add things. Next column, we'll redo the list, show examples, and give some discussion.

OK? It'll be like the old *ATPO* days.

Where we are deviating from the *ATPO* model is that many of the applications we'll look at don't use outlining. You know, usually I'm pretty strict about what we discuss here and at drawing the line around outliners. But I've had many requests to address writing, and it makes such sense to. Many *ATPO* users are in the outliner community because they use their outliners in workflows that produce some written output. I admit I am one of those. And it just doesn't make sense to talk about writing without starting with the actual writing process and seeing where it takes us.

The applications I propose to draw from are:

Avenir[a] $30

[a]http://returnself.com/avenir.php

BBEdit[a] $125

[a]http://www.bbedit.com/products/bbedit/

CopyWrite[a] $30

[a]http://www.bartastechnologies.com/products/copywrite/

Mellel[a] $49

[a]http://www.mellel.com

Glass Writer[a] $20

[a]http://www.glasswriter.com

NovaMind Screenwriter[a] $199 ($99 without screenwriting)

[a]http://www.nova-mind.com/index.html

Jer's Novel Writer[a] in beta

[a]http://jerssoftwarehut.com/index.shtml

Papyrus[a] $100

[a]http://www.rom-logicware.com/papyrus.htm

[Scrivener](http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html)[a] in beta

[a]http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html

[Microsoft Word](http://www.microsoft.com/mac/products/word2004/word2004.aspx?pid=word2004)[a] $239

[a]http://www.microsoft.com/mac/products/word2004/word2004.aspx?pid=word2004

[SuperNotecard](http://www.mindola.com/snc/index.html)[a] $29 ($34 with screenwriting)

[a]http://www.mindola.com/snc/index.html

[WriteItNow](http://www.ravensheadservices.com/)[a] $37.55

[a]http://www.ravensheadservices.com/

[Z-Write](http://www.stonetablesoftware.com/z-write/index.html)[a] $29

[a]http://www.stonetablesoftware.com/z-write/index.html

If you have others that we should consider, let me know. And of course we will also draw when appropriate from the *ATPO* power outliner list, which currently has these (leaving off the journaling ones):

[Ulysses](http://www.blue-tec.com/ulysses/)[a] $120

[a]http://www.blue-tec.com/ulysses/

Curio Pro[a] $129 (versions at $79, $39)

[a]http://www.zengobi.com/products/curio/

Mori[a] $40

[a]http://www.hogbaysoftware.com/product/mori

DEVONthink Pro[a] $80 (versions at $40, $20)

[a]http://www.devon-technologies.com/products/devonthink/index.html

NoteBook[a] $50

[a]http://www.circusponies.com

Inspiration[a] $69

[a]http://www.inspiration.com

NoteTaker[a] $70

[a]http://www.aquaminds.com

[OmniOutliner Pro](#)[a] $70 (standard version at $40)

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[a]http://www.omnigroup.com/applications/omnioutliner
/pro/

[Tao](#)[a] $34

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[a]http://blue-beach-systems.com/Products/Software/TA
O/en_index.html

[Tinderbox](#)[a] $192

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[a]http://www.eastgate.com/Tinderbox/

. . .and one of the two we add below. As with the process we followed when looking at outliners, if you know of a product on Windows or Linux that has features that are not available on OS X, please let me know and we'll include them.

The Capabilities List

Here are the various notions, features, and capabilities that have been suggested to me. Treat these like the outliner features: things that you might want, each one being something that someone intelligent absolutely must have.

More Than TextEdit

Whatever surrounds and supports the pane you actually do your writing in, that pane needs to support the most capable editor you can find. That means all sorts of little things that add up to big things. Since the least feature-rich you'll encounter is likely to be the system's built-in text editor—the same as used in TextEdit—we'll use that as a baseline. It's good enough for notes, but you might want better. I think there might be a long list of possibilities under this, including folding and conditional text—also, stuff such as split editors and multiple clipboards.

Cocoa?

You might expect that your writing environment will take clever advantage of everything Apple supplies, so far as system services and user interface goodies. Essentially, that means your environment needs to have been designed as a Mac-only application with Cocoa in mind.

Macros, Scripting

No matter how well the tool is designed, you might want just that one capability that would suit only you, or round out a peculiar workflow. That means you might need extensive tailorability, flexibility, extensibility. It may mean AppleScriptability, or a plug-in architecture. It might also mean programmable triggers such as glossaries and shortcuts.

Full Screen, Different Views

One of *ATPO's* reasons to be excited about outlining is because it allows you to shift focus from the entire document or its structure to focus on a single element on which you are working. This collection of features concerns the focus. It might be an outliner hoist, a full-screen writing mode, or some sort of other effect. It also covers the ability to switch from WYSIWYG

styles to styles and layouts more suitable for viewing, editing, writing.

Overall Structure

This collection of features is the opposite end: various means to see the whole document or some substantial part of it or its structure and the ability to relate the parts you are working on to that structure. Outlines of various types are common, but graphical layouts are common, too. This collection of features not only allows you to see and comprehend the structure, but also to enrich and modify it. So links and clones come into play in this bag.

Marginalia/Annotations

Now this one may not be optional. You need to have some way to annotate what you are working on. That might be by labels or tags, by column content, by notes, annotations, or by marginalia. Things you might be interested in noting are the progress, things to consider, or work to be done. Or you might note sources—all sorts of things. Some of these would be live only during the writing process, while others might live on as footnotes, endnotes, and sidenotes. I consider filtering to be associated with this, and smart folders.

Styles (With an Emphasis on Structural Elements: Tags)

We've done some columns on styles[1]. There's an awful lot to style management beyond setting text appearance for printing. It's all about adding structure to the document, all the way down to the character level. Much of this structure may relate to support for authoring.

Integration With Snippets and External References

This collection of features includes the ability to reference stuff not in the document and to collect stuff from all over to include in some phase of the life of the thing. It's non-trivial. We should include here tools to find and filter the things once collected or linked. Also of interest may be tools to massage or transform them as needed.

Export and Layout

Finally, an author generally needs to publish in some way. So composition and layout tools for whatever modes needed are important, or means to link to special-purpose tools for this. Let's include here all the variables and tables, indexes and such, that a good layout program would include. Alternatively, for Web, blog, hypertext, help, or whatever non-print mode, you need mode-specific publishing support. We'd include here version control and integration with content management systems. And we're not just talking text documents here; there's the whole array of media types and delivery.

EagleFiler

Leaving the zone of writing environments now, we look at a new application that qualifies for the *ATPO* power outliner list, EagleFiler. First, some disclosure. EagleFiler's developer is Michael Tsai who is C-Command Software[2] and the developer of SpamSieve[3], a very highly regarded spam filter. Michael is also the publisher of this fine periodical. ATPM is an all-volunteer effort, but if I got paid, I suppose Michael would be my boss. But I don't, and he ain't. Still, its a relationship I should mention.

EagleFiler's Icon

I think there will be a lot of attention given to this application, with reviews far more useful to you than this brief mention in *ATPO*. I'll generally outline what it is and then just focus on a few elements of interest.

In terms of market, it competes in some way with Yojimbo[4] and DEVONthink[5]. Both of those are repository-type applications with special attention given to ease of getting things in. Generally, once an item is in one of these applications it is intended to be relatively static. That differentiates this class of outliner from more writer-oriented and note-taking

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[1]http://www.atpm.com/11.06/atpo.shtml

[2]http://www.c-command.com

[3]http://c-command.com/spamsieve/

[4]http://www.atpm.com/12.06/yojimbo.shtml

[5]http://www.devon-technologies.com/products/devonthink/index.html

applications where the user is expected to create and evolve material within the thing.

