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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the February issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* As winter winds its way through the calendar and the economy continues in a deep freeze of its own, the editors of ATPM have compiled our latest issue to bring a little warmth to the long cold nights and shed a little light on the state of Apple-based computing in all of its desktop, laptop, and handheld varieties. As this issue's cover illustrates, Apple's continuing bright performance stands in contrast to the surrounding economic and industry terrain.

Stay Tuned

Perhaps that's the best way to describe the recent changes to iTunes. The catalog of available music, movies, and apps continues to expand, and consumers have more reason to spend more time shopping at the popular online store.

In early January, Apple announced that more than 500 million apps had been downloaded from the iTunes application store, and sales traffic for all areas of the iTunes franchise set record highs in the days after Christmas.

iWork '09 and iLife '09

Departing from the historical even-year update schedule for Apple's lifestyle and productivity software suites, the company announced iWork '09 and iLife '09 at January's Macworld Expo. Reviews of the new products have been generally favorable. Users who found iMovie '08, a component of the iLife suite, awkward to use should be cheered by this version's updates.

Goodbye January, Hello June

January's Macworld Expo may be the last of its kind. The market has changed, and many of the most prominent hardware and software makers are revisiting their commitment to big trade shows. The expensive events are falling victim to the Information Age in which virtual exhibit spaces provide potential product buyers with needed information and vendors increasingly sell direct to clients and consumers.

Apple's annual conference for developers, held each June, may become the company's big public event to showcase new products and technologies. Developers are becoming increasingly important to the success of the iPhone and iPod touch platform, and enticing new developers to enter the Apple fold is becoming increasingly important to Apple's product plans and continuing success.

A Bright Light in a Darkening Economy

For the three-month period ended December 27, 2008, Apple reported record quarterly GAAP revenue of \$10.17 billion dollars as well as record GAAP profits \$1.61 billion or

\$1.78 per share. Non-GAAP results (which include the full value of iPhone and Apple TV sales that are realized over the anticipated life of those products) reflect revenue of \$11.8 billion and earnings of \$2.3 billion. Mac unit sales increased nine percent over the prior-year period, and the company sold a record 22.727 million iPods, including apparently strong sales of the popular iPod touch as well as the inexpensive iPod shuffle.

Please join us each month of the year as ATPM brings to its readers interesting views on the world of Apple computing and insightful product reviews. It's our mission to celebrate the personal computing experience.

Our February issue includes:

Bloggable: That and 99 Cents Will Get You...

A lot of iPhone applications are free, or priced at 99¢. Is this good for software developers and for users? Last month's debate over when the price is right for mobile software continues in this month's *Bloggable*.

MacMuser: Broadband Endowment

Mark notes that in the UK many broadband users are only getting half the speed they're paying for, and the loggerheads future broadband stands at.

MacMuser: Phone Bills and Forms

Mark Tennent, our correspondent across the Pond, examines how his phone bills have changed through broadband's growth and laments the fact that many employment forms are in non-editable PDF format.

Next Actions: February 2009 Master List

This month, we review a few new additions briefly, while updating the list of GTD applications to reflect version changes and additions.

Report: Macworld Expo 2009

Three members of the ATPM staff ventured forth last month to take in the 25th Macworld Conference & Expo, and share their thoughts on their adventure.

Segments: The Zippy Quest for Jazzy Flash

Money can buy you lots of removable storage.

Desktop Pictures: San Francisco

In addition to attending Macworld 2009, Lee Bennett did some San Francisco sightseeing and returned with several scenic shots, mostly around the Golden Gate Bridge.

Qaptain Qwerty

Is bigger better?

Review: Cricket Laptop Stand

Some purists may think laptop stands are just not cricket, but Frank Wu is impressed with the Cricket Laptop Stand.

Review: MacSpeech Dictate 2.1

MacSpeech has done a major overhaul of their voice-recognition utility, now offering a capable and useful tool for those looking for dictation and voice-command help.



