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Welcome

Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the December issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We enter the season of lights with many positive signs of continued growth in Macintosh market share and yet another holiday period with the iPod as the unrivaled leader in the digital music player market. We look forward to the release of Mac OS X 10.5 (Leopard) in early 2007 and more news at the January Macworld Expo about Apple's iTV and the long-anticipated iPod phone. Our December issue highlights many of the happenings in the world of Macintosh computing as we continue our monthly celebration of the personal computing experience.

Apple Hits a New All-Time High

In late November, Apple Computer's share price hit an all-time high of \$93.16 and finished the month's trading at the lofty price per share of \$91.66, giving the company a market capitalization (the sum value of all outstanding shares) of \$78.29 billion. To put these impressive numbers in perspective, Apple Computer now has a market value almost \$18 billion dollars greater than rival Dell Computer and places the Mac and iPod maker among the most highly valued companies in the technology and consumer electronics industries.

The Zune Balloon

Once billed as the great "iPod Killer," Microsoft's much-hyped iPod competitor turned out to be nothing more than a lot of advertising hot air. Soon after its November release, the Zune's PR balloon was unceremoniously popped by lack of consumer interest. The iPod Nation's economic force of gravity dealt its latest challenger a hefty dose of market reality. The Zune has all but disappeared from retail advertisements and can only be found in abundance sitting idly on store shelves and in inventory rooms.

The stunning lack of demand for the latest consumer product from the owner of the Windows OS code may be leaving the executives in Redmond clueless as to the reasons for the digital music player's overnight demise. Lamponed in the press and the source of material for late night comics, the reasons for Zune's spectacular failure may be found in published comments—its size, its price, its DRM scheme, the lack of simple functionality and, of course, com-

plications working with the company's OS. But what else would you expect for the maker of Windows? Few people seemed surprised.

The Amazon Jungle

Those who braved Black Friday's pre-dawn store openings have likened the experience to shopping in a suburban jungle—heavy traffic, scant supplies of sales items, and merchandise strewn all over the floor as shoppers battled for deeply discounted promotional items.

Internet shoppers sat back in amusement while watching the fight for market dominance survival in the Amazon Jungle. This year the best selling items list on Amazon.com has taken on new interest as analysts, investors and consumers watch product-makers battle it out in one of the world's largest virtual storefronts. A quick look at the electronics best 25 list finds 11 iPod models including the two top selling items and 6 of the top 10.

Is Amazon.com's bestseller list a harbinger of iPod sales for the Christmas seasons? Many market watchers are answering "yes." On the best selling computer list, Macs fill 14 of the top 25 spots, including the top 3 spots and 7 of the top 10. Indications are that Macintosh portables continue to gain impressive amounts of market share from their rivals.

Apple Will Soon Be #3

Before December comes to an end, Apple Computer should reemerge as the #3 personal computer maker in the United States behind Hewlett-Packard and Dell. Already out shipping Gateway in total units sold, Apple should surpass the struggling PC maker's US sales this holiday quarter.

iPods For the Holidays

You may have a radio station in your area that has succumbed to the latest holiday trend—Christmas music 24/7 from Thanksgiving Day until Christmas Day. We're not opposed to holiday music, but it's always better for listeners to be able to listen to tunes of their own choosing. This Christmas season, Apple offers more iPod models than ever, including the new iPod shuffle in clip-on form. Starting at only \$79, the

new Shuffle may change (yet again) the way people choose to enjoy music, especially over the holidays.

Positioned as both a digital music player and fashion accessory, the diminutive Shuffle may be the answer to the holiday music blues by offering the blues and any other genre of music of the owner's choosing. It may make the perfect holiday season survival gift for music lovers on your gift list.

Our December issue includes:

Mac of All Trades: Where Did You Hear That?

Mike Chamberlain takes a quick tour through his bookmarks on a quest for the best Apple-related blogs. Join in the fun!

Photoshop For the Curious: An Overview, Part 1

This new series is *not* Photoshop For Beginners. It's more like Photoshop For the Curious. In fact, it *is* Photoshop For the Curious!

Web Accessibility: SeaMonkey 1.0.6

SeaMonkey 1.0.6, though similar to its cousin, Nvu, is lacking in some important areas.

How To: Use Activity Monitor to Monitor Your Mac's Memory

Sylvester Roque is back with another installment about the Activity Monitor—this time with tips for using it to monitor your Mac's memory and tracking down memory leaks.

Desktop Pictures: Europe

The pictures in this series were taken by Mike Chamberlain in England, France, Rome, and Spain during a five-week summer tour.

Cartoon: Cortland

We continue to see the genesis of Cortland's employment at Wieser Graphics while dark forces prep their move to the Midwest.

Review: Fission 1.1

You might be just as surprised as I am to realize that Rogue Amoeba didn't already produce an audio file editor. But now that it does, you can likely rest assured that, before long, it'll be widely regarded as the audio editor that's kicking butt and taking names.

Review: iRecord

It's not exactly cheap, but the iRecord truly is one-touch recording. Plus, unlike its competitors, it uses the superior H.264 codec and allows recording to almost any USB storage device.

Review: OpenMenu X 1.0.2

We review the shareware utility OpenMenu X, which greatly widens the scope of what contextual menus can do. Add scripts, services, and any number of other functions to the menu that's always a mouse-click away.

Review: Synergy 3.0

Synergy is an excellent small, single-purpose program that integrates the OS X menu-bar with iTunes. It allows the user to play, pause, skip forward, and skip back a track from the menu bar. In addition, Synergy will display the current track and album art for the current track in a "floater" that displays briefly at a location of the user's choice as each new track begins.

Review: Tankstick

This controller brings a new experience to arcade, FPS, sports, and golf titles that benefit from the trackball, and the head-to-head two-player gaming action makes many classic games more fun.



E-Mail

A Song of Opposites¹

I ran into firmware and/or driver problems with a Western Digital internal hard drive. Same answer: we're working on something, don't know when we'll fix the problem, but why don't you try one of our other (slower, lower capacity) drives? I returned their drive and bought a LaCie external 500 GB FireWire drive with multiple ports (FireWire 800 and 400, USB 2). Fast, quiet, works great.

—*Gregory Tetrault*

Currently, there is a new drive en route from WD. At first, they billed my credit card for the cost of the drive—at a darned sight more than I paid for the original. They also wanted me to pay the postage costs to and from Germany.

I said “Fine, and I'll write about the drive's failure and the hassles and expense you've put me through in my blog and ATPM column.” Now, they decided to refund my card and are shipping me the drive for free with a return coupon. I wonder why.

It didn't stop me writing about it. ;-))

—*Mark Tennent*

Web Accessibility: PageSpinner²

I use BBEdit for fast edits of Web pages opened right from the Web server. And I use Dreamweaver 8.0 now and then when editing complex table layouts (created by others), but PageSpinner is my favorite. In fact, when using Dreamweaver, I have PageSpinner set up to edit my HTML code. Why do I like PageSpinner so much? It's fast, I can very quickly find what I need most often, it auto-converts punctuation to HTML entity codes on saving, and it hooks up very nicely to my FTP program so that I can just click on files to edit them.

PageSpinner doesn't get in my way. True, I suppose part of the appeal is that I can use it on my G4 or my little G3 laptop and it zips along. I thought that it would take a back seat after I bought Dreamweaver, but PageSpinner is still my main tool for editing and creating Web pages.

—*Doug Hogg*



¹<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/macmuser.shtml>

²<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/web-accessibility.shtml>

I am another PageSpinner user who really loves this tool. Like Doug said, it doesn't get in my way. How odd that you would come across it and demand that its interface be changed to suit you, while we users who have been using it for years would then have to adapt. You may call it quirky, but not erratic. “Erratic” implies that it is not trustworthy, which I believe it is. You seem to have found the missing `alt` tag, become outraged over that, then saw every little difference between what you found in PageSpinner and what you expected to find as a flaw.

Some things you did not have time to find were:

Include tags, which allow you to edit something like a footer or a navigation menu, and have it updated in all pages that use it. They can also insert the date or other useful things. The ordinary user would appreciate not having to run around a folder full of pages, updating them all.

PageSpinner includes AppleScripts that will work with a database to create pages from the data. This is like having a database running on your server, but you can serve the pages from any Web server. If your data doesn't change often, this could be a huge benefit. Your Aunt Minnie could have a catalog of her embroidered potholders hosted on SpyMac. This struck me as a feature for the little guy, because while it does require you to know AppleScript, that is much nicer than having to learn PHP and find a hosting service that will let you use it.

You didn't mention the semi-WYSIWYG nature of PageSpinner. Of course, you can't anticipate how somebody's browser is going to render your page, but it is nice to see headings that look like headings, bold that's bold, etc. This was a huge help when I was starting out building Web sites. As you mentioned, it's a matter of one click to preview your page in PageSpinner's live preview (which is a lot like BBEdit's) or in a browser. You can have (if I remember correctly) eight Web browsers in your list of browsers to use, so you can try your Web page in all of them. It strikes me that this would be very useful to ordinary folk, as not all browsers handle HTML the same way, and you'd want to see any lack of accessibility before your visitors did.

I was surprised at your comment about how, if you're just typing along, you can hit Command-Return to create the paragraph tags, but they include the cursor. Of course, you're correct in

saying that if you finish writing one paragraph, then type Command-Return, you then have a paragraph within a paragraph, which is bad HTML. But I don't encounter that problem, and I wondered why. So I started PageSpinner and started typing and realized that I have been typing a down-arrow when I get to the end of a paragraph. I don't enter tons of text this way, so I don't run out of blank lines

Since you appreciate AppleScript, I would think you would really like PageSpinner. I write AppleScripts for PageSpinner all the time; one will take a folder full of photos and a list of captions and turn it into a slideshow. The authors really believe in the value of AppleScript, and there's even a Web site to support the use of AppleScript in PageSpinner. This goes far beyond the token, reluctant access some apps give you via AppleScript.

I hope you've sent your comments (especially the one about the `alt=""` missing from image tags) to Optima. You may not want to use PageSpinner, but they are very responsive to suggestions, and correcting that omission would result in better access for many.

I recommend PageSpinner to people interested in creating efficient, hands-on Web pages because I find it strikes a good balance between ease of use and power. I hope you haven't chased away any potential users.

—Lyle Gunderson

Lyle (and everyone), thanks for your comments. I'm glad PageSpinner's working well for you. I wasn't writing a full review of the software though, but looking to see how readily people could use the software to create accessible Web pages (but without being a professional Web designer).

I'm not demanding the interface be changed to suit me. I simply found that the current interface makes it harder to create a basically accessible page.

Correctly using paragraphs, headings, lists and `alt` text is the very least that one can do to create an accessible page.

—Miraz Jordan

I, too, have been using PageSpinner for several years—both for my personal sites and for work. I agree with Miraz that PageSpinner should include `alt` attributes every time it places an image tag. (Yes, I said `alt` attribute, so I am correcting Miraz and everyone else. `img` is the tag. `alt` is an attribute of that tag, just like

`height` and `width`.) Yet, I'm not sure about using a space.

Miraz offered a "useful link" that said, "`alt` text is an alternative, not a tooltip." Following that logic, a space character is not an appropriate alternative for an image.

Personally, I have taken to simply typing anything I feel like in the little `alt` field when setting up an `img` tag just so that PageSpinner includes the `alt` attribute. Then, I immediately erase that character after the tag is rendered.

But, instead of a space, remember that a null is an acceptable value for the `alt` attribute. In other words, instead of `alt=""` you would have `alt=""`. This is the way, for example, to have an image on your Web page that makes up part of the visual design but has no useful purpose for someone who is blind and listening to a utility read the Web page. When said utility sees the null `alt` attribute, it would simply skip it.

—Lee Bennett

VirtueDesktops 0.53³

I use You Control: Desktops from You Software. It works very nicely, and has a number of features I don't see in VirtueDesktops. You can pin an application to a particular desktop; you can have a particular application or window appear on all desktops; you can even pin a particular window of an application to a certain desktop. And it is easy to move things from one desktop to another.

—Allen Watson

(Editor's note: [ATPM reviewed](http://www.atpm.com/12.11/virtuedesktops.shtml)⁴ You Control: Desktops last year.)

That's new software for me! If I wasn't satisfied with what I'm using, then I'd definitely be after YC:D.

I've heard that Leopard will have a virtual desktop feature when it's released. If it works well, and like I want to use it, then I'll abandon third-party applications and go with the operating system. Otherwise, I'll be scanning the horizon once again for an appropriate tool.

—Dave Thompson



³<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/virtuedesktops.shtml>

⁴<http://www.atpm.com/11.09/you-control-desktops.shtml>

...has a number of features I don't see in
VirtueDesktops...