Yojimbo is designed to be so simple[6] that the developer's mother can see all the way through it. It has no way to build structure and relate items, so it isn't interested in outlines. DEVONthink is at the other end of a spectrum. It supports nesting, cloning, and links. It has a useful "semantic grouping" assistant that finds internal structure based on matching words and phrases, allowing DEVONthink users to edit and create material. A recent version just added a "full screen" editing mode.
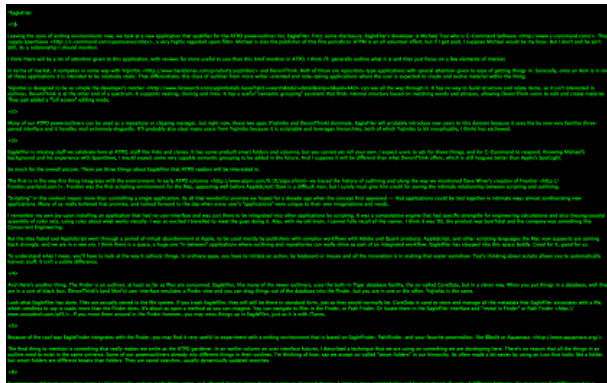
DEVONthink's Full Screen Mode

Many of our *ATPO* power outliners can be used as a repository or clipping manager, but right now these two apps (Yojimbo and DEVONthink) dominate. EagleFiler will probably introduce new users to this domain because it uses the (by now) very familiar three-paned interface and because it handles mail extremely elegantly. It'll probably also steal many users from Yojimbo because it is scriptable and leverages hierarchies, both of which Yojimbo (a bit inexplicably, I think) has eschewed.

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[6]http://www.listsearch.com/yojimbotalk.lasso?tab1=search&tab2=detail&skip=0&uid=440
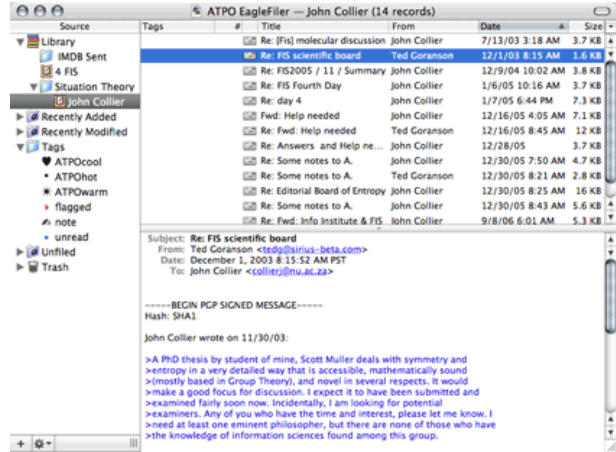
The EagleFiler Layout (Showing Mail)

EagleFiler is missing stuff we celebrate here at *ATPO*, stuff such as links and clones. It has some prebuilt smart folders and columns, but you cannot yet roll your own. I expect users to ask for these things, and for C-Command to respond. Knowing Michael's background and his experience with Spam-Sieve, I would expect some very capable semantic grouping to be added in the future. And I suppose it will be different than what DEVONthink offers, which is still leagues better than Apple's Spotlight.

So much for the overall picture. There are three things about EagleFiler that *ATPO* readers will be interested in.

The first is in the way it integrates with the environment. In early *ATPO* columns we traced the history[7] of outlining and along the way we mentioned Dave Winer's creation of Frontier[8]. Frontier was the first scripting environment for the Mac, appearing well before AppleScript! Dave is a difficult man, but I surely must give him credit for seeing the intimate relationship between scripting and outlining.

"Scripting" in this context means more than controlling a single application. It's all that wonderful promise we hoped for more than a decade ago when the concept first appeared—that applications could be tied together in intimate ways, almost synthesizing new applications. Many of us really believed that promise, and looked forward to the day when every user's "applications" were unique to their own imaginations and needs.

I remember my own joy upon installing an application that had no user interface and was just there to

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[7]http://www.atpm.com/9.10/atpo.shtml
[8]http://frontier.userland.com

be integrated into other applications by scripting. It was a computation engine that had specific strengths for engineering calculations and also (incongruously) assembly of color sets, using rules about what works visually. I was so excited that I travelled to meet the guys doing it. Alas, with my old brain, I cannot fully recall all the names. I think it was in 1993, the product was Sum Total, and the company was Concurrent Engineering Tools.

But the idea faded, and AppleScript went through a period of virtual abandonment at Apple, to be used mostly by publishers with complex workflows with Adobe and Quark products. AppleScript and other scripting languages the Mac now supports are coming back strongly, and we are in a new era. I think there is a space, a huge one "in between" applications, where outlining and repositories can really shine as part of an integrated workflow. EagleFiler has stepped into this space boldly. Good for it, good for us.

To understand what I mean, you'll have to look at the way it collects things. In ordinary apps, you have to initiate an action, by keyboard or mouse and all the innovation is in making that easier somehow. Tsai's thinking about scripts allows you to automatically harvest stuff. It isn't a subtle difference.

And there's another thing. The Finder is an outliner, at least so far as files are concerned. EagleFiler, like many of the newer outliners, uses the built-in Tiger database facility, the so-called Core Data, but in a clever way. When you put things in a database, well they are in a sort of black box. DEVONthink's (and Mori's) user interface emulates a Finder view, and you can drag things out of the database into the Finder, but you are in one or the other. Yojimbo is the same.

Look what EagleFiler has done. Files are actually stored in the file system. If you trash EagleFiler, they will still be there in standard form, just as they would normally be. Core Data is used to store and manage all the metadata that EagleFiler associates with a file, which, needless to say, is scads more than the Finder does. It's about as open a method as you can imagine. You can navigate to files in the Finder, or [Path Finder](#)[9]. Or locate them in the EagleFiler interface and "Reveal in Finder" or Path Finder. If you move them around in the Finder, however, you may mess things up in EagleFiler, just as it is with iTunes.

Because of the cool way EagleFinder integrates with the Finder, you may find it very useful to ex-

periment with a writing environment that is based on EagleFinder, Path Finder, and your favorite power editor, such as BBEdit or [Aquamacs](#)[10].

The final thing to mention is something that really makes me smile as the *ATPO* gardener. In an earlier column on user interface futures, I described a technique that we are using on something we are developing here. There's no reason that all the things in an outline need to exist in the same universe. Some of our power outliners already mix different things in their outlines. I'm thinking of how we accept so-called "smart folders" in our hierarchy. It's often made a bit easier by using an icon that looks like a folder, but smart folders are different beasts than folders. They are saved searches, usually dynamically updated searches.
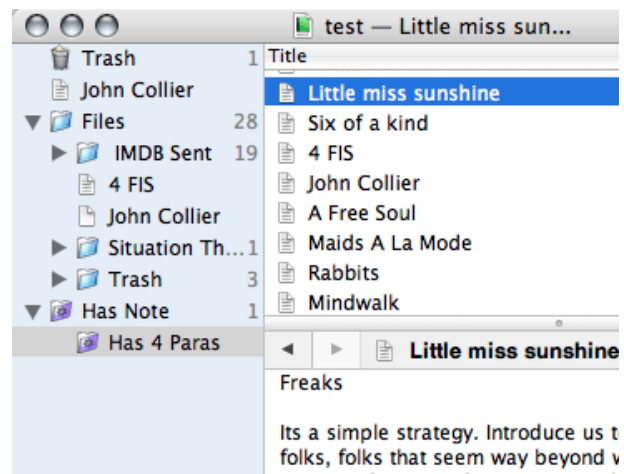
Mori with Nested Smart Folders

Suppose we added yet more item types to the hierarchy, and we made them active, and we allowed them to have drags to assign or change behavior. I claim to have invented this and have explored all sorts of different behavior. It's nice to see EagleFiler use it in a simple, elegant way. One sort of metadata that EagleFiler manages is the notion of a "tag." The user can create these and they appear in a Tags folder. If you drag a file in EagleFiler to one of the tags (which exists in the same source list as other folders) the file gets assigned that tag. Tags are user-defined and have an icon or badge associated with them. It's a clever UI for assigning metadata, and is generalizable to any outliner.
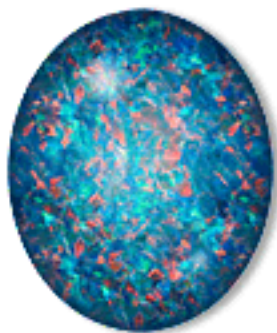
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[9] http://www.atpm.com/12.03/path-finder.shtml

[10] http://www.aquamacs.org
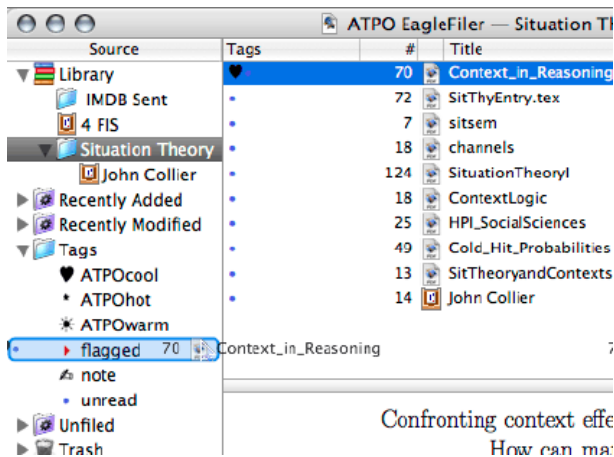
Dragging a Note to Assign a Tag

EagleFiler is $40.