Allen, VirtueDesktops does all of these things.
—*whoDean*



This may fall under the category of “if you don't know why you'd use it, you probably don't need it,” but I'm just not sure I understand the point of multiple desktops. I use an iBook exclusively, and often have multiple apps open and use the Command-Tab to toggle amongst them. What's the point of having them sequestered in their own desktops? Obviously, there is a point, since so many people do it, but I have yet to read a review of one of these programs that explains it in a way I can understand.

—*JuliaL*

If you don't “get” the idea of multiple desktops, then I'd say that operating paradigm is not for you. Mark Tennent basically [said](#)⁵ the same thing—he found the use of multiple desktops confusing. I'm of the opposite type—I find too many windows open on a single desktop confusing.

I prefer to organize my tools by task. For example, I have Camino and Mori open on my “browsing” desktop, MacJournal open on the “writing” desktop (I might have TeXShop open there too and a couple of Finder windows as well, if I was doing a little more writing, and perhaps BBEdit too...), Mail, iCal, and AddressBook are open on the “mailing” desktop, and so forth.

This model works for me, but it doesn't work for everyone. It's just the way my brain is wired.

—*Dave Thompson*

Rather funny, actually, but I have a completely different rationale for multiple desktops. My primary one is, unfortunately, loaded with icons on the desktop that I'm doing stuff with. Another has just some work-related stuff, and another is completely clean for when I want to show off.

—*Lee Bennett*

Outliner Writing Environments⁶

This past spring/summer I completed and published a book (234 pages, about 100 photos), doing every-

⁵<http://www.atpm.com/12.10/macmuser.shtml>

⁶<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/atpo.shtml>

thing from writing, editing, to page layout to PDF production for the commercial printer. My initial drafts were in Word (relatively unstable after 100 pages). I started this five years ago, and then I moved to Mellel two years ago. The outline capability of Mellel was more than sufficient for that stage of my work. I found it easy to understand and use, and flexible enough to meet all my needs. I could adjust chapters and sub-chapters easily just by dragging in the outline pane.

Mellel is my primary word processing tool, but it couldn't handle photo placement easily. So when I moved into the page layout work (I couldn't afford Quark or InDesign), I settled on Papyrus XI (I have since upgraded to Papyrus XII). I kept each chapter as a separate file; however, Papyrus allows consecutive numbering of chapters and captions for photos across multiple files. So even with major structural changes, Papyrus easily handled the work and changes. I made the PDFs in Papyrus, then joined them into one PDF using PDFLab, which I then sent to the printer.

So, for my purposes (aside from this book, mostly theological writing) Mellel and Papyrus meet my writing and outline needs. Given more time, I would like to try some of the outliners you have covered over the past three years, but time is a sparse commodity.

Keep up the good work and informative articles.

—*Rich Shields*



Ted, thanks for another terrific article. Because I am not a writer, I fall into the other major category of outliner users—the task managers.

My question is this: why are the software companies that are developing these types of programs not giving the users what they need/want?

I am sure that the companies (or individuals) are listening; they just don't seem to hear what the people are saying. I have been to numerous user forums and I find them inspirational and optimistic in what the people are saying, asking for, and envisioning. And, if you really take all of that in, a program emerges that is not as much conceptual as it is a combination of two or three existing programs. There are all of these companies getting closer to this perfect solution, but no one has hit the nail on the head yet. I believe the first company to do so will shape the direction of this market.

My frustration has reached the point to where I have sketched out my “perfect program” (I run a small design firm) and have thought about investing in the development of my own (don’t know where to start and it seems like a large investment of time and money). Granted, it would be perfect for me, but a lot of the core features that I have put together are the same ones that the majority of people are asking for. I have been to every Web site and downloaded just about every outliner/information manager that I can get my hands on. I have also been to just about every user forum that I can find for all of these products, and people are all asking for the same things: outlining ability, user-defined columns, smart folders, etc. As I have said in a post on OmniGroup’s OmniOutliner [forum](#)⁷ (JasonI: post 1, post 2), every program is just one core feature away from being the program that a lot of people want. Now, maybe there are some technical reasons why this hasn’t happened yet, but from my perspective I just do not see the issue—all of the features I am looking for are out there; they just aren’t in the same software.

Another frustration is that even if a company were to come out with this great product, how long will they be around? In this market, a number of smaller companies have sprung up to offer their product. This is really good in a number of ways, creates competition, etc.), but it is also bad. It is bad because a lot of times these smaller companies are just a couple of people that are really good at one thing (programming), but bad in some other area (UI, marketing, etc.) And, to have a really good, well-rounded product you need to offer everything. As much as I want a program to do exactly what I want it to, I also want a program that is intuitive, easy to use, and looks good. Mac software has set a pretty high bar, and any program that is lacking in any area really stands out. This is why I have high hopes for OmniGroup—they are a proven and respected company that puts out really nice software, and I think that they are in it for the long-haul.

Another problem that goes with the above paragraph is this: there doesn’t appear to be any standards. One test I use on all of the software is whether or not I have the ability to export out my information in OPML format. This seems to be the easiest way to take my outline from one program to another. OPML is not the greatest format (you still can lose information—columns, formatting, etc.), but it is the

⁷<http://forums.omnigroup.com/showthread.php?t=1673&page=2>

closest thing I can find to a universal format. The problem is that not all outliners allow you to import or export in this format. When that is the case I will usually just casually test the software out without using my “real” information. So, my point is is that there really needs to be some new standards so we can feel more comfortable in investing our time with new software—we need the ability to pick up our data and move it to another program if needed.

Anyway, I have been meaning to write you for quite awhile, so thanks for taking the time to read my ranting.

—Jason Ivey



I think a lot of your desires, Jason, are valid and shared by me and probably many others. But I still don’t think it’s that easy to just simply come to the perfect program because even the widest of users end up with different requirements.

You are definitely not alone in purchasing many licenses in the quest to find the right fit. I bet many of us reading these articles own more than a few. Part of my frustration is that there are so many excellent choices on Mac, and each of these programs does something else a little better than the other. But how exactly with such a complex piece of software and demands do we agree on what those essential items are? It seems obvious at times, but I think each user builds a different world inside of them.

For instance, one of my central desires is to be able to import many types of media (ie. audio files, pictures, film clips, etc.). And the reason for that is even though I use this diverse breed of “outliner” for writing and for work control (to do lists, project tracking), I also like to utilize a powerful information management tool as my companion in cataloging the various snippets of information that are part and parcel of the new Internet. For no clear reason beyond the fact that I want it all in one place! I think that’s a valid usage of these tools but it may not be first in mind for say, a new program to better implement GTD and the like.

It makes me wonder just how big this community of particular software users is. Because though it’s large enough to support a large community of conversation, and seemingly more than just a few excellent programs for our diverse wishes, I don’t know if it’s big enough to keep all those developers in continuing

business or to spend untold hours and years building the one ultimate program to bind them all!

Thanks for linking to your discussion at Omni. I think your concerns are excellent, and I hope they are heard by more developers.

—*Guthrie Neidhardt*

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



Mac of All Trades

by Mike Chamberlain, mchamberlain@atpm.com

Where Did You Hear That?

I write in some pretty august company here at ATPM. A quick perusal of articles and credentials will reveal that we have some serious and capable people offering the best Mac advice around (and at a price that we can all afford). If you're reading this publication, you too are one of those who wants to stay up to speed on the latest information that will help you get the most out of your already great computer. Interestingly, that has different meaning for different people. The programmers and systems types look for different information than do the hardware geeks and early adopters, who are different still from the everyday Macaholic who wants to know about the particular things that will help him do the things that he needs or wants to do.

Clearly, reading publications like this is a good start, but on a day-to-day basis the wealth of blogs out there are a more immediate source of up-to-the-minute Mac info. What follows are a few of my regular stops. N.B., I am in the last category of information seeker: the Macaholic who wants to keep his machine up-to-date and wants to see the latest software and hardware information as soon as it comes out. Here are my regular stops, loaded in order of the "Apple" folder on my bookmarks bar. (You do have one of those, don't you?)

[The Unofficial Apple Weblog](http://www.tuaw.com)¹

I check *TUAW* at least three times a day. The site has a great Aqua-themed look and is as up-to-the-minute as any site that I have stumbled across. A group of blog editors contribute a wide variety of posts on the latest Apple-related news. I often find out about Apple system software updates here first. When the ubiquitous Mac rumor mill begins to get crazy, the bloggers at *TUAW* pass on the best but with a more mature and down-to-earth spin. I have a number of programs on my computer that I would not have discovered were it not for the blog. The normal post on new hardware and software gives the reader a good overview of the product and a surface review. There are enough posts during the day

¹<http://www.tuaw.com>

that revisiting the site a couple of times always seems worthwhile.

[The Apple Blog](http://www.theappleblog.com)²

This is a newer site for me, though one that seems to have some interesting posts. Information on the site seems to trend to Apple news, while also including a fair amount of hardware and software information. The layout is not as flashy as *TUAW*, and the information on the post before the jump tends to be a bit more sketchy. I stop back in at this site at least once a week and often more than that.

[Mac Rumors](http://www.macrumors.com)³

OK, I confess, I sometimes go to this site and allow myself to get all hot and bothered by the next great thing that is coming our way from Cupertino. At the moment I am all sweaty with the dream of an iPhone that will actually sync with my MacBook Pro and Palm and iPod in the seamless way that only Apple seems to be able to make happen. I may not be helping the cause, however, as this site and others like it, are often off the mark when it comes to forecasting what coming next. There is a page on this site that is interesting if you are getting ready to buy new hardware. The [buyer's guide](#)⁴ section of the rumor site gives a current recommendation on buying particular hardware based on its position in the lifecycle of the product line. If you are getting ready to spring for new stuff, this page is worth a stop.

[Inside Mac Games](http://www.insidemacgames.com)⁵

This is the premier site for Mac gaming information. Great reviews, information on upcoming releases, links to demos and updates, good forums and gaming blogs. There is a membership option that I have tried in the past, but unless you are a hardcore gamer, you can get everything you want from the free information available.

²<http://www.theappleblog.com>

³<http://www.macrumors.com>

⁴<http://buyersguide.macrumors.com>

⁵<http://www.insidemacgames.com>

[MacBreak Weekly](#)⁶

True, this isn't technically a blog—it's a podcast—but it links to so much that I can't imagine keeping up without it. Leo LaPorte of *This Week in Tech (TWIT)* leads a weekly conversation that roams freely and humorously across the Mac landscape. If you only subscribe to one Mac podcast, this is the one—and it's free.



Finally, Here is a short list of good-to-have-on-hand places for heightening your Mac life:

[MacDesktops](#)⁷ It's about...desktops.

[Pimp My Safari](#)⁸ If you're a Safari user, this site has all the extras you need.

[Official Google Mac Blog](#)⁹ Because it's worth keeping an eye on what these folks are doing.

[The PowerBook Zone](#)¹⁰ Sometimes helpful information for road warriors.

[MacMinute](#)¹¹ Think of it as a Mac news ticker.

There's no way to list all the sites that any of us use, but it would be interesting to see where our readers surf when they want the latest in the Mac world. Add a [comment](#)¹² and a link for your favorite Mac site.

See you in the new year.

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⁶<http://www.twit.tv/MB>

¹²<http://atpm.com/12.12/mac-of-all-trades.shtml#comments>

Photoshop For the Curious

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

An Overview, Part 1

My Background

A few months ago, I was chatting with ATPM’s publisher, Michael Tsai, about some of his digital photos and some of my own that I’ve submitted as ATPM desktop wallpaper images on various occasions. A conversation about me helping him with some short steps for basic color correction in Photoshop transmogrified into the possibility of making it a How To column in a future issue of ATPM. Transmogrification turned into procrastination, and I’m only now purposing to make this idea a reality. But the idea has since gone through yet another rebirth to become this series.

Prior to last year, I would have assumed that anyone who legitimately had access to Photoshop—which is *not* an inexpensive toy of an application—either knew their way around it or was actively learning their way around it. Michael’s suggestion made short work of squashing that assumption. I also later learned of an employee in the billing office of a graphic service bureau I occasionally patronize who has Photoshop on her iMac. She’s never used it, but she’s curious to try. She doesn’t have time for courses, nor do the designers employed there have time to assist. It just happens that this service bureau puts Adobe CS2 on every Mac (and most PCs) in the building. Site license, perhaps—I don’t know.

It is for people such as these who I believe will have the most to gain from this series. In this first column, we’ll begin at the rock-bottom basics of Photoshop. What is that box of weird-looking icons? What are those windows all around the edges of the display? What’s tucked away in those menus?

First, a quick moment to tell you where I am coming from. I most certainly *am not* an authority on Photoshop. In fact, I not only anticipate that Photoshop professionals who read ATPM will post comments that elaborate on what I write—and I enthusiastically welcome it.