Opal

Opal's Icon

In our survey of legacy outliners[11], we mentioned Acta. It was an amazing piece of work in part because it still worked well under Classic after all these years. Acta was where those flippy triangles were introduced to outlining, and it was one of the very first outliners that would be recognized as such today. David Dunham has kindly made Acta a free download for many years now.

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[11]http://www.atpm.com/10.03/atpo.shtml
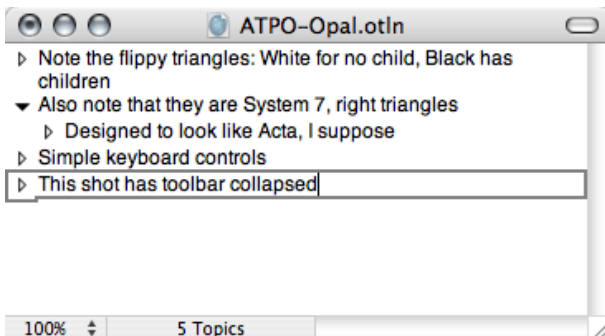
Opal

But now Apple is abandoning support for Classic, so David has re-imagined Acta in Cocoa for OS X, and the result is Opal[12], available for $32. Acta and Opal are "pure" outliners in the sense that there are only topics, what *ATPO* usually calls headers. That means there are no notes or comments, like you are used to seeing with most *ATPO* outliners. No links or clones either, and no named or level-specific styles.
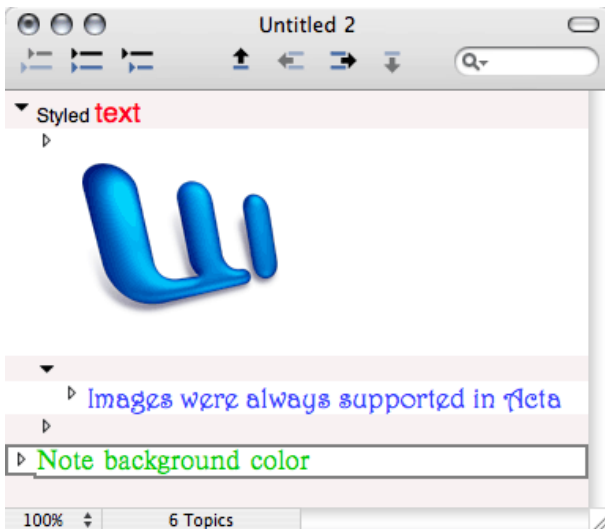

Opal Styles and Images

Entries are fully stylable, though. Drag and drop is well supported. You can intersperse graphics (but you apparently can't play media files). Links to external files and URLs are supported. You'll find moderately good keyboard and scripting facilities. It opens and saves OPML, but without note or column info, obviously. It has folding, hoist, and "filter," which is a sort of search facility.

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[12]http://a-sharp.com/opal/
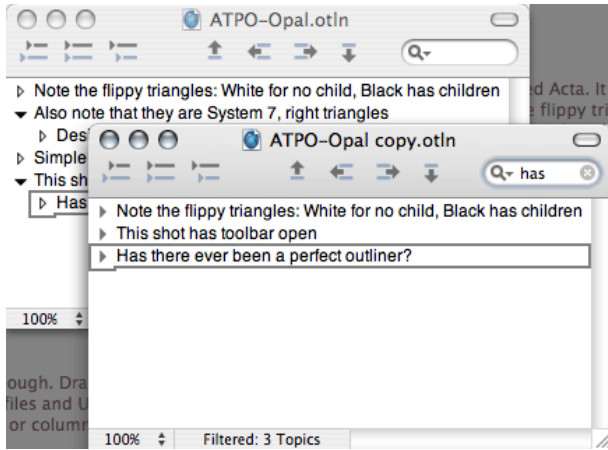
Filters

Tao in a way is its closest competitor, mirroring the more than a decade-old competition between MORE and Acta. (They are about the same price.) If you choose to use Tao without notes and columns and metadata (and palettes, oh those palettes!), you will find that Tao has the traditional outlining commands that Opal lacks, things such as combining and splitting topics.
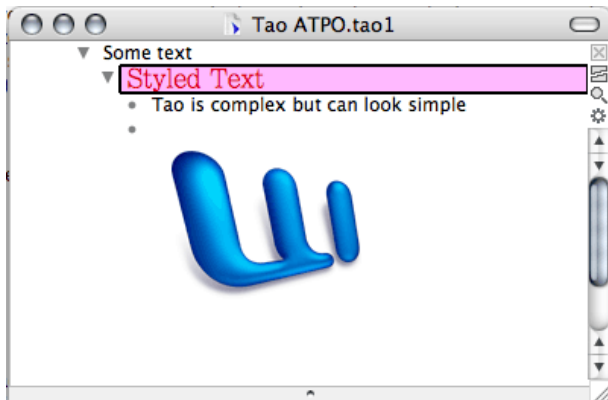
Tao's Simple View

But there's a joy in using something that is clean, apt, fast, and focused on pure outlines. And there's a special celebration that at least one of our legacy outliners, one of our oldest, has survived to be reborn in Cocoa.

Copyright © 2006 Ted Goranson, tgoranson@atpm.com. Ted Goranson is senior scientist of Sirius-Beta[13].

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[13] http://www.sirius-beta.com

PageSpinner 4.6.3: Quirky and Erratic

I am on a quest to find inexpensive applications that are capable of creating accessible Web pages. Web professionals need to know a lot to create truly accessible sites to the strictest levels of compliance, but I'm interested in the ordinary user.

I want to know whether these applications allow ordinary folk to achieve basic tasks such as adding alternate text to an image, marking up paragraphs, headings, and lists with the correct HTML tags, and using a good title for the page. These are the sorts of common things anyone creating a Web page, at whatever level, should be able to do. And they shouldn't have to fight the software to do it.

PageSpinner

PageSpinner[1] costs $30. It works with Mac OS X 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, and even Mac OS 9.1 and higher. Version 5 has been announced and supports Intel Macs. The PageSpinner package can be used free for up to 21 days to try it out.

The Process

I opened PageSpinner and chose a New Empty HTML Page from the Starting Points dialog. PageSpinner created a new HTML 4 page with a relevant doctype and `<head>` tags, and the cursor ready in the `<body>` portion of the page.

Aside: I was on my third or fourth visit to the Starting Points before I noticed that the button is actually labelled "New Emtpy HTML Page." I wonder how long that typo has been there?

I pasted in a few paragraphs of text and clicked the Live Preview button. As expected, my text had all run together, as it wasn't marked up with paragraph tags.

Paragraphs

It was easy enough to select each paragraph in turn and add `<p>` tags, either using the default Command-Return keystroke or the Toolbar button or menu item.

Another option was to select the text, choose Edit ▷ Convert ▷ Text to HTML... and then to

choose between various combinations of `<p>` and `<br>` tags.