My perspective is someone who is, for the most part, self-taught through experimentation and asking questions. It is through nearly 15 years of just trying things and not being afraid of what the results might be that I have gained my experience. I now routinely

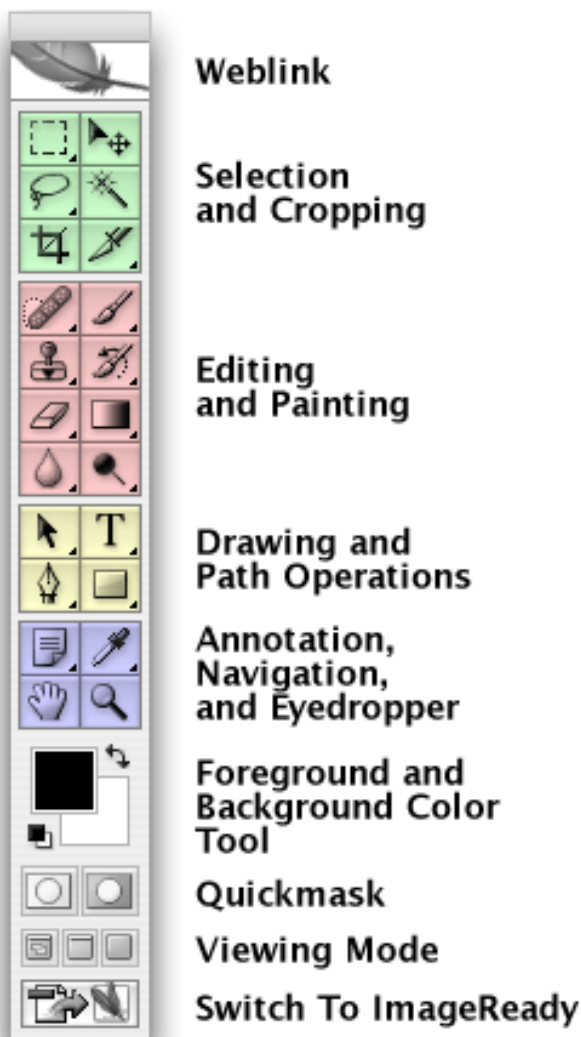
color balance and optimize photos to send to commercial press, perform intermediate clone editing to rid a photo of unwanted objects (“Photoshopping” is becoming as much a verb as “Googling”), and create image masks to blend portions of images into other images. What I mean to say is, there was a time when I was exactly in the same boat as those to whom this series is intended. I had access to Photoshop while in college and just started dabbling.

By the way, if you have Photoshop Elements, I suspect that a great deal of what this series will cover will directly translate to that application. For the record, Photoshop Elements is a sub-\$100 “express” version, so to speak, of Adobe Photoshop. Just please be forewarned that I have had neither the opportunity nor the reason to try Photoshop Elements for myself. Similarly, I suspect that substituting the Control key for the Mac’s Command key is the only thing a Windows Photoshop user would have to remember.

In upcoming columns, we’ll cover fundamentals such as performing a basic color calibration of your monitor (it’s not as hard as you think), using the Levels or Curves palettes to adjust brightness and contrast (avoiding the temptation to use Photoshop’s Brightness and Contrast palette), fundamentals of layer effects, etc. I’ll even teach you how to manipulate almost any graphic image so that it will tile seamlessly. And yes, I’ll perhaps take on a few requests, too.

The Photoshop Tool Palette

In the first of this two-part overview, let’s just expose ourselves to the tools Photoshop presents to you after a fresh installation. This is not a tutorial for each tool—rather a quick introduction to the purpose of each tool. After all, that big vertical Tool Palette looks kind of daunting if you’ve never used it before, doesn’t it?



The Photoshop Tool Palette is a bit less daunting if you think of it in terms of the groupings that Adobe created by way of the thicker borders.

Now is probably the right time to mention that I'm presently using Photoshop version 9 (a.k.a. Photoshop CS2). The Tool Palettes in versions 7 and 8 are virtually the same, but the tools and their positions become increasingly different from version 6 and older. I'll also mention that it is entirely likely I'll upgrade to CS3 (Photoshop 10?) when it is released next year, smack in the middle of this series of tutorials. Whether the Tool Palette will look the same in CS3 remains to be seen.

Adobe's Self Promotion

First of all, if you've ever hovered your mouse over the feather at the top of the palette and noticed that it colored itself, but you had no idea why, relax. It's simply a quick link to the [Photoshop product page](http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/)¹ on Adobe's Web site.

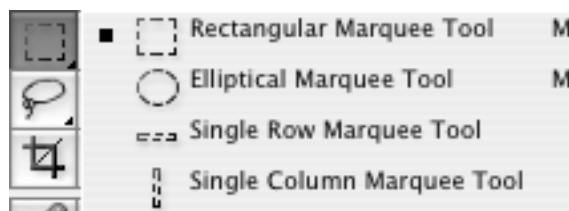
Selection and Cropping

The first set of tools, highlighted in green in the figure above, are for working with selections. This simply means that they are used to isolate and work with a portion of your image. The most basic selection tool is the Marquee selection tool.



The Marquee selection tool.

Notice the tiny little blackened corner in the bottom right of that square. Whenever you see that, it means you can click and hold on that icon to choose a related alternate tool. In the case of the Marquee selection tool, you can choose between rectangular, elliptical, and single-pixel rows.



Marquee alternates.

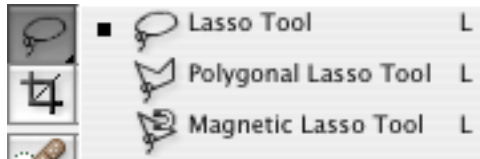
The two icons in the second green row are slightly more advanced selection tools. The Lasso tool allows you to draw a freeform shape as your selection.



The Lasso selection tool.

The alternate tools for the Lasso allow for polygon-shaped selections and a magnetic feature to snap your selection to high-contrast edges in your image.

¹<http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/>



Lasso alternates.

Sorry, the Magic Wand tool isn't a one-stop tool to automatically make your photo Ansel Adams perfect. It is used to select a range of similar pixels in your image.



The Magic Wand tool.

Depending on settings, it can select all pixels that are one specific shade of color, or it can select a defined number of neighboring color values.

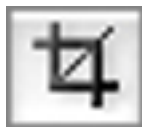
These first three tools are the staples of selection. The remaining three are used to make direct adjustments to your selection.

The Move tool simply lets you drag a selected area or an entire layer around to position it somewhere else. (More about layers in an upcoming column.)



The Move tool.

The Crop tool works similarly to the rectangular Marquee selection tool, but is used to trim an unwanted portion of an image around the outer edges.

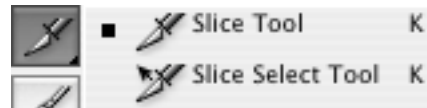


The Crop tool.

The Slice tool defines areas of action when designing images intended to be used on Web pages. Slices are a somewhat advanced aspect of Photoshop which I won't be covering any time soon.



The Slice tool.



Slice alternates.

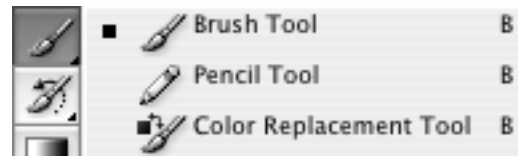
Editing and Painting

The red-highlighted set of tools could be thought of as the Photoshop tools that really do the grunt work. I'll start with the Brush tool.



The Brush tool.

The variants available by clicking and holding are the Pencil and Color Replacement tools.



Brush alternates.

These tools, combined with the palette that contains countless shapes that the brush can mimic, are what allow you to pretend you've got a paint brush in your hand and an empty canvas in front of you.

Moving on, the left-side icons in the first and second row of the Editing and Painting section are possibly more magical than the actual Magic Wand tool.

I'll first point to the Clone Stamp tool. Think of it much like the Brush tool, but instead of painting with a color, you can paint a clone of another region of your image.



The Clone Stamp tool.



Clone Stamp alternates.

Above the Clone Stamp tool is the Healing Brush tool—something of a Clone Stamp on steroids. The Healing Brush is a little difficult to describe without showing it in action, but it essentially performs the same function as the Clone Stamp plus an action to blend in what you’ve painted. It tries to clone the pixels from another portion of your image but retain the shading and texture of what was originally there.



The Healing Brush tool.

The variant Healing Brush options offer alternative methods of doing this same function.

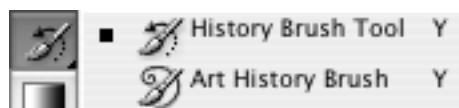


Healing Brush alternates.

The History Brush tool works similarly to the regular Brush, but uses Photoshop’s history of what you’ve done to an image to allow you to paint in an older version.



The History Brush tool.



History Brush alternates.

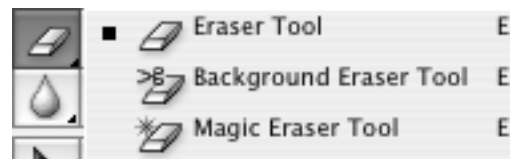
Suppose you applied a filter that made a significant change to your image, but you want a few areas to not have the filter effect. You can use the History Brush tool to paint a bit of the earlier, unfiltered image back in.

The Eraser tool’s function should be obvious. It is the opposite of the Brush tool, in a manner of speaking.



The Eraser tool.

Its variant tools include a function identical to the Magic Wand except that it immediately erases those pixels instead of just selecting them.



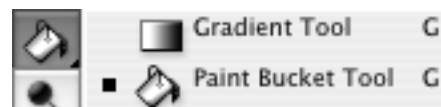
Eraser alternates.

Next to the Eraser are the fill tools. The basic fill function, labeled as the Paint Bucket tool, will flood a single color into a region.



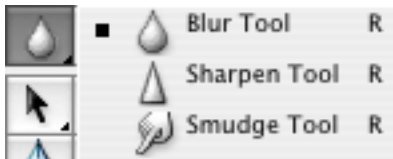
The Paint Bucket tool.

The alternate fill tool, Gradient Fill, lets you drag a line to to create a gradient from one color to another in the direction of, and within the confines of, the line you drag.



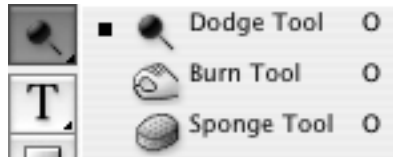
Paint Bucket alternates.

At the bottom of this set of tools, the left icon allows you to soften (blur), sharpen, or smudge (think finger painting) a region of your image.



The Blur, Sharpen, and Smudge tools.

You can use the Dodge tool to lighten an area, the Burn tool to darken an area, and the Sponge tool to make an area's colors more or less intense.



The Dodge, Burn, and Sponge tools.

Dodging and Burning are terms that harken to the traditional darkrooms where you would dodge or burn in light to make portions of a photo lighter or darker.

Drawing and Path Operations

Most of the tools in the yellow section are somewhat advanced and I won't spend much time on them now. They are used to create lines (paths) and shapes for a variety of purposes.



Drawing and Path Operation tools.

The Type tool in the upper right fits the path operation grouping because a character of text, in a way, is really just a shape that happens to look like a particular character. This is the only tool for which beginners will initially have use.

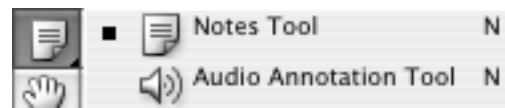
Annotation, Navigation, and Eyedropper

The last section, in blue, might be more aptly called the Miscellaneous Group. The Notes tool allows for written notes to be attached to an image, but not actually be part of the image.



The Notes tool.

The alternate choice for Notes allows for audio annotations instead of written notes. Keep in mind, you'll want to keep a Photoshop-native .PSD file to retain these annotations. Saving in another format will likely lose them.



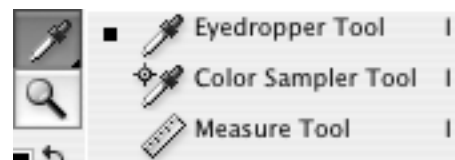
Notes alternates.

The Eyedropper tool makes the foreground or background color the same as any portion of your image that you click.



The Eyedropper tool.

The Color Sampler tool allows you to define up to four points which will have visible markers within your image for future reference. They can also be used to make note of the numeric color value of the specific pixel beneath the marker. The color value is found in Photoshop's Info palette.



Eyedropper alternates.

The Measure tool reveals the distance (such as inches or number of pixels) from one point to another.

The last two tools are probably the two least-used tools—sort of.



The Hand tool.



The Zoom tool.

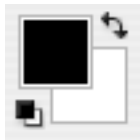
I, personally, never click these because I prefer to simply hold the space bar (except when editing a text field) to access the Hand tool and I use Command + and Command - to zoom in and out. The purpose of the Hand tool is to simply slide around your current view within a window when you are zoomed in close. Using the Hand tool does not modify your image.