It's an interesting quirk that when entering text by typing you can use Command-Return to create new paragraph tags as you type, but the new tags are created at the cursor. If your cursor is already inside an existing paragraph tag, then an invalid nest of tags is created. You must either press the arrow key four times (to move the insertion point past each character of the `</p>`) or click to move outside the existing closing tag.

This makes the shortcut almost useless. It would be a nice feature if the software could figure out where you were and what you were doing and allow you to just type fluidly, creating correct paragraph tags as you typed.

Character Encoding

The default character encoding seems to be iso-8859-1. I prefer UTF-8, but was unable to find any way at all to set PageSpinner to use it. If I used the New Page Assistant I could type in UTF-8 and PageSpinner would remember it for the session, but that memory would not survive restarting the application. The only other choice built in to PageSpinner is SHIFT_JIS.

Headings

Next I added a heading and came across a stumbling block: how to mark it up from the available tools. Finally I found it in the last place I'd think to look: under the Size menu.

It's been many years since I saw any strong connection between heading level and size—that's truly old-fashioned thinking. Thanks to stylesheets, we can make any level heading appear however we want it: big, small, green. While the size of a heading may decrease as its importance diminishes, these days it's arguably more common that we'll use similar sizes for the lesser headings and use color, font, or a style such as italics to distinguish heading levels.

I'd certainly expect to be able to assign headings from a toolbar button, but there isn't one. There is a button on the Toolbar to call up the HTML Assistant

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[1] http://www.optima-system.com/pagespinner/

where you can make numerous choices, including selecting headers of various levels, but it's long-winded for something that should be simple.

Emphasis

On the other hand, the Toolbar has the now-rather-redundant buttons for bold and italics. Under General Preferences it's easy to set the bold and italics buttons to enter `<strong>` and `<em>` tags, enhancing their usefulness.

Lists

Adding a list was interesting: I added a few list items, selected them, and clicked the List button on the toolbar. Each list item was correctly marked up with `<li>` tags, but the list tag itself (probably `<ul>` or `<ol>`) wasn't added. To add the list tags I had to select my text and use the List topic in the HTML Assistant. Making a list is therefore a two-step procedure, with the commands you need in two very different places. Odd.

At least I was able to create my properly marked-up list.

There is an option in the Preferences to enable a List menu, but a list remains a two-step procedure. Moreover, PageSpinner happily marks up empty lines with `<li>` tags, creating empty bullet points in the output.

As a Web professional, I hand code my pages, using a text editor and downloaded or homegrown AppleScripts to help. Perhaps I'm spoiled that my scripts remove empty lines from a list, but if I can do it with a small AppleScript then software people are paying for should certainly do it.

Photos

Next up was adding a photo. When I clicked the Toolbar button, the HTML Assistant dialog box appeared. It was easy to browse for my image, set various attributes, and Insert the image. Unfortunately, PageSpinner was happy to allow me to insert my picture without entering anything in the Text Description text box. The resulting code also didn't include the empty `alt` tag that might be appropriate in this circumstance.

When I undid the insertion, added `alt` text, and clicked Insert, the `alt` text appeared as expected.

Not every image requires a text equivalent, but every image does require `alt` text. It's simply a matter of what you choose to enter: sometimes a description of the image, sometimes wording reflecting the function of the image, sometimes a space or a empty string, i.e. no text. The `alt` text attribute, however, must not be omitted.

PageSpinner needs to handle this differently.

Good `alt` Text

`Alt` text is also not the same as a "text description," and it doesn't actually help anyone to equate the two.

If I were writing a page about how to distinguish a cat from a dog, I may have photos of both, and the `alt` text may be appropriately "cat" and "dog" respectively.

If I used those same cat and dog photos simply as decoration, the appropriate `alt` text may well be " " (a space).

If I used a cat photo as a button for "next page," then appropriate `alt` text would be "next page," not "photo of a cat." It's the function of the image that's crucial. Occasionally that may require describing the image, but often it does not.

Honestly, the best way to really grasp what `alt` text is and how it needs to work is to spend a day or a week surfing the Web with the images turned off (mimicking the experience of a blind visitor, or Google). You'll soon understand two things:

1. what `alt` text is and why it's absolutely necessary.

2. how incredibly frustrating the Web can be without correctly marked-up images.

What you won't understand is the experience of the blind visitor. If there is no `alt` text at all, then a blind visitor often hears the path and filename instead. Here's a genuine path and filename example from a CMS I use daily:

```
/NR/rdonlyres/E1D2C882-5CE3-46A8-950A-6D14EC
70FD08/0/david.jpg
```

Just imagine listening to that even once or twice per page!

For a truly enlightening experience, download the [video](#)[2] of Darren Fittler's presentation at the Webstock conference held in Wellington, May 2006.

Miscellaneous Tools

PageSpinner makes it easy to preview the document, with a built-in viewer or in a browser. This is very handy for seeing how the page is coming along.

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[2] `http://webstock.org.nz/recordings.php`

The globe in the menu bar is the icon for Web Tools, including several validators. Make a choice and confirm you wish to open the link in your Web browser. The validator's page opens up and you can proceed from there.

PageSpinner also has an AppleScript menu, with some supplied scripts. You can also create your own scripts and add them to the menu. When I tried the script to paste a text file into an existing XHTML Strict document it stepped me through a sequence of about three operations. The last was to convert the text to HTML. Unfortunately, while PageSpinner added <p> tags, it didn't add the closing tags required by XHTML, creating an invalid page.

My Conclusion

PageSpinner 4.6.3 is quirky and erratic. Version 5 has been announced, and I would hope it's been substantially overhauled. While PageSpinner allows its users to create the kind of basic, accessible Web page this series has been aiming for, it doesn't make it very easy, and it sometimes work against the user. My quest continues.

Useful Links

- Guidelines on alt texts in img elements[3]   The fundamentals: replacement, not description, Jukka "Yucca" Korpela.

- Alt text is an alternative, not a tooltip[4] Roger Johansson, 456 Berea St.

Related Articles

- Web Accessibility: Nvu: impressive and powerful[5], ATPM 12.10, October 2006.

- Web Accessibility: RapidWeaver: A Useful Tool in Need of Sharpening[6], ATPM 12.09, September 2006.

- Web Accessibility: Sandvox: Sand in the Eyes[7], ATPM 12.08, August 2006.

- Web Accessibility: The Clayton's Web[8], ATPM 12.07, July 2006.

- Web Accessibility[9], ATPM 10.01, January 2004.

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[3]http://www.cs.tut.fi/~jkorpela/html/alt.html
[4]http://www.456bereastreet.com/archive/200604/alt_text_is_an_alternative_not_a_tooltip/
[5]http://www.atpm.com/12.10/web-accessibility.shtml
[6]http://www.atpm.com/12.09/web-accessibility.shtml
[7]http://www.atpm.com/12.08/web-accessibility.shtml
[8]http://www.atpm.com/12.07/web-accessibility.shtml
[9]http://www.atpm.com/10.01/web-accessibility.shtml

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[10]http://mactips.info
[11]http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0321450191/

How To

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Activity Monitor: How to Keep Tabs on Your Mac

For some Mac users, one of the more interesting things about each new computer purchase or major OS upgrade has been poking around the hard drive to see what interesting pieces of software got included as extras. The usefulness of AppleWorks, MacWrite, and MacDraw was fairly obvious, but some of the more recently bundled software has been little-understood or under-utilized. That realization led to my first Automator article[1]. Now I have a new candidate for most underutilized application. When was the last time you opened Activity Monitor?

Just What Is Activity Monitor?

As a multitasking, multi-user operating system, Mac OS X usually has a dizzying array of tasks going on simultaneously. As I write this article, I have Safari, two word processing programs, MPEG Streamclip, and Mail running simultaneously. Meanwhile, my wife's account is running another program. That's just the tasks that I know about. What about all the underlying tasks that the operating system starts without my knowledge? How do I keep tabs on all of that activity?