The Rest of the Tool Palette

The remaining Tool Palette items are toggles, of sorts, for various functions.

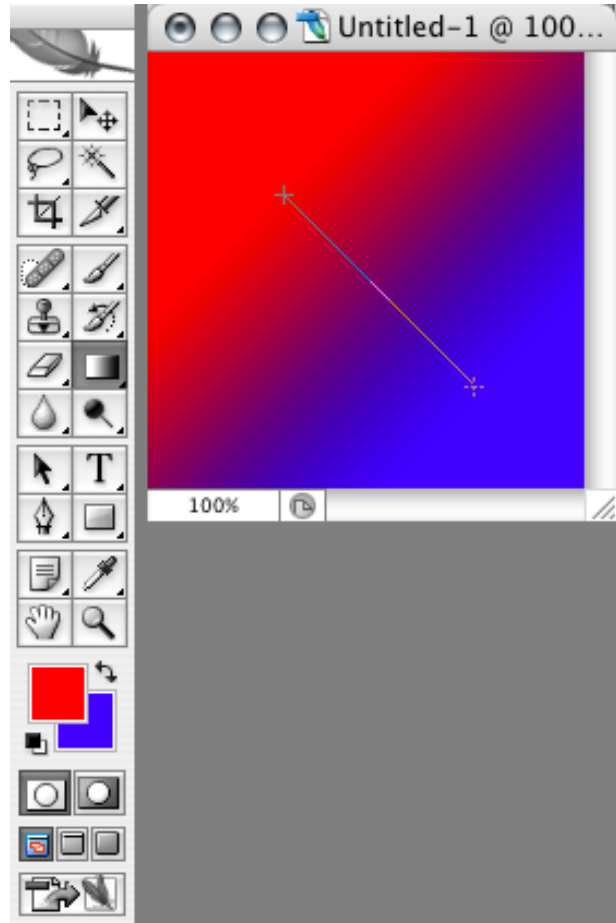
Color Tool

The Foreground/Background Color area is one of Photoshop's methods for making color selections.



Foreground and Background Colors.

For now, only worry about the foreground color (the upper left of the large, overlapped squares) unless you want to play with the Gradient Fill tool, which can create a gradient starting from the foreground color and ending with the background color.



When the Gradient Fill tool's Foreground to Background Color mode is selected, the gradient colors match those selected in the Color Tool.

The curved arrow in the upper right of the Color Tool swaps the foreground and background colors, and the miniature black/white squares reset the colors to—you guessed it—black and white.

Quick Mask

Many of us have used sheets of paper and masking tape to cover windows, doors, etc. so they aren't exposed while painting a wall. Masking in Photoshop is much the same, except the intent is that the masked areas will never be seen again. But since it is a mask, you can always restore all or part of the original image. If it had instead been erased, it would be gone. The Quick Mask tools in the Tool Palette are part of Photoshop's masking features which we will cover later.



The Quick Mask tool.

Viewing Mode

The Viewing Mode selector is a simple, three-way toggle.



The Viewing Mode selector.

The left button presents your image in a standard window, complete with scroll bars, if needed. The middle button fills your screen with a neutral grey and places your active image in the center. When making color adjustments to an image, a neutral grey is the best thing to surround your photo so your eye is not distracted by whatever might be on your desktop. The third button is the same, but uses black instead and temporarily removes the menu bar. You don't want to use this for color adjustments because of the high contrast between the black and your lighter image, but this is a nice way to present an image to a friend or client. The Tab key can also be used to temporarily hide all of Photoshop's palettes.

ImageReady

Adobe ImageReady is a sister application that ships with Photoshop and is used primarily for finishing an image for use on the Web.



Edit in ImageReady.

Remember the Slice tool up above? Slices become very important when using ImageReady. This icon at the bottom of the Tool Palette simply transfers your image to ImageReady.

We Made It!

Here's your homework assignment. Memorize those four main groupings of Photoshop tools and you'll spend considerably less time hunting for the right one. Then, make a duplicate file of a digital photo (always

keep original, unaltered versions of your photos) and just play with each tool. Don't worry about anything else you might find in the other palettes or menus. Just play with the tools. You cannot hurt anything by trying each one out. If you think you goofed up, simply head to the File menu and hit the Revert command. Observe exactly what happens when you use each tool.

Also, remember that some tools are multi-step tools. For example, to use the Clone Stamp and Healing Brush tools, you must first tell Photoshop from which area of the image you wish to clone. If you don't, you'll see a message box telling you as such. You must hold the Option key and click a source area first, then move elsewhere in the image and start Cloning or Healing. If you're still having trouble, don't be too concerned, but feel free to ask for more detail about a tool by [posting a comment](#)². I'll answer it as soon as possible.

Next Month...

In part two of this overview, we'll quickly peek at the other palettes that appear when Photoshop is first launched and find out what sort of functions are available in each of the menu bar items.

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²<http://www.atpm.com/12.12/photoshop.shtml#comments>

SeaMonkey 1.0.6

A couple of issues ago, I looked at [Nvu](#)¹ and considered it a likely candidate for an application that can allow ordinary users to create Web sites that meet at least a bare minimum of accessibility requirements.

This month, I looked at SeaMonkey, though with a little hesitation, as it is a cousin of Nvu. In times past, the Netscape browser, which included the Composer component for making Web pages, turned into the Mozilla Project. In turn, the Mozilla Project has brought several Web-related pieces of software to the public: Firefox and Thunderbird are well-known; SeaMonkey is another.

Both SeaMonkey and Nvu were based on the Mozilla Composer code base, but they have been developed separately. They have a lot in common, but it turns out they aren't quite identical.

SeaMonkey

[SeaMonkey](#)² is free, open-source software. It requires Mac OS X 10.2 or later, 64 MB RAM (256 MB recommended), and 100 MB of free hard disk space (significantly less space is required if you reduce the cache size).

Getting Started

As usual, I started up the application and added a few headings, paragraphs and a list, and a photo—the fundamental features of most Web pages.

While the application opens with the browser component, you can open the Composer by choosing New from the File menu. You can change the Preferences to open the Composer on startup, if you wish.

It was a simple matter to type my text in to the Normal view. On saving, a sheet appeared asking me to enter a Title for the page.

It was easy to turn my list into a real HTML list, and my headings into HTML headings using the standard toolbar buttons.

¹<http://www.atpm.com/12.10/web-accessibility.shtml>

²<http://www.mozilla.org/projects/seamoney/>

Semantic Markup

The modern, accessible Web demands what's known as semantic markup. Semantic markup classifies everything on a Web page: this is a paragraph, this is a heading, that is a list. Such classification allows software tools, such as screen readers for visually impaired people or search engines, to “understand,” navigate, and summarize a page.

Style Traps

In addition, modern techniques for creating Web pages involve applying styles to text (and other elements) via style sheets. In order to achieve consistent results with a style sheet, it's important to use consistent markup in the HTML.

One common “trap” is to leave some text on a page without any specific markup, beyond being contained within the `<body>` tag and therefore classified, by default, as “body text.” If the writer intends it to be “paragraph” text, and doesn't notice that the `<p>` tags are missing, then there may be a lot of troubleshooting to discover why one chunk of text looks different from the rest.

Body Text

Unfortunately, because I hadn't set the style first from the pop-up menu, much of the text was simply body text, divided by line breaks, rather than paragraph tags.

It stands to reason that most of the text on an ordinary page will be paragraphs; I believe that paragraph text should be a default on Web-page software.

The good news was that I was able to select whole chunks of “body text” and style them as paragraphs from the pop-up. SeaMonkey did more or less the right thing: it removed the `
` tags and replaced them with correct `<p>` tags, except where I'd left empty lines between paragraphs. There, SeaMonkey correctly marked up paragraphs, but included `
` tags inside them to indicate the empty lines.

On reflection, I guess this is fair enough—by pressing Return twice between paragraphs I was indicating that I wanted a blank line—though it may be time for me to change my typing habits.

Alternate Text

As with Nvu, it was hard not to supply alternate text for an image. A warning appears if you attempt to close the dialog box without either entering alternate text or deliberately choosing none. If you choose none, then SeaMonkey correctly inserts an empty `alt` attribute.

A strange thing happened, though, when I inserted my image. I'd quickly exported an image from iPhoto. I created a JPEG, 450×300 pixels and weighing in at about 70K. That's a bit big for a real Web page, but for my purposes it was fine.

After adding the image to my page, SeaMonkey Composer showed only an empty rectangle, with the `alt` text I'd supplied. I validated the page, checked the code by eye, removed and reinserted the image, reduced the image file size, checked the settings, and tried a different image. SeaMonkey Composer simply refused to display the image. On viewing the page in SeaMonkey Navigator (the Web browser component), there was my image, as it should have been.

A bit of searching didn't turn up anyone else mentioning this problem, so I guess it was something about my setup. I was working on a backup machine and wasn't able to engage in extended troubleshooting.

Even more curiously, while writing the above paragraph, I decided I didn't care so much for the overall look of SeaMonkey and decided to switch to the Modern theme. After restarting the application, with the new theme, my images displayed perfectly in the Composer.

UTF-8

The page SeaMonkey created used an ISO-8859-1 character set. While this isn't my preferred option, it's perfectly acceptable and common. I was able to edit the HTML source to replace it with UTF-8. Another method was under the File menu: Save and Change Character Encoding, or from the View ▾ Character Encoding submenu. It doesn't seem possible, though, to define the default character set in Preferences.

Separate Presentation and Content

A key element of accessibility is to separate presentation and content. The HTML file will specify headings, for example, but should not carry the information about how headings will be displayed. Instead, a separate stylesheet may specify that a heading should be green, Georgia, large, bold, with a border.

Doctype

While an HTML doctype certainly doesn't *prevent* anyone from removing fonts, colors, and the like to a separate stylesheet, it still allows users to include `` tags. A Strict XHTML doctype does not allow such presentational markup, though a Transitional XHTML doctype does.

The doctype SeaMonkey used was HTML 4.01 Transitional. This is acceptable, but many people, including me, use an XHTML doctype these days—it's been a W3C recommendation since January 2000.

I tried very hard to change the doctype to my preferred XHTML, but was unable to find any preference or setting to allow me to do that. That is simply unacceptable.

Miscellaneous Tools

The Tools menu begins with a Validate HTML item. This takes you to the W3C site, where you can upload the file you're working on and check it.

A handy tool is the Export to Text item under the File menu, which does just what it says.

My Conclusion

SeaMonkey is very similar to Nvu, but not exactly the same. If you're happy to code to an HTML 4 doctype, this software will allow you to create accessible pages—without too much effort. If you require or prefer an XHTML doctype, then this software is simply not for you.

Useful Links

- [HTML 4.01 Specification](#)³ The W3C Recommendation, 24 December 1999.
- [XHTML 1.0 Specification](#)⁴ The W3C Recommendation 26 January 2000, revised 1 August 2002.

Related Articles

- [Web Accessibility: PageSpinner 4.6.3: Quirky and Erratic](#)⁵, ATPM 12.11, November 2006.
- [Web Accessibility: Nvu: impressive and powerful](#)⁶, ATPM 12.10, October 2006.

³<http://www.w3.org/TR/html401/cover.html>

⁴<http://www.w3.org/TR/2002/REC-xhtml1-20020801/>

⁵<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/web-accessibility.shtml>

⁶<http://www.atpm.com/12.10/web-accessibility.shtml>

- [Web Accessibility: RapidWeaver: A Useful Tool in Need of Sharpening⁷](#), ATPM 12.09, September 2006.
- [Web Accessibility: Sandvox: Sand in the Eyes⁸](#), ATPM 12.08, August 2006.
- [Web Accessibility: The Clayton's Web⁹](#), ATPM 12.07, July 2006.
- [Web Accessibility¹⁰](#), ATPM 10.01, January 2004.

Copyright © 2006 Miraz Jordan, <http://mactips.info>¹¹.
Miraz is a co-author of the recently published book:
[WordPress 2: Visual Quickstart Guide](#)¹².



⁷<http://www.atpm.com/12.09/web-accessibility.shtml>

⁸<http://www.atpm.com/12.08/web-accessibility.shtml>

⁹<http://www.atpm.com/12.07/web-accessibility.shtml>

¹⁰<http://www.atpm.com/10.01/web-accessibility.shtml>

¹¹<http://mactips.info>

¹²<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0321450191/>

How To

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Use Activity Monitor to Monitor Your Mac's Memory

In [last month's column](#)¹, I talked about Activity Monitor as my candidate for one of the most under-utilized applications included with Mac OS X. I focused primarily on the basics of the Activity Monitor window and proposed using it to quit currently running [processes](#)². It's particularly useful for those processes that have hung but do not appear in the Force Quit dialog. Activity Monitor will also quit processes initiated by other users if you enter an administrator password.