Open the Applications folder of your boot drive. Tucked inside the Utilities folder is a program called Activity Monitor. It gives Unix-challenged Mac users such as myself a more comfortable means of investigating the inner workings of our systems. Versions of OS X prior to 10.3 included a program called Process Monitor that allowed users to examine the processes[2] running on the Mac; Activity Monitor yields much more information. Disk input and output, network throughput, CPU utilization, memory usage, and processes can all be examined in Activity Monitor.

Overview of Activity Monitor

The first few times I opened Activity Monitor I was more than a little intimidated. If that has happened to you, put your fears aside and let's do a little exploration. Locate Activity Monitor in the Utilities folder and launch the program. If you don't see the main window choose Activity Monitor from the Window menu.

When the window appears, the columns listed may be vary slightly depending upon whether you have done any prior exploration, but the window will look something like this:
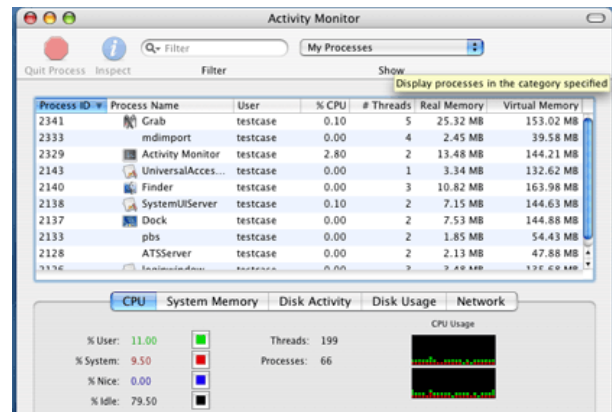
The Main Activity Monitor Window

The large red button in the toolbar allows you to quit active processes. Click on the name of a process once to select it and push this button. The resulting sheet will give you the option to Force Quit, Cancel, or Quit. Read this sheet carefully before you answer. The messages are not always the same. For many processes you will get a generic message asking whether you want to quit, but some processes provide a bit more information. Attempt to quit the "login-window" process, for example, and the resulting quit sheet will inform you that this will log you out of the system. We'll discuss some uses for this button in a moment. For now, don't quit anything.

The large blue Inspector button is unavailable until you select a process. Once a process is selected, clicking the Inspector brings up another window with additional information about that specific process. You can examine memory usage, additional statistics, and open files and ports. You can even sample what's happening with that process. File most of the results under the heading of "information only a programmer could love." There may be some instances,

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/12.07/automator.shtml
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_%28computing%29

29

though, where a support technician may request this information.

The Filter field allows searching for specific processes, while the pop-up menu offers several options for how you want the processes organized in the Activity Monitor window. My favorite views are "All Processes Hierarchically" and "My Processes." The former shows processes spawned by other processes, while the latter shows processes associated with the current user account.

It's All in the Process

The heart of the Activity Monitor window is the list of processes and various tidbits of information about each process. Your view of the Activity Monitor window may not have every column of available information active. With the main window open, take a quick trip to the View menu and choose Columns. Any columns that are checked will appear in the main window. The following columns are available: Process ID, Private Memory, User, Shared Memory, %CPU, Virtual Memory, CPU Time, Messages Sent, # Threads, Messages Received, # Ports, Kind, Real Memory.

Let's just take a quick glance at some of the more useful pieces of information.

The Process ID is a number assigned to each process on the machine. Even activities that are not usually visible in the Dock or Force Quit dialog are processes and thus have a process number assigned to them. Sorting the list by ID number can give you an idea of which processes were last launched on your Mac, even if it was not launched from your account. For example, while preparing this article I launched a word processor that the system assigned a three-digit ID number. Sometime later I launched a second instance of the same program while logged in as a different user. That instance of the program was assigned a four-digit ID number. Knowing the last process launched can help pinpoint sudden system slowdowns. Note, however, that after it assigns the maximum process ID, OS X will wrap around and start re-using the low-numbered IDs.

The User column makes it possible to identify which processes were started by which user account. If multiple users are logged into the system and Activity Monitor is set to show all processes, processes are shown in the main window no matter which account initiated that particular process. Several important system tasks, such as the kernel task, are assigned to the root user and cannot be killed unless you are logged in as the root user.

The %CPU column shows how much of the CPU's resources are devoted to a particular task. The percentages will vary quite a bit with many processes staying at or near zero until some activity puts that process to use. Although some processes can report high percentages, most will stay below 20% unless they are part of some processor-intensive task. If an application is open but not actively performing a task its percentage may well be very low.

If I activate the Kind column, the software I use regularly appears in the list as PowerPC. None of my software would show up in this list as Intel, since my system pre-dates those machines, but that could be useful information for some users.

If that wasn't enough information for you, the tabs at the bottom of the Activity Monitor window provide a graphic representation of system performance. CPU usage, system memory, disk activity, disk usage, and network activity are all graphically represented. Simply click on a tab to see the relevant graph.

What Can I Do With All That Information?

We'll discuss using Activity Monitor to track down some performance issues next month, but in the meantime here's how to turn Activity Monitor into the ultimate force quit dialog.

Macs usually perform very reliably, but if you experiment with them enough from time to time you will experience a situation where one or more applications stop responding. Even after you have waited for what seems like an eternity the offending program refuses to respond. I had this happen recently when an application was unable to read some corrupted data. I didn't want to power down the entire system because I had other applications open with unsaved work. What to do?

Most long-time Mac users know that under these circumstances simultaneously pressing Command, Option, and Escape brings up a Force Quit dialog that allows you to click on the offending program and force it to quit. Alternately you can Option-click a program's icon in the Dock and choose Force Quit. That technique works much better now than it ever did under OS 9, but what if the all the programs in that box appear to be functioning as expected? That probably means that the problem is due to a background process whose name does not appear in

the usual dialogs. Enter Activity Monitor and the superhero version of the force quit. Here's how it works:

1. Launch Activity Monitor and bring up the main window.

2. As you look through the list of processes, those that are stuck usually appear in red. If you cannot find the offending process, change the list to show all processes. Once you have identified the problem, click on that process.

3. Now choose the Quit Process button at the top of the window. In the sheet that appears, choose Quit or Force Quit. You will know when that process quits since it disappears from the list.

I have started calling this procedure the Super Quit. It has two advantages over the usual method for force quitting applications. First, this procedure allows you to quit background processes that do not appear in the Force Quit dialog. Ever have to quit the Dock? Dread those Unix commands? This is one solution. Second, if multiple users are logged into a Mac, it allows you to quit a process initiated by another user. Here's how that procedure works:

1. Launch Activity Monitor and choose Other User Processes from the pop-up menu.

2. Locate the process that you would like to terminate. If more than one user has the same process running, make sure that you look at both the process name and the user name to identify the process.

3. Single click the process as before and choose Quit Process. This time, since you are quitting a process started by someone else, you will be asked for an administrator password. Simply enter your password when prompted.

Before you use either of these procedures, here are a few things to keep in mind. It will make your life easier and perhaps prevent the loss of important data.

1. Before initiating a standard Force Quit or either of the above procedures, wait for a

bit to see if the offending process will resolve itself. All of the force-quit methods will result in loss of unsaved work. Sometimes a program that appears "frozen" is simply being forced to work more slowly due to limited resources.

2. Be careful when quitting processes started by other users. I suggest this as a last resort since it will cause the loss of any unsaved work affected by that process. If the user has not saved the 500th page of a next great novel, you're not going to make friends by needlessly quitting the word processor.

3. While many processes have names that you will recognize, there are other processes with names that give little or no clue to their function. Did you know, for example, that when Classic is launched it appears in Activity Monitor's list as TrueBlueEnvironment? Neither did I until recently. Be very careful and use these procedures only when necessary. Here is a partial list of some of the more important processes[3] to get you started.

This should get you through the basics of Activity Monitor for the time being. Next month we'll use this information to identify some system performance issues. Does your favorite application have a memory leak? Is it making use of both processors when needed? Do you really need additional memory? We'll find out together next month.