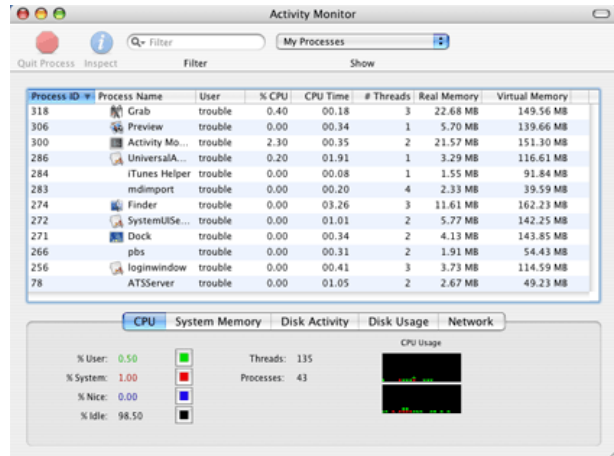
These are all perfectly good uses for Activity Monitor, but my first contact with it was to examine some memory-related issues on my G5. After I began researching the previous article, I discovered that, with a little thought, Activity Monitor can tell you more than just how much memory is being used on your computer. Is your Mac using the memory that it has efficiently? Do you need to add more memory? Activity Monitor may provide some clues to these questions.

Background Information

Last month I mentioned that the upper two-thirds of the Activity Monitor window provides information about individual processes.

¹<http://www.atpm.com/12.11/activity.shtml>

²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Process_%28computing%29



The Main Activity Monitor Window

The lower third of the window is geared toward examining some system-wide information. There are tabs for CPU Use, System Memory, Disk Activity, Disk Usage, and Network. Let's look at each of these areas briefly:

- The CPU tab provides graphical and textual representations of how your Mac is using its processor(s). Do not be surprised if the largest percentage is designated idle. Even with a word processor, Web browser, QuickTime Player, Preview, Activity Monitor, and Mail open, my system CPU stats hovered around 85 percent idle. This number will of course change depending upon how complex the tasks are that you are performing. There's not much you can do to change the numbers in this tab, but they are interesting to peek at from time to time.
- The System Memory tab displays its data as a Pie Chart. The whole "pie" represents the total amount of physical memory installed in the system. In my case it is 512 MB. That "pie" is then divided into Wired, Active, Inactive, and Free. Before you interpret this graph, make sure that you understand each of these

categories. Before I read [this Apple article](#)³ I could not understand why I often had 150 to 200 MB of memory listed as inactive. After all, the memory was there, why wasn't it being used? It turns out that the information stored in "inactive" memory is in RAM but has already been cached to disk. If the information is needed it is taken from RAM. If another application needs that memory it's available for use.

- The Disk Activity tab graphically represents the amount of data that has been written to disk. It's mostly useful for the seriously geeky among us. I do check this tab from time to time just to see if there has been a significant change.
- The Disk Usage tab shows how much disk space is used and how much remains free. If you have more than one disk attached, you can change the target drive using the pop-up menu on the left. I almost never use this tab unless I already have Activity Monitor open. Most of the time I either open a Finder window for the drive I want to examine or use the Get Info command.
- The Network tab provides graphical representations of the amount of network traffic going in and out of my system. About the only time I pay attention to this tab at all is if I seem to be having network trouble. If your network is behaving well now, look at this tab to get a rough idea of how your system is performing. Use this as a baseline to gauge future activity levels should a problem arise.

The statistics provided by Activity Monitor fluctuate as you use your system. Activity Monitor won't sound an alarm if you need more memory, but it may give you a clue if you know how to listen. We'll get to that issue in a minute, but let's first decide whether your Mac is making the best use of the memory it already has installed. In other words, "Did your Mac spring a memory leak?"

Finding Potential Memory Leaks

If you are a long-time computer user you have probably encountered reports that a given application might have a memory leak. [Memory leaks](#)⁴ occur when a computer program fails to release memory

³<http://docs.info.apple.com/article.html?artnum=107918>

⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory_leak

that it is no longer using. In extreme cases the program continues to consume memory to the extent that the entire system's performance is affected. For operating systems such as OS X that make use of [virtual memory](#)⁵, it can take quite some time for the program's performance to degrade significantly. If you are having a memory leak this process, based on [this Macworld article](#)⁶, may help identify the culprit.

1. Open Activity Monitor's main window and set the pop-up menu to "My Processes." If the Real Memory column is not visible, go to the View menu, choose Columns, and select the Real Memory option.
2. Click on the header for the Real Memory column until the arrow points downward. The amount of memory used by each process will be listed in descending order. These values are updated regularly, so watch to see if any of the numbers is climbing. If you find one that is climbing but you haven't changed the tasks being performed by the program, it might be the culprit. This behavior can also cause the numbers to rise in the virtual memory column, so be sure to check there as well.
3. If you quit the offending program and your Mac returns to normal, this might be the cause of your problems. Having this issue occur occasionally may not indicate a problem, but this should not happen consistently.

Safari is one application that many users have suggested has memory consumption issues when used heavily for extended periods of time. Quitting Safari and re-launching the program will clear the memory cache (and any potential leaks) and resolve the issue.

If you are consistently seeing poor performance after launching a particular application and you have adequate memory it might be time to contact the developer. Whether it's a fast memory leak that degrades performance quickly or a slow leak that takes time to affect performance, this is not something that users can solve; it's going to take some reprogramming to fix.

⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_memory#Swapping_in_the_Linux_and_BSD_operating_systems

⁶<http://www.macworld.com/2005/05/secrets/juneworkingmac/index.php>

Have I Got Enough Memory

Before you decide that a memory leak is present, let's try to decide whether you have enough memory installed. That's not as simple an issue as you might think. If, like I do, you only have 512 MB of memory, you will likely notice improved system performance after installing additional memory. If you already have 2 GB of memory installed and only run one or two programs, an additional GB of memory might not make a noticeable performance difference. How do you know whether or not to add additional memory?

Start by clearing out any problems that might have accumulated by restarting your Mac and logging in as usual. Launch Activity Monitor and click on the System Memory tab. Pay particular attention to the amounts of free and inactive memory shown in the pie chart. Make a mental note of these numbers or jot them down.

Now that you have a good idea of how your Mac uses memory when it first starts, it's time to do a little work. Launch applications and work with your Mac as you normally do. Periodically check Activity Monitor and look at the amount of free and inactive memory that is available. [According to Apple](#)⁷, if the numbers for *both* free and inactive memory are getting low, it might be time to add additional memory. Keep in mind that most current systems require (or can achieve a performance boost from) adding RAM modules in pairs.

If you want further confirmation of whether additional memory is needed, Terminal can provide you with the number of page-ins and page-outs that have occurred. Most importantly it shows the number of page-ins/outs per second. These numbers represent how often data is passed between the drive and memory. The more often this occurs, the more likely it is that adding extra memory will prove beneficial, so that your Mac won't need to spend as much time reading or writing to disk the data that doesn't fit in RAM. [This post](#)⁸ describes which Terminal commands to run and how to interpret the results. Even Unix-challenged folks such as myself can follow these directions.

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⁷<http://docs.info.apple.com/article.html?artnum=107918>

⁸<http://www.macosg.com/group/viewtopic.php?t=1414>

That's it for this month. It's time for me to get back in the lab and see what I can cook up for next month.

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Desktop Pictures

Europe

[This Month's Desktop Pictures](#)¹

The pictures in this series were taken by Mike Chamberlain in England, France, Rome, and Spain during a five-week tour this past summer (2006). The pictures from England, France, and Rome were taken with a Nikon 995, 3 megapixel digital camera. The Rome and Spain pictures were taken with a 7 megapixel Nikon Coolpix 7900. The change in cameras was the result of a software failure in the 995 midway through the trip, but the result was a series of much sharper pictures.

The trip that these pictures represent was focused on European history and particularly the history of Christians, Jews, and Moors in Spain. The Alhambra in Granada, Spain where many of the pictures were taken was particularly impressive as it is the site of the final surrender of the Moors to Ferdinand and Isabella and also the place where, just a few months later, Isabella presented Christopher Columbus with a charter to set out on a westward search for the route to China. Sadly, at the same moment in history the Jews were being expelled from Spain under the authority of the Spanish Inquisition. Today, there are largely only museums remaining to remind people about the impressive history and contributions of the Jewish people to Spain and to western history.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

Some browsers can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once.

iCab Use the Download command to download "Get all files in same path."

OmniWeb Choose "Save Linked > Images..." from the File menu.

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#)³.

¹<http://www.atpm.com/12.12/europe>

²<http://www.atpm.com/Back/desktop-pictures.shtml>

³<http://automator.us/examples-02.html>

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

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

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x and 10.4.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

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



Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com

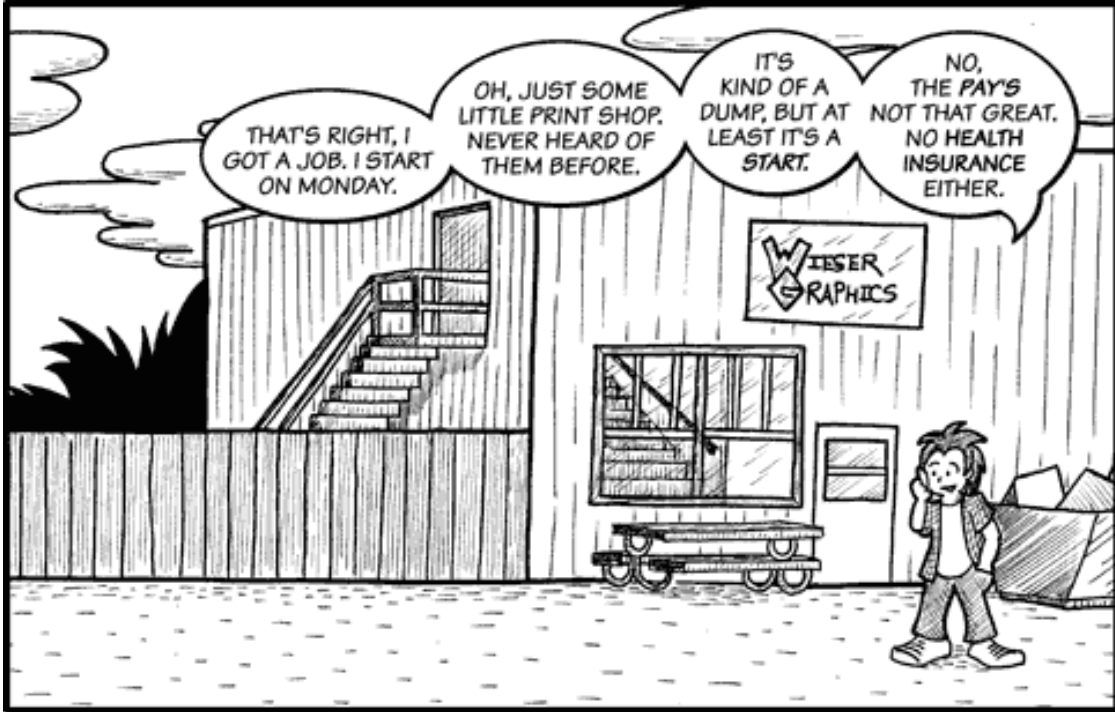


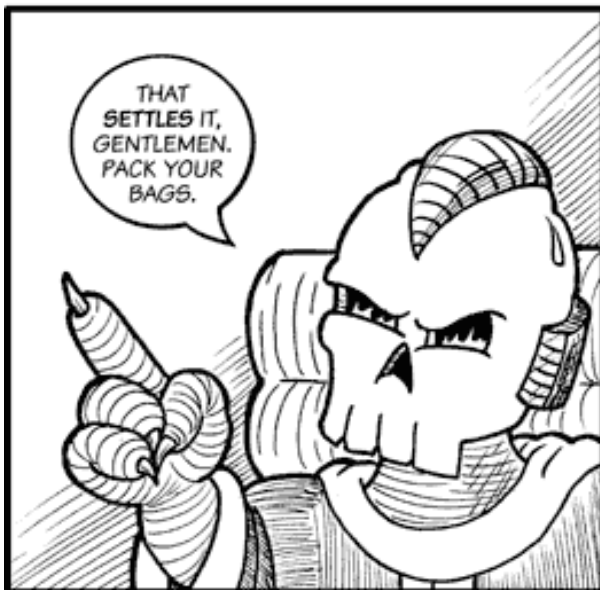
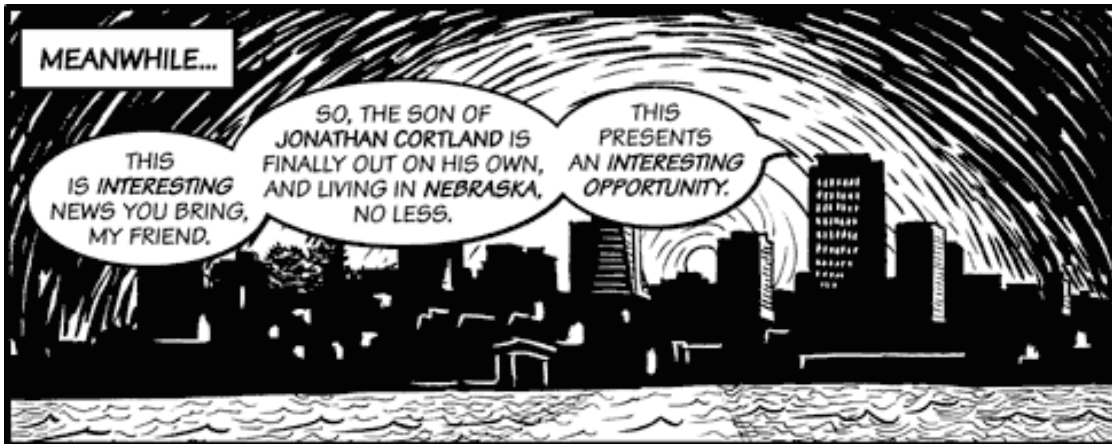














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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

Fission 1.1

Developer: [Rogue Amoeba](http://www.rogueamoeba.com)¹

Price: \$32

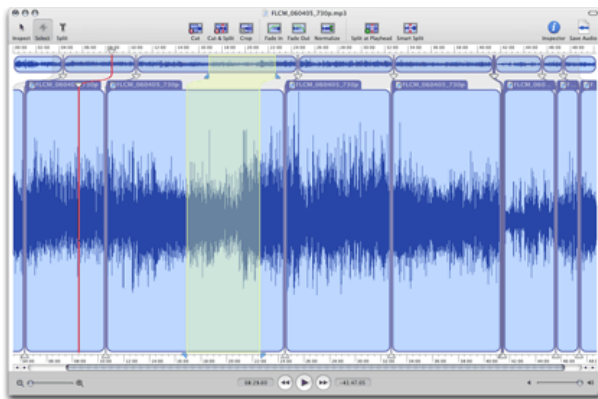
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.
[Universal](http://www.apple.com/universal/)².

Trial: Feature-limited (saved files de-graded with a series of audio fades).



With a rather long history of excellent audio-related products, it's rather surprising that Rogue Amoeba has only just recently produced a standard audio editor. ProTools is just far beyond my needs (and budget), and while Audacity is free, its lack of intuitiveness made me groan every time I launched it, not to mention its frequent crashes.

But at last, the company I consider to be expert at audio-related software priced for the masses has released Fission. Like most version 1.x software I've reviewed, Fission has some maturing to do, but that isn't to say it can't get the basic job done.



Fission's user interface is very clean and simple. Its metaphor of the entire audio clip at the top expanding to a zoomed section in the main editing region might take a second to get used to—but only a second. [Click^a](#) to enlarge.

^a<http://www.atpm.com/12.12/images/fission-large.png>

The most useful feature for me is Fission's ability to edit and save MP3 files without re-encoding them. As part of various projects in which I am involved, I often encounter audio recordings in MP3 format

either because the recorder saved directly to MP3 or because uncompressed source files are no longer available. I'm now finally able to “trim the fat” from recordings that started too early and/or ended too late, and not end up with an MP3 that is lower quality than the original.

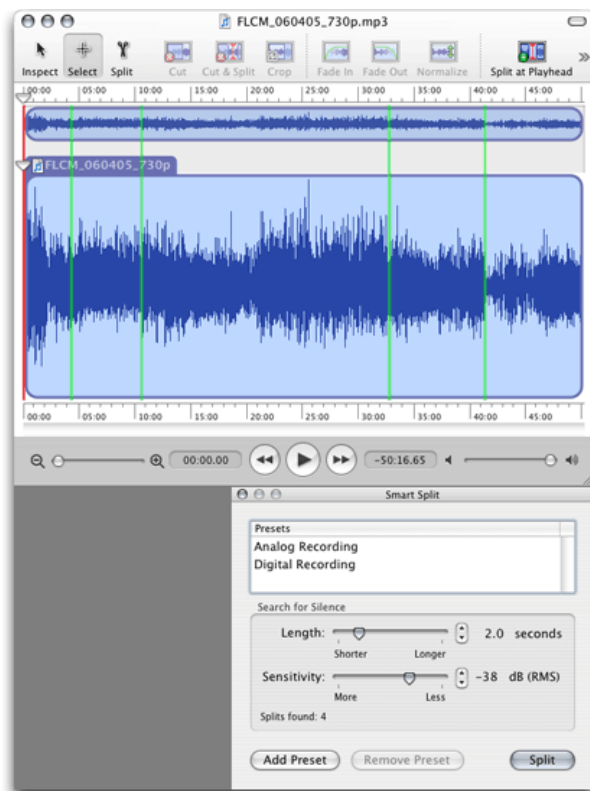
Be cautious, however, of trimming MP3 files too closely to content that isn't essentially silent. I tried to trim right at the beginning of a word and this resulted in a brief audible defect. This occurred only on MP3s—not AACs, WAVs, or AIFFs. I wouldn't be at all surprised if this is simply an issue of the MP3 codec and that any lossless MP3 editor would have the same problem. But, of course, if Rogue Amoeba were able to address it, so much the better!

As I said, Fission does have some maturing to do, but nearly all of it lies within additional features and user interface improvements. Before I touch on those, I first want to describe what I perceived as a significant bug and is the sole reason I chose a Good rating over Very Nice. During my testing, Fission hung three times, requiring a force quit. In all three instances, the hang occurred when I clicked a portion of a recording that I had split into clips (note the dark blue tabs above the main editing area in the image above). It didn't happen every time I clicked a tab to select a clip but, when it did happen, it was always just when a tab had been clicked.

So, by now you may possibly have concluded that the function of these clips is to break up a long recording into multiple files. When you save an edited file, if it is split into clips, you'll get a file for each clip in whatever file format you chose. This is perfect for recording a series of songs in one swoop, then saving each individual song. Fission even includes a Smart Split function that locates breaks both by duration and by sensitivity to silence. It can be adjusted on the fly, showing you an instant preview of how many breaks the settings will produce and where they will be located.

¹<http://www.rogueamoeba.com/fission/>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>



The Smart Split's live preview is probably the most perfect element of Fission's user interface. [Click^a](#) to enlarge.

^a<http://www.atpm.com/12.12/images/fission-smart-split-large.png>

All that's left is to mention that Fission includes a normalize command, fade in and out controls, and access to primary ID3 tags (plus lyrics and album art), and that's the long and short of what Fission is all about.

Wish List

Here's what I want to see in version 2.0, in no particular order:

Speed Adjustment

The icing for this feature would be for both a speed and pitch adjustment, but even just a basic speed control in which pitch was linearly tied to the speed would be handy. The user should be able to adjust by either desired duration or percentage above or below 100%.

Ability to Open Multiple Files

Fission currently permits only one audio file to be open at a time. As such, it's not a simple matter

to add one recording to the end of another. I do realize, however, that merging multiple files would create a problem with the lossless editing function. Perhaps the ability to copy and paste from one file into another would work only if both files were uncompressed formats or if the bit rates on MP3s and AACs matched exactly. Or, if they didn't match, Fission would only save them to an uncompressed format such as AIFF.

Figuring out this dilemma makes my head hurt, so I'll just say that even if copying/pasting between files wasn't possible, I'd still love to be able to have more than one file open.

Basic Filters

Fission currently possesses exactly two filters: normalize and fade in/out. Again, the ability to save a new MP3 or AAC without re-encoding might be in jeopardy, but when saving AIFFs or WAVs, wouldn't a few basic equalization, envelope, and special-effects filters be nice?

Additional Keyboard Shortcuts and/or Toolbar Buttons

There should be a keystroke or button (preferably both) for a few behaviors. My list is not exhaustive, but two that immediately come to mind are a way to quickly fit the entire recording within the larger main editing window, and a way to jump the playhead to the next or previous split. I'm thinking Command-0 for the zoom out and the up/down arrows for the playhead movement. Fission does define Command-[and -] for selecting the previous and next clips, but these only select the clip and do not move the playhead. And, of course, I've already described what eventually happened to me after selecting a few clips.

Removing Splits

I was nearly going to say, as my last wish list item, that there needs to be a way to remove a split, but thought better of it because I just couldn't believe there wasn't a means for doing so. I was right, but this was essentially the only item for which I found myself needing to hunt in the manual. Maybe I'm just being a little dense, but it wasn't immediately apparent that splits are easily removed by clicking once on the triangle pointer for a split and pressing the Delete key. I had been trying to Control-click on a split and expecting to find some sort of Delete Split function in the contextual menu. Fission already has a number of functions available via the contextual menu, so

adding a Delete Split command when a Control-click occurs near a split shouldn't be very difficult.

Conclusion

So once again, there's the long and the short of it— with a wish list on top! To me, the price is right, but if it's too steep for you, give Audacity a try and [let us know](#)³ how you think it compares to Fission (translation: I don't anticipate any remarks favoring Audacity to Fission).

One final remark: a perfect companion to Fission is Rogue Amoeba's Audio Hijack or Audio Hijack Pro (a product [comparison page](#)⁴ is available). Wes Meltzer is working on a review of Audio Hijack Pro, which will appear soon in an upcoming issue of ATPM.

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³<http://www.atpm.com/12.12/fission.shtml#comments>

⁴<http://rogueamoeba.com/audihijackpro/compare.php>

Hardware Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

iRecord

Developer: [iRecord](#)¹

Price: \$200

Requirements: USB device for recording, e.g. iPod (including Nano and Shuffle), USB flash drive, USB hard drive.

Trial: None



If you can tolerate a little bit of cheesy acting, a [YouTube video](#)^a demonstrates the simplicity of using the iRecord.

^a<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EQohEJIddo>

Simple to Use

The iRecord's packaging states quite clearly, "In one touch...iRecord." This is one case where the hype that is printed on a product's package is not a bunch of fluff. The iRecord simply works.

You can attach an iPod to the iRecord and clips are recorded directly to your iPod. Alternatively, you can stick in a a USB flash drive or hard drive to use as the destination of the recorded clips. Only the device's available capacity limits how long you can record.

Can Videos Move From an iPod to iTunes?

There's a really good reason for using flash or hard drives for recording. Clips recorded to an iPod cannot sync back into iTunes. I initially thought this

¹<http://www.irecord.com>

was a major problem and defeated the purpose of the iRecord, and I queried the developers about it. They replied:

As far as syncing back to iTunes is concerned, iPod has built-in audio-recording capabilities. Audio recording accessories, like [iTalk](#)², just provides an interface to these capabilities. Actual recording is done by iPod itself. Hence, iTunes acknowledges presence of audio files on iPod, that were not transferred by iTunes. So it syncs-back those files.

However, the case of video recording is different. iTunes does not acknowledge that a video file can be present on iPod without iTunes knowing about it. If a video file is present on iPod but not present in iTunes library, iTunes thinks, that user has deleted this file from his library, and this file is no longer needed. So iTunes will delete that particular file while performing sync.

So there you have it. Sounds to me like the iRecord developers would have allowed for syncing back into iTunes if they could have. Instead, they implemented a procedure that might not be desirable, yet is the only way to make sure your clips stay on your iPod after you sync:

To avoid this [the deletion of recorded clips], iRecord disables automatic-sync of iPod. You can re-enable it from your PC/Mac, but re-enabling it will cause iRecord files to be deleted by iTunes, as stated earlier.

From iTunes 7 onward, Apple has added a feature that allows you sync-back the purchased contents. But this sync-back is currently limited to purchased contents only. Maybe in the future Apple will enable sync-back of other contents as well.

²<http://www.griffintechology.com/products/italkpro/>

While I'm happy that the iRecord takes this manual-sync safeguard so as to not delete recorded clips, I don't want to use manual syncing. This is why I said earlier that using a USB drive is a very good idea. If you record to such a drive instead of the iPod, you can then copy the files into your iTunes library and they'll sync to your iPod normally. As such, since the iPod itself is not "influenced" by the iRecord, the sync mode is not changed to manual.

I was also told that a configuration utility is in the works that will allow the clips to be accessible if the iPod disk-use mode is enabled, which would allow you to copy the clips into the iTunes library, but I'm sensing that iTunes will still be switched to manual sync mode to keep newly recorded clips from being deleted. The word I received on November 13 was that this utility would be available in a few days, but as of November 25, it's still not on the iRecord Web site.

Update Your iTunes

Officially, iRecord supports iTunes 5 or later. Since recordings can't be synced back into iTunes, the version requirement may seem pointless. However, you cannot record to an iPod fresh out of the box. It must first be synced with iTunes to set up the standard navigation structure on the iPod. It follows that the iRecord requires the structure created by iTunes 5 or later.