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[3]http://www.westwind.com/reference/OS-X/background-processes.html

Desktop Pictures

Butterfly Garden

This Month's Desktop Pictures[1]

These butterfly garden images were taken by Lee Bennett with a Nikon D100. Resizing and color enhancement were all performed in Adobe Photoshop CS2.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the desktop pictures archives[2].

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.
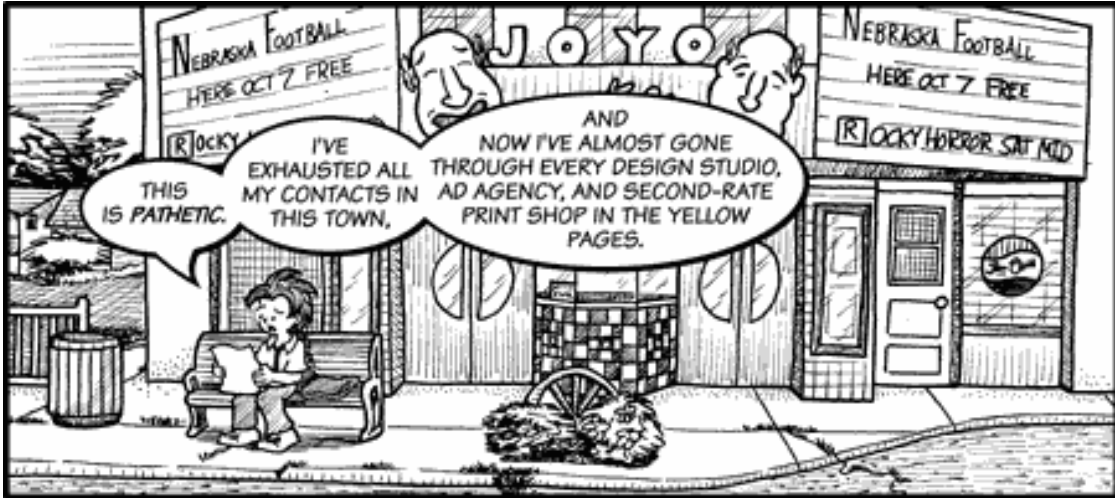
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[1] http://www.atpm.com/12.11/butterflies
[2] http://www.atpm.com/Back/desktop-pictures.shtml

Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com

36

EarthDesk 3.5.4

Developer: Xeric Design[1]
Price: $20
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3, Quick-
     Time 6.5.2. Universal[2].
Trial: Feature-limited (watermark and
     maximum of five items in Favorites list).

Outstanding.

That's actually all this review needs to say. Se-
riously, if I owned a business and wanted to hang a
Geochron[3] on a wall in the lobby, I'd quite likely ded-
icate a Mac mini, a 30″ Cinema Display, and a copy
of EarthDesk to the task.

I already suggested in my original review[4] that
EarthDesk may actually surpass a Geochron's capa-
bility since it indicates regions where the moon is and
isn't above the horizon. Nearly four years and two full
integer versions later, I'm more sure than ever that
EarthDesk is better. For one thing, thanks to popu-
lar request from EarthDesk users, the global display
of cloud coverage is now a feature.

Just as cool is that when EarthDesk is running on
a Mac that supports multiple monitors, each display
can be a completely independent EarthDesk view. I
have no way to test beyond two monitors, but I sus-
pect the limit for how many displays EarthDesk sup-
ports is equal to the number of displays your Mac
supports.

There's really only one additional feature Xeric
Design could incorporate to make EarthDesk unde-
niably superior to a real Geochron—add an option
for the various calendar and time zone markings that
Geochrons have. Maybe that's what Xeric Design's
Time Palette[5] application is all about, but that's an
entirely different application.

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[1]http://www.xericdesign.com/earthdesk.php
[2]http://www.apple.com/universal/
[3]http://www.geochronusa.com
[4]http://www.atpm.com/9.01/earthdesk.shtml
[5]http://www.xericdesign.com/timepalette.php

Any projection, any zoom level, realistic or political map
view, clouds or no clouds…it's *your* EarthDesk!

Another cool feature is that map projections that don't
occupy the entire screen can optionally be transparent in the
non-map areas. This enabled me to set a static starfield
wallpaper normally in OS X and run an EarthDesk globe on
top of it.

You might remember that I only raised three
small points of concern in the first EarthDesk re-
view. Let's revisit those:

*Menu Bar or Preference Pane vs. Application in
the Dock*

This one's definitely a matter of opinion. There are some applications I don't think need to live in the Dock, and EarthDesk is one of them.

EarthDesk Images Remain When EarthDesk Quits

This is now an option. There is a preference to have the original desktop picture restored if you quit EarthDesk.

Automatic Daylight Saving Time

The developer told me back then that automatic adjustment for Daylight Saving was something that would very likely show up within a few minor version updates. It did.

Deep Thoughts Redux

The idea of using an expensive Cinema Display instead of a Geochron seemed ironic four years ago. But now, at just two grand, a 30″ display costs $1,500 less than the 23″ did back then!

I don't imagine I'll ever have enough play money to dedicate this kind of Mac setup just for displaying EarthDesk in a lobby, but I do keep EarthDesk always running at home and at work. It has been 100% stable, the map image quality is superb, the early problems with cloud updates (which weren't technically EarthDesk's fault) are almost entirely gone, and I *still* get comments from visitors who are impressed when they see EarthDesk on my screen.

Probably the only sad thing is that I can no longer truthfully tell those passersby that EarthDesk is only available for the Mac!

RouteBuddy 1.1.1

**Developer:** RouteBuddy[1]
Price: $100 for application; $40-70 for various maps[2].
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9. Universal[3].
Trial: Fully-featured (watermark and maximum of 30 objects).

As best I can tell, RouteBuddy is the first (and only, at this moment) mapping application for Mac OS X that allows you to connect a supported USB-enabled GP and interact with a live map display. Mac users have waited a long time for a single application that accomplishes this function with no extra software or hacks.
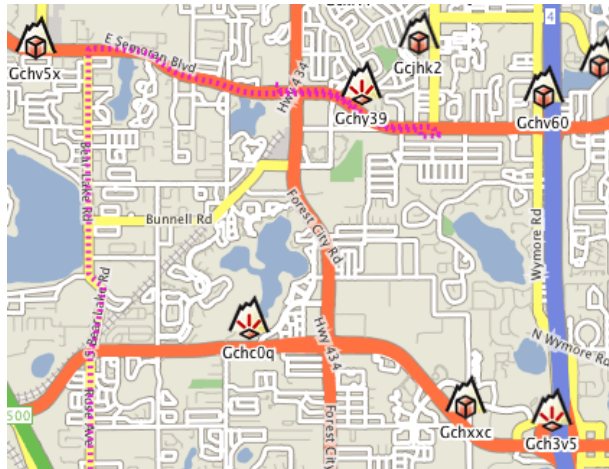
Unfortunately, RouteBuddy is not one of those rare "perfect-out-of-the-gate" version 1.x products. While I applaud that Mac users finally have this kind of tool, the application still feels as though it's a beta—unfinished. I wavered between a Good and Okay rating, but sided for Good only because RouteBuddy does accomplish its core functions very well. The quality of map and point of interest data is 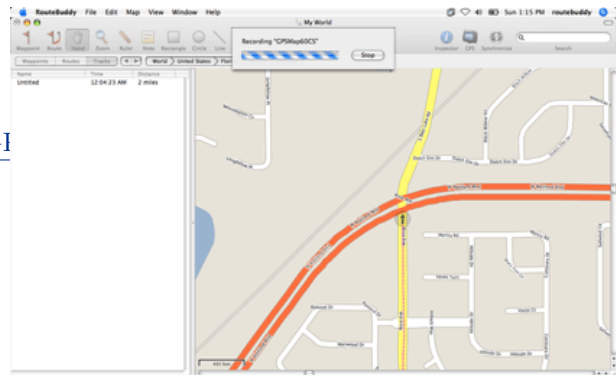excellent, using data from Tele Atlas, which is also used by Google Maps and Google Earth. The live tracking is responsive and accurate. Also, the recent version 1.1.1 update will make Geocachers happy thanks to the addition of .LOC and .GPX waypoint support.