But, if you're using iTunes 7, be sure to update to version 7.0.2 or later. It seems there were issues with the first releases of iTunes 7 that affected many situations—not just using an iRecord. Indeed, my computer was still running iTunes 7.0.1. After recording one clip to my iPod with the iRecord, then syncing, iTunes completely froze up. I was subsequently completely incapable of resyncing my iPod.

So, I bit the bullet and decided to sync it on my other computer (which also had iTunes 7.0.1). Before the message could appear that the iPod wasn't recognized and the contents would be erased before I synced it, iTunes froze on the second machine.

Ultimately I had to dig out my previous copy of the iPod update software (before it was rolled into the iTunes application), reset the iPod, and completely resync it back on my computer that holds my library. Makes me glad I kept those standalone iPod update applications. Upon the developers' advice, I then updated to version 7.0.2 and all was well. Unfortunately, I have no way to say whether updating

iTunes sooner would have saved me from having to completely resync my iPod.

Here's my completely unscientific guess as to what happened: the iRecord must be placing some sort of instruction on an iPod when it is used as the recording device. I don't know if it's a separate file, or a portion of an existing file, or something I'm not even thinking of, but once an iPod is used with the iRecord, it then has to "tell" iTunes to switch to manual sync mode. My conclusion is that this little step was the "malfunction" that invoked whatever problem iTunes 7.0 and 7.0.1 had.

Not-so-subliminal Advertising

Another minor caveat is that the iRecord places a logo splash screen on the first five seconds of every video. I have no words for why this bugs me. It just does. You don't get overlaid logos at the beginning of records made on a VHS or even a DVD recorder. Why should there be one on the iRecord?

Sample Recording

On the positive side, the quality of the recordings is very nice. H.264 compression is used at 320×240 resolution, resulting in more than three hours of record time per GB of capacity. This [one-minute clip](#)³ from a local production in which I am involved (about 5 MB) contains a mix of computer graphics and standard video. I found no noticeable compression artifacts and the video plays smoothly. The sample clip includes the aforementioned splash screen at the beginning.

The last caveat to point out is that if you are connecting the iRecord to a device that only has a single audio/video output, you won't be able to see what you're recording. The iPod only shows the typical "Do Not Disconnect" screen as if it were connected to a computer and the iRecord box only has inputs, not outputs. You'll want to either pick up some RCA plug splitters or use a source device that offers multiple outputs so you can send the audio/video signal to both a monitor and the iRecord at the same time.

Alternative Products

I briefly searched online for alternative products and mostly found software-based recorders that required a computer. The only two hardware devices I found in my admittedly quick and non-exhaustive search were

³http://www.atpm.com/12.12/iRecord_Sample.mp4

the [iLuvTM](#)⁴ and the [iSee](#)⁵. Both, like the iRecord, cost around \$200 which seems a bit high, although we are talking about a hardware encoder that works in real time. I suppose that technology still has a bit of a price tag to it.

In regard to the recording resolution, the advantage goes to the iSee for recording at 640×480. But since there is currently no software support for the Mac, the iSee suddenly drops out of the running.

The iLuvTM, on the other hand, is like the iRecord in that I saw no mention of any special software requirement. So it, too, seems to work on both Macs and PCs. Unfortunately, I could find no mention of the iLuvTM's recording resolution. What I did find, however, is that the iLuvTM *only* records to an iPod—not to any USB device like the iRecord.

The iLuvTM also uses the MPEG 4 codec. At the same bitrate, videos from the iRecord's H.264 encoding would look much better. The iRecord always uses 768Kbps. The iLuvTM can be set between 512Kbps and 1.5 Mbps, which means you can get even more video per gigabyte at the expense of low quality, or you can get video that looks as good as what the iRecord produces, but at the expense of more space required.

The part about the iLuvTM that confused me was that, in addition to this bitrate quality setting, there's also a 30, 60, 120, or 180 minute time setting. Surely this doesn't mean that even on an 80 GB iPod, you can only record up to 180 minutes, does it? Maybe that's a timer recording setting.

The iRecord will also save audio-only recordings, but does so in 192Kbps MP3 format. Since the audio portion of a video recording is done at 128Kbps AAC, I would've preferred audio-only files to be encoded that way, too. I suppose keeping them as MP3 format makes them more compatible for people who aren't using iTunes and iPods. Perhaps a small switch on the back to choose one or the other would be prudent.

The Bottom Line

The iRecord is probably the simplest of all the devices in this category. There's no futzing with recording quality settings, there are no menus or other adjustments, and you don't even need an iPod to make recordings. Given the iRecord's \$200 price tag, it's not likely the kind of device a casual/curious shopper might pick up on a whim, and there are certainly

better-suited (and better-priced) solutions for people who are more interested in recording high quality video to their computer.

Yet, for the iRecord's simplicity and ability to record to most any USB storage device, \$200 might not be so bad a price.

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⁴http://www.i-luv.com/iLuv/product_info.php?products_id=288

⁵<http://www.isee-ato.com/Video/Record-TV-Shows/Default.aspx>

Software Review

by Matthew Glidden, mglidden@atpm.com

OpenMenu X 1.0.2

Developer: [Artman21](#)¹

Price: \$10; \$7 (upgrade from OpenMenu 1.0)

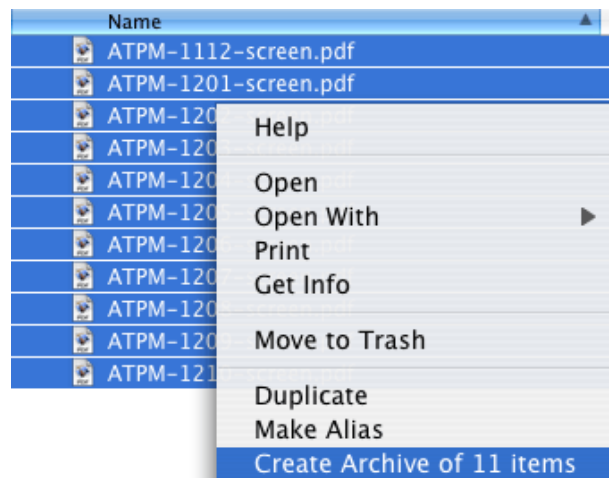
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9. Universal².

Trial: Fully-featured (20 days)



Many people make occasional (or even extensive) use of the Mac OS X contextual menu. After all, it's just a Control key (or two-button mouse right-click) away. Search Mac Help for "Using shortcut menus" for an intro if the concept is brand-new to you.

The contextual menu shows only actions for what you click, such as Cut and Paste for text or "Open with" a different application for a file. For my part, it's nice to block ad graphics on a Mozilla page, run AppleWorks document word counts, or make a new file archive, all with single mouse clicks.



Am I the only one archiving a year's worth of ATPM?

Even if you don't use the contextual menu now, it's worth looking into. Its strength is its brevity, with only relevant actions visible. If you don't rely on keyboard shortcuts for Cut and Paste, for example, they're also in the contextual menu.

¹http://www.artman21.net/product/OpenMenuX/index_E.html

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>

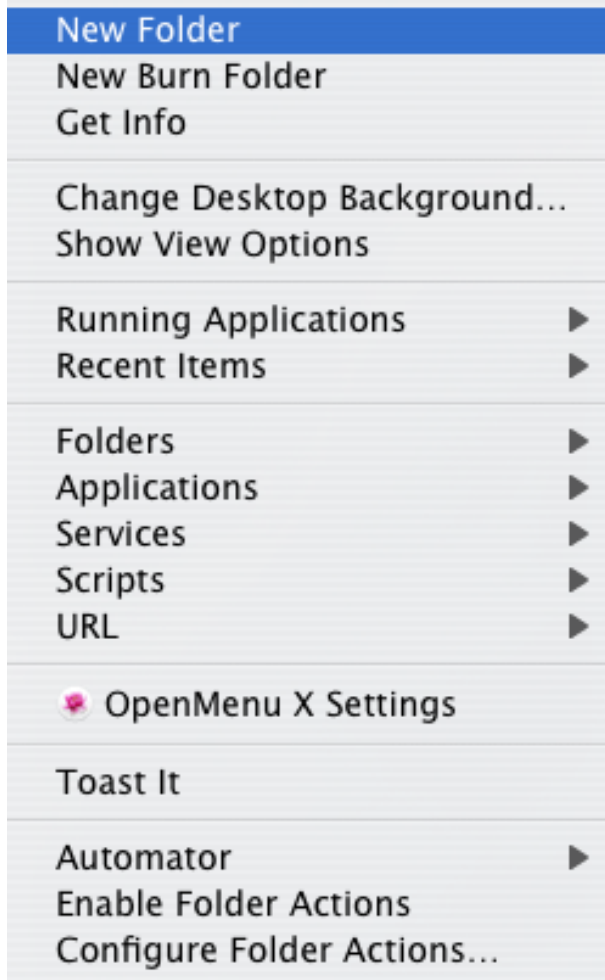
OpenMenu X challenges this concept a bit, expanding on the contextual menu capabilities. You can add items to the menu itself, much like a permanent shortcut. It puts the Recent Items menu close at hand, as well as the list of Services. You can positively overwhelm yourself with choices, which is where the decision comes in. Do you want lots of options in the contextual menu? If so, which ones do you really want to have?

Installation

It's no problem adding OpenMenu X to your system. Download and expand the package to see its preference pane. Open that to install it. I had to log out and log in again to finish the install.

Functionality and Usability

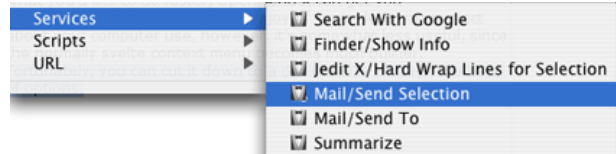
Once you finish installation, open a contextual menu anywhere to see the new features. Typically, the OpenMenu X options appear below the standard contextual items.



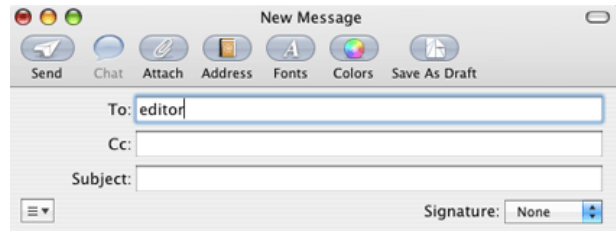
OpenMenu X's default contextual menu from the Finder.

OpenMenu X prompts two important Mac OS questions. Is it a new or better way to do things? Also, is it more or less usable than what we already have? Great features fall flat when they just get in the way.

In every application menu, Mac OS offers something called Services. They tie functions from other programs to what you're currently working on, which can be handy. As a writer, I often want commentary from others (especially if that commentary is, "Wow, what excellent writing."). For example, OpenMenu X can tell Mail to open a new message with some selected text from AppleWorks.



Sending text from AppleWorks to Mail.

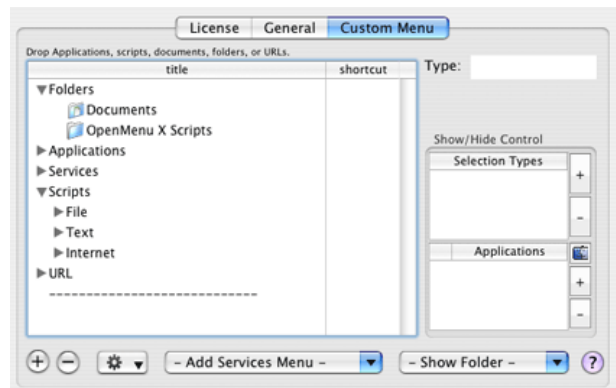


The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

The selected text appears in a new Mail message.

You can search for your text with Google, summarize it with the Summary tool, and other handy things. This is just a glimpse into Services, though. Have you ever used them before? [Not many people do](#)³.

The OpenMenu X preference pane contains a bevy of customizations. It's more than you need at first, though you'll probably choose to add things as time goes on.



OpenMenu X's preference pane.

Most are turned on by default. This creates a very "full" contextual menu, so I pared things down. Out went active applications, since I can Command-Tab to them as needed. Ditto the Folders submenu, with its way-too-many options. Gone the "Open Settings" item. I don't do much scripting, so that left as well.

³<http://highschoolblows.blogspot.com/2005/11/mac-os-x-services-menu-you-never-go-to.html>

In the end, only the Recent Items and Services sub-menus proved uniquely useful, so they stayed. With the excellent [DragThing](#)⁴ already in place, opening applications from the contextual menu seemed unnecessary. However, that doesn't diminish Services, which I do find handy (and contextual). Definitely try it out, should you install OpenMenu X.

Summary

OpenMenu X proves handy for people who like a customized, personal environment. You can make anything—program, document, or URL—available at the touch of your mouse. If you script the Finder to help with repetitive tasks, this can further reduce menu-based busy work. However, it best fits a niche market of skilled users. Less frequent users probably find it effort enough just browsing the Internet and sending mail.