Recording a live track. Be sure you set your desired zoom level before recording, because you can't change it until recording is done.

Performance

Topping the "bad" list is the application's sluggishness. I might feel differently if I were on a brand-new Intel-based Mac, but a 1 GHz PowerBook G4 with a GB of memory ought to have enough oomph for RouteBuddy. I even tried running in a fresh user account to make sure none of the items I normally run were bogging things down, and moving around a map still felt like I was wading through molasses. If I clicked and dragged the map to slide it in a direction, I'd only go a few dozen pixels before I saw the blue "Loading" region and had to sometimes wait 10–20 seconds or more for that portion of the map to load and be displayed. Google Maps downloads this data from the Internet before it can display it to a visitor, but it manages to do it quickly. Shouldn't accessing it from a map data file on a hard drive be even faster?

Routes

Creating a route is an exercise in patience. The time RouteBuddy takes to calculate which roads to follow after marking a route is no faster than map loading

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[1]http://www.routebuddy.com
[2]http://order.kagi.com/cgi-bin/store.cgi?storeID=6F CMQ
[3]http://www.apple.com/universal/
[4]http://www.routebuddy.com/support/devices/

time. Even Garmin's MapSource on my very old and slow Pentium II calculates routes faster.

The quality of the route can leave something to be desired, too. Sample routes that I created often took me through completely out-of-the-way roads. In one case, it even had me leaving a highway to go through residential streets and return to the same highway not far from where it veered off!

The worst part about route creation is the inability to use the zoom tool and hand slider while defining the route. If you switch to one of those tools, you'll completely lose your route setup, forcing you to start over. Yes, you can zoom with the Command–Scroll Wheel feature using a mouse, but if you aren't using a mouse and have an older PowerBook that predates the trackpad scroll feature, you're out of luck.

Regardless of whether you have a mouse, the only way to scroll the map around while in the middle of defining a route is with the window scroll bars, clicking the arrows or the scroll area to move one bit at a time. Beware of dragging the scroll widgets. The scroll bar area represents the entire map. A few pixels worth of scroll bar drag and, whooooosh, you may find yourself going from Orlando to some nowhere spot in the middle of Texas!

Here's the best way I found to fine-tune a route: first, define standalone waypoints in advance that will be points you want to pass as part of your route, including the beginning and ending points, then zoom out and create a general estimate of your route just with temporary starting and ending points. Don't even worry about being accurate with them. Next, double-click the route and use the panel that appears to add and rearrange your previously created waypoints, including correct start and end points. Feel free to delete the rough start and end points afterward.

Remembering Window Locations a Bit Too Well

Those who use a second monitor attached to a laptop must be wary about leaving a map window in the second monitor. I took my laptop to the car and discovered, after booting it up and launching Route-Buddy, that my default map window was not visible. Apparently, RouteBuddy saved its position on the second display and was still trying to put it there, even though the display wasn't attached. This is *not* a Mac OS bug. I repeatedly leave my Safari browser window on my secondary display at home, and it du-

tifully resets to the primary laptop display when I boot up while out on the road.
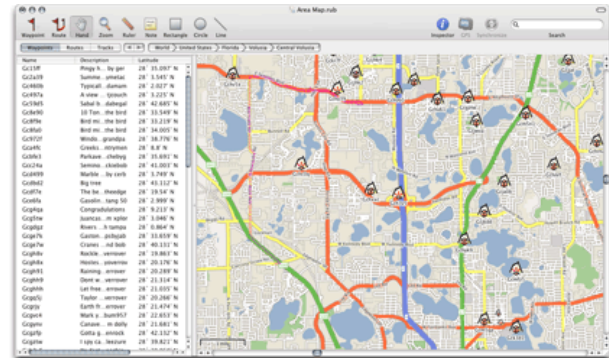
The iTunes-esque bread crumb buttons were often useless. All of my RouteBuddy testing was done in the western and northwestern regions of metro Orlando, in Orange and Seminole Counties. The buttons, as seen above, almost always indicated I was in central Volusia County.

Document Corruption

Also on the bug list is a condition I encountered that no longer allowed me to save a map document file. I suppose it somehow became corrupted. The only way I could close it (or even quit RouteBuddy) was to not save that map window. I don't, however, think this was RouteBuddy's fault. I discovered today that my Garmin's USB jack has recently become damaged and will no longer make a reliable connection. My repeated attempts to keep the USB cable attached probably confused RouteBuddy. Several times, this problem of mine caused RouteBuddy to crash—possibly corrupting my document file. Fortunately, I was able to keep a connection long enough to record a sample track, seen in the first figure, above.

No Address Data

If you're using a route as a guide to drive somewhere, you'd better have a navigator in the car who can focus on the computer and tell you when a turn is approaching. I found no function for turn-by-turn directions—something that should be added. Mac OS X has a built-in speech synthesizer—why not use it to announce upcoming turns? The reason might be that there doesn't seem to be any street and address data in the maps. This probably explains why, as stated earlier, a route I created needlessly took me off of a highway. Considering the price tag of the maps, I definitely think this data should be included.

Users should be able to type in a street address to have the map hone on that area.

Tool Bloat?

I'd love for someone to tell me the purpose of the Rectangle, Circle, and Line tools because I'm at a loss. They can't be labeled, and they don't seem to interact with any other part of RouteBuddy that I can see. The Note tool might be a bit more valuable, but you have to click on the note to read it. In addition to the regular note, it should have a title field that appears beneath the icon, just like regular waypoints.

Paltry Toolbar Item Availability
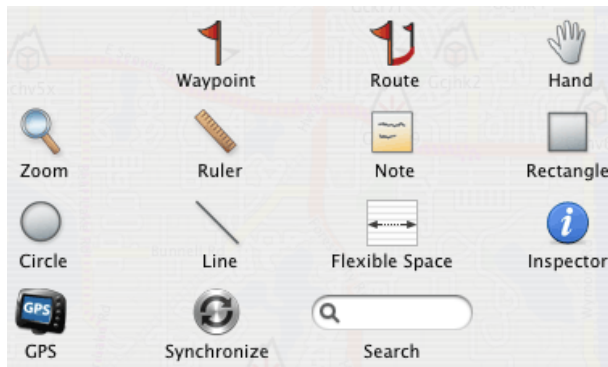
In the case of RouteBuddy's toolbar, more would definitely mean better.

First of all, at least two (or more) standard OS X toolbar items are not available—Space (as opposed to Flexible Space) and Separator. A toolbar Customize button is also missing, which I believe is normally always available. Since RouteBuddy has printing functions, it stands to reason the Print button should also be present. On second thought, maybe it shouldn't. Two attempts in a row to use the standard "Preview" function in the Print window (I don't own a printer at home) resulted in RouteBuddy freezing, requiring a Force Quit.

Besides these OS-standard toolbar buttons, there are numerous RouteBuddy functions that I'd love to have available in the toolbar, such as recording a track; accessing the Device, Inspector, and Navigator windows; zooming in, out, and to fit; the point of interest locator; and the various "Go To" items.

Scorecard

I had high hopes for RouteBuddy. I'll admit that my hopes were perhaps too high and that I'm be-

ing too harsh in this review. But I can't help but be harsh when I found myself wishing I had an old PC laptop so I could use Garmin's Windows-only MapSource application while on the road instead of RouteBuddy. I'll also admit that even though MapSource is the only application that can sync maps into my Garmin GPSMAP 60CS, and I feel that it outperforms RouteBuddy, MapSource pales in comparison to Microsoft Streets and Trips. That's right, your conclusion is correct. I really am suggesting that Streets and Trips is substantially better (and cheaper) than RouteBuddy. But that is moot since Streets and Trips, like MapSource, is only available for Windows.

We Mac users like to think that Mac software is superior, right? OK, that's not a universal truth, but we still like to think it. With that mentality, RouteBuddy should be looking at the best equivalent product on the Windows platform and aspiring to be even better. RouteBuddy may never be able to approach the selling price that Streets and Trips users enjoy (Microsoft could quite justifiably charge more for it), but I see no reason it couldn't reach and surpass the user experience.