The contextual menu itself best fits people used to “discovering” what functions lie within familiar programs. In that sense, OpenMenu X extends this to include scripting abilities and other customizable “show me now” functions. This pushes much of the program's utility to you, the user.

If you often spend time thinking how you use the computer and what you'd like to do faster, OpenMenu X can get you there—customize the menus and enjoy. If you're less circumspect about your computer use, however, it's somewhat less useful, since the normally svelte contextual menu becomes much bulkier. Fortunately, you can cut it down to a desired size through the bevy of options.

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write to us at reviews@atpm.com.*



⁴<http://www.dragthing.com/english/about.html>

Software Review

by David B. Thompson, dthompson@atpm.com

Synergy 3.0

Developer: [Wincent Coaliuta](http://wincent.com/a/products/synergy-classic/)¹

Price: 10 Euro (about \$13)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2.
[Universal](http://www.apple.com/universal/)².

Trial: Fully-featured (7 days)



I use iTunes. I use iTunes a lot! It's rare for me to be at my computer and not have music playing in the background. I started loading my music library into iTunes shortly after I bought my first PowerBook (an aluminum model) late in 2003. That was the Panther epoch and predates Dashboard and its widgets.

I like my music. I like my music at moderate volume levels or a smidge higher. Therefore, there are times when I want to quickly pause a song, especially if the phone rings or a student comes to my office door. There are also times when my mood is such that the next track just doesn't interest me, so a skip-this-track feature is necessary. A convenient tool on the menu bar for just this purpose is welcome. It's also convenient if the tool does more than just pause and restart a track in iTunes.

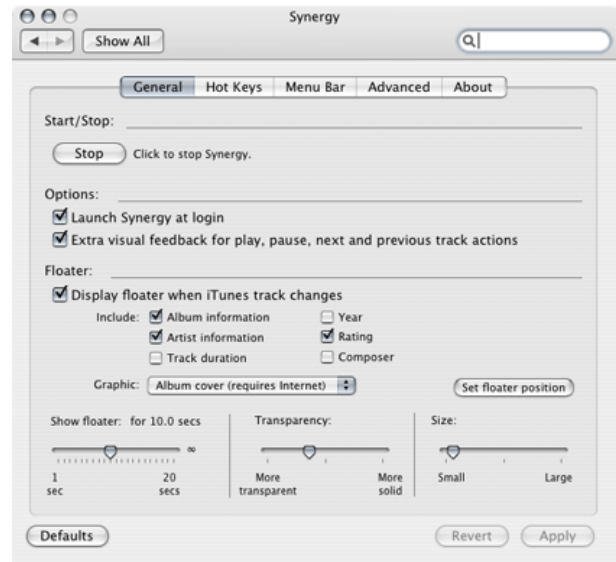
Soon after I bought my first Macintosh, I found a link to Wincent Coaliuta's Synergy utility. Synergy's main purpose is to put an iTunes controller on the menu bar. It also offers hot keys for controlling iTunes' functions without removing your hands from the keyboard. For keyboard specialists, this is a nice additional feature.

However, I'm getting ahead of myself. I found Synergy back in the Panther epoch (as mentioned above) when I wanted/needed iTunes control from the menu bar. Although I loaded and tested the program before I paid my registration fee, I used it only a few hours before recognizing the program's value. I am a long-time registered user of Synergy.

Installation and Use

Installation is simple. I downloaded the disk image, mounted it, and launched the installer. The installer did its thing, installing the software and a preferences pane. Configuration of Synergy is through the

System Preferences application. I turned on some Synergy options and turned off others.



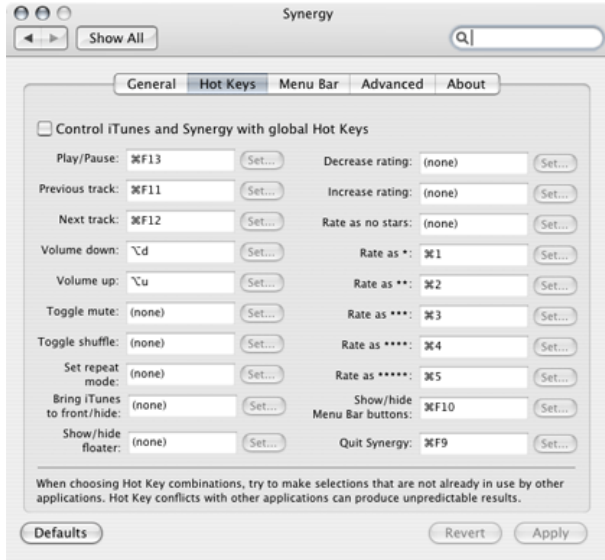
General Setup Options

I use Synergy much of the time, so I allow it to launch on login. I also like the floater to display track information whenever a new track starts. There are tweaks for floater settings.

The availability of hot keys to control iTunes from the keyboard is useful, and I used that for a while. The hot keys are user-configurable and offer the usual suite of previous/next track and play/pause. But, Synergy also offers hot keys for volume control, muting, repeat, rating adjustments, and more. There are a lot of options for hot key control.

¹<http://wincent.com/a/products/synergy-classic/>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>



Hot-key Capabilities

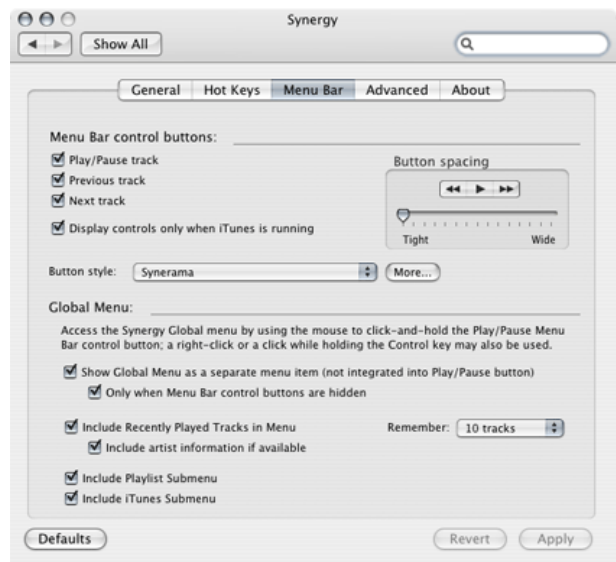
I'm not a control freak, so I eventually turned off the Synergy hot keys. As I recall (it's been awhile), the default volume up/down key set interfered with the hot keys for one of my common applications, and I didn't use the feature often enough to hunt for a mnemonically-appropriate combination that wasn't used by another application. I simply turned off the hot keys feature. That capability was appreciated.

The menu bar appearance of Synergy is also configurable. The type of "widget" is user-selectable, as is what is presented to the user. What Synergy calls the "global menu" (a pull-down from the menu bar) is also configurable.



Configuring the Floater

The floater is cool. It appears at the beginning of each new song (if activated). Given a Net connection or if the cover art is stored in the music file (MP3 and AAC file share this capability), Synergy will display it, along with user-selected track information, at a location on the screen of your choice. I have my floater set to display the cover art, track title, and artist, and my "star" rating for the track in the lower-left portion of my screen for about ten seconds.



The Floater on the Desktop

I like the floater. Cover art is cached, so once you work through your library, cover art is available even if it isn't present in the music file.

Conclusions

I've been using Synergy for nearly three years on three different Macs (a PowerBook, a dual-G5 desktop, and now a MacBook Pro) and through numerous versions of iTunes. Coaliuta actively develops the software, and a number of updates were issued over the last three years. I have had no stability issues with the software—it simply works as advertised and fills an important function for me.

When updates are released, they are packaged in an installer that finds the installation and patches it simply and professionally. Synergy gets high marks here.

I use iTunes a lot. Until I bought my current keyboard and mouse combination (a Logitech 530—a review for another time) and until the advent of Dashboard, I had no option for controlling iTunes without the application being in the foreground (I never used iTunes' Dock menu). If you're into a menu bar solution for controlling iTunes, Synergy fulfills that role well, at least for me. I'll give it a Very Nice rating.

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Hardware Review

by Andrew Kator, akator@atpm.com

Tankstick

Developer: [Xgaming](#)¹

Price: \$200

Requirements: Mac (2 USB ports) or PC
(2 USB or 2 PS/2 ports)

Trial: None



The X-Arcade Tankstick combines the X-Arcade [Dual Joystick](#)² and [Trackball Mouse](#)³ controllers into one unit, saving desk space for gamers. As with Xgaming's other products, the Tankstick is a solid unit made of melamine-surfaced hardboard, trimmed with "authentic" arcade-style T-molding. This unit is the largest offered to date, measuring 29.5" wide by 13" deep and weighing in at a significant 20 pounds. Xgaming offers a lifetime [warranty](#)⁴ with free parts replacement for all of its products.



The controller has enough inputs to satisfy most gamers. Two self-centering joysticks and 22 buttons frame the large trackball centered on the top surface. The right and left sides have two buttons each, one for mouse-button input and one for "insert coin" or pinball use. The back of the Tankstick has two additional buttons and a sliding switch for customized setup and programming options.

¹<http://www.x-arcade.com/tankstick-arcade-game.shtml>

²<http://www.x-arcade.com/two-player.shtml>

³<http://www.x-arcade.com/trackball.shtml>

⁴<http://www.xgaming.com/guarantee.shtml#warranty>

Installation

Two additional cables are included, a combined USB-PS/2 cable and a serial cable for use with optional [console adapters](#)⁵. Mac and PC users simply attach the USB-PS/2 cable to the back of the console and plug either the USB or PS2 (not both) into the computer. No specialized drivers are required to use the Tankstick with either Macs or PCs, since everything on the controller is recognized as standard keyboard or mouse input.

For game console users, the dual joysticks on the Tankstick work with the PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Xbox, Xbox 360, Gamecube, and Dreamcast with the use of the appropriate adapter and serial cable. The trackball works on PlayStation 2 consoles with the standard USB cable, but the Xbox consoles require an additional USB-to-Xbox adapter. PlayStation 2, Xbox, and Xbox 360 consoles can also use third-party mouse-to-console adapters for trackball use.

Windows versions of Atari Anniversary Edition (Asteroids, Asteroids Deluxe, Battlezone, Centipede, Crystal Castles, Gravitar, Millipede, Missile Command, Pong, Super Breakout, Tempest, and Warlords) and Midway Game Bundle (Defender, Gauntlet, Joust, Rampage, Robotron: 2084, and Smash TV) are included. Intel Mac users with [Boot Camp](#)⁶ and Windows XP installed can play all of these arcade classics without the use of emulators or online services.

Configuration

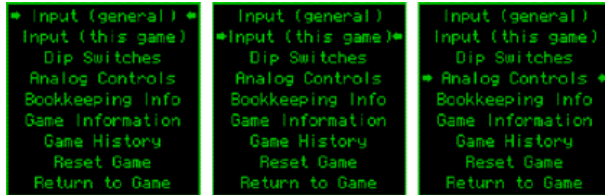
Setup for most games and emulators requires only changing the software preferences, specifically the keyboard and mouse settings. For games that do not offer control preferences, there are three hardware programmable settings accessed with the sliding switch on the back of the Tankstick. Position one is the non-programmable default configuration, but positions two through four are easily setup for use with non-configurable games and online services such as [Gametap](#)⁷.

⁵<http://www.x-arcade.com/adapters.shtml>

⁶<http://www.apple.com/macosx/bootcamp/>

⁷<http://www.gametap.com>

Emulators work well with the default hardware setting, since most have software preferences for both general and specific game use. To configure emulators for the trackball, use the analog control input options. Setup is similar for MacMAME, MAME, MAME32, and X-MAME.



While running a game in MAME, pressing the Tab key displays options for controller settings.

The Tankstick works extremely well with many first-person shooter games. The joysticks and buttons replace the keyboard and number-pad inputs, and the trackball replaces the mouse.

Results

My test unit's construction and finish was flawless, without defects or blemishes, and when plugged in it was immediately recognized by both Mac OS X and Windows XP. It worked with all games and emulators tested, including the bundled Atari and Midway arcade games running on an Intel iMac with Boot Camp and Windows XP SP2. The hardware's programmable settings functioned without a snag. After hours of use, I encountered no control issues with the joysticks, trackball, or any buttons.

The Tankstick offers a good value to gamers, saving \$30 over purchasing the Dual Joystick and Trackball Mouse controllers separately. This controller brings a new experience to arcade, FPS, sports, and golf titles that benefit from the trackball, and the head-to-head two-player gaming action makes many classic games more fun.

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¹<mailto:reviews@atpm.com>

²<http://www.atpm.com/subscribe>

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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.



⁴<http://www.atpm.com/Back/>