VirtueDesktops 0.53

Developer: Tony Arnold[1]
Price: free (donationware)
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4. Universal[2].

Computationally, I grew up in the Microsoft DOS environment way back in the early 1980s. I learned to work with the command line; that mode works for me. I changed jobs in 1993 and decided to leave the DOS world. The multi-tasking application I used, Quarterdeck's Desqview, was in trouble and trying to cope with the changes in the personal computer world. Microsoft's Windows was coming on strong and end-users were abandoning the command-line DOS for Windows. I had already begun my migration from DOS because I found myself installing DOS ports of Unix tools on my system. After tinkering briefly with Windows 3.1, I abandoned DOS/Windows and installed my first Linux distribution.

Of course, the Intel 80486 platform I used didn't have the horsepower to run X-Windows effectively, so I remained in text-mode, using the multiple consoles available under Linux to do the same thing I'd done with Desqview all those years. After a couple of years, I finally traded up to the Pentium-class systems and could run X-Windows. While my work was still mostly done in the command shell, I used a few graphical programs to do things such as e-mail and Web browsing.

Enter the Unix "pager." The pager is a small graphical program running under X-Windows that allows the user access to n virtual desktops. The number of virtual desktops, n, is configurable by the end-user. After some experimentation, the number for me was nine. It allowed me to have associated tools open and running together on a desktop in a fashion that made sense. (Well, it made sense to me.)

Several years passed and I continued to work with Linux. But, with more work-related travel, I found myself with a Windows notebook computer for travel, and I was back to running Windows again—and Linux! Arrgh! Fast forward to 2003, and

I decided to give a PowerBook a try. I began the search for a single computer to do all of my work.

Given the Unixy nature of OS X, I decided to find a pager application similar to what I used under Linux. I found CodeTek's VirtualDesktop Pro[3], tried it, and bought it. I expect to review this application in the future when CodeTek releases an Intel-compatible version. When I bought my MacBook Pro, the CodeTek application would not run, so I was forced to seek an alternative.

I found and settled on VirtueDesktops. It runs on Intel-based Macs. In fact, it runs very well.

Installation was simple. I downloaded the archive, expanded it, and copied the program to my Applications directory. A quick double-click and we were up and running. I used the Preferences window to choose the number of virtual desktops I wanted to use, saved the results, and restarted the application. I also set the application to load on login, so I don't have to start the program manually every time I use my Mac.


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[3]http://www.codetek.com/ctvd

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[1]http://virtuedesktops.info
[2]http://www.apple.com/universal/
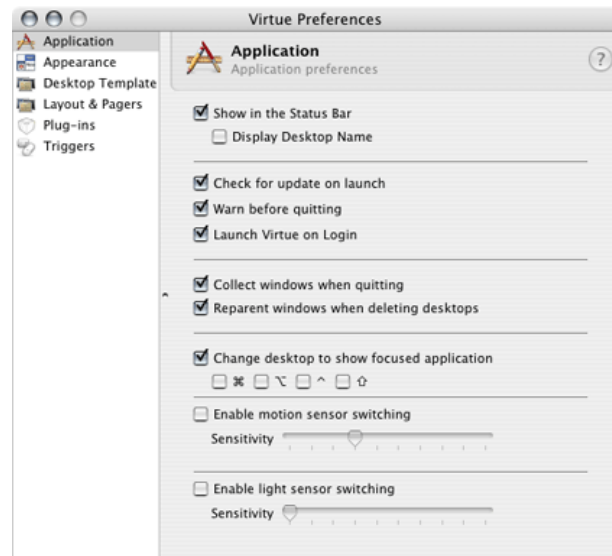
Use

Mark Tennent mentioned VirtueDesktops in last month's [MacMuser](#)[4], but decided he didn't like the multiple-desktop paradigm. After a few days of frustration, Mark decided this paradigm is not for him. That's perfectly OK—they call these personal computers for a reason.

For me, though, this is my preferred operating environment. I currently run six virtual desktops. My browser lives in one (and sometimes a repository such as Yojimbo or Mori), Mail and iCal (and sometimes Address Book) live on another, TeXShop and a Finder window or two live on another, and iTunes lives in yet another. That leaves me a spare if I need another tool or toolset.
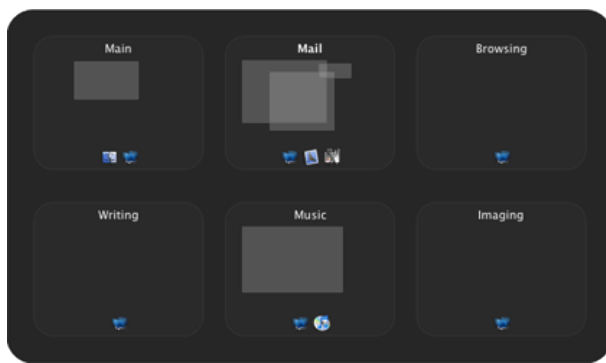

The Pager

Moving between applications is as simple as using the standard Command-Tab key combination. The system changes desktops seamlessly. This is just as expected and is unaffected by the presence of VirtueDesktops.

An alternative means of moving between groups of applications (the way I use virtual desktops) is the Shift-Tab key combination. This key-combination invokes the pager so the user can select which virtual desktop to use. I have mine configured to a 3×2 layout.

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[4]http://www.atpm.com/12.10/macmuser.shtml
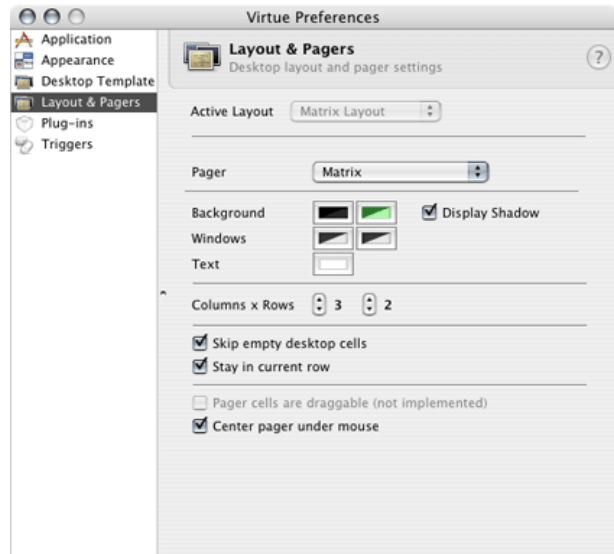
Impressions

I've been using the application for several months now without a single problem. It's a simple program, still undergoing active development, but it is stable on my system. It implements the Unixy virtual desktop system I want in a simple, elegant fashion. I'm able to work in my preferred mode and keep my windows relatively clean. This is comfortable for an old Unix geek like me.

Conclusions

Unlike CodeTek's product, VirtueDesktops runs on Intel-based Macs, an absolute requirement for me, now that I've upgraded hardware. The program is stable, has sufficient features, and was easy to learn to use. If you, like me, like a number of virtual desktops because of the way you work or organize your work, then you'll like using this program.

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FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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About This Particular Macintosh (ATPM) is, among other things, a monthly Internet magazine or "e-zine." ATPM was created to celebrate the personal computing experience. For us this means the most personal of all personal computers—the Apple Macintosh. About This Particular Macintosh is intended to be about your Macintosh, our Macintoshes, and the creative, personal ideas and experiences of everyone who uses a Mac. We hope that we will continue to be faithful to our mission.

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[1] `mailto:reviews@atpm.com`
[2] `http://www.atpm.com/subscribe`

Windows. PDFs may be magnified to any size and searched with ease.

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[3]http://www.atpm.com/reviews/

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We hope by now that you've found what you're looking for (We can't imagine there's something else about ATPM that you'd like to know.). But just in case you've read this far (We appreciate your tenacity.) and still haven't found that little piece of information about ATPM that you came here to find, please feel free to e-mail us at (You guessed it.) editor@atpm.com.

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[4]http://www.atpm.com/Back/