Xmas Exchange

I waited two years for the iPhone and bought the 3G this past year. I am not unhappy about this, but I would not give it a 10 either. I think not sending pictures with text messaging is a disadvantage! I was surprised I couldn't do this. I do send pictures via e-mail, but it isn't the same thing. Some of my recipients want to get pictures on their phones. I am very disappointed to find out after the fact that my Bluetooth headgear does *not* support voice mail, a service which came automatically when I was at Verizon. I feel this is a necessity in the car, and after spending all this extra mula with AT&T for this phone, I don't want to give them another \$5+ a month. There are apps that sort of have voice dial, but I would still have to look at my phone while driving, which is unsafe and illegal. Also, another disadvantage is when I talk on the phone my cheek usually touches the phone screen and puts me on mute, calls another person, or cuts me off. That is annoying! Last but not least is the rapid rate that the battery drains, but I've dealt with it by purchasing a small external battery source that fits in my purse and additional chargers for home and car.

—*Ellen Lerner*

Freeway 5.3.1

Very nice review, Ed. I've been running the demo of Freeway 5 for a couple of weeks, and it looks like I'll purchase it. Your comments cemented that decision.

—*Jim Larson*

Next Actions: Article Line-up

Thank you for this article. Two comments:

1. Check out XMind. It is the best free mind-mapping application on the market. The Pro version allows for task GTD-like management.
2. Despite all my previous gripes about Circus Ponies NoteBook I am using it to manage my tasks using a system that is very GTD-like. It is important to remember that NoteBook can clip e-mail or Web sites and append it to the user's Inbox list for later sorting *or* it can clip to a particular GTD category (e.g. Someday/Maybe). It is certainly one of the most attractive applications on the market.

—*Durbrow*

Thanks for the recommendation about XMind—I will check it out. And good tips on using Circus Ponies NoteBook for GTD.

—*Ed Eubanks*



Thanks for continuing to write on these topics. For 2009 I'd love to see more of a focus on moving structured data in and out of these applications. Please focus more on issues of importing data, exporting data, and to what extent data is "locked" into these apps and therefore binds users to an application.

—*John Gordon*

By "structured data" and what you go on to say, I assume you mean something like an open standard?

It would be nifty if all of the GTD application developers all agreed to use XML or OPML, or some other existing standard. The trouble is, even with just XML or OPML, which do you use? It would depend on what application(s) you want to share that data with. That was, in a sense, one of the great advantages of the original KinklessGTD, which—because it was based on OmniOutliner with its inherent power—could export the data in a scad of formats.

I'm not entirely sure about the nature of your question, though: is it your wish to use multiple GTD-style apps, and move data regularly between them? Or is it simply to have the flexibility to export and import a variety of data types?

—*Ed Eubanks*



Great article. You touch on one of the big challenges for me—creative idea management—>simple ongoing planning/necessary idea refinement—>fruition of idea into reality.

The system I've developed is this:

Curio: My digital white board with mindmaps, lists, drawing tools, shapes, arrows all working together to help me see my own mind. It is the quintessential creative mind tool (I've tried outliners, NoteBook—Curio stands out for me)

Evernote: As they say, my brain in my pocket. Call logs, details, idea capture, and much more. Wherever I am. Beautiful.

Things: It's as yet incomplete. But Culture Code do depth with elegant simplicity—so I'm happy to wait for their excellence vs. other's premature answers. (Yes, I've tried them all.)

Here's what's missing: a protocol for helping them all work together. Along with contacts and e-mail. It's a cobbled together system, with some integration, but no seamless flow. It's improved a lot in the last year or two and will continue to do so, but the system that works for me, doesn't work for you. What is needed is a way for these programs to share this data in a live link and update way, with thumbnails etc. so there can be an ongoing dashboard auto-updated. That's what I'm looking for.

—Patrick Jones

Good summary—and you’re right, a clear protocol, as you call it, is the hinge-pin, isn’t it? I want to begin to work on that idea with the “Task Tracking” article—but I think such a topic is bigger than one or even several articles. Maybe my thoughts will, at least, provide a petri dish in which your workflow might emerge.

—Ed Eubanks



Great series of articles. Still, your description of Life Balance’s Distinguishing Features is incomplete. Yes, it “gives ‘meta-feedback’ about tasks: how much time are you spending in different areas of your life...,” but the main feature that stands out is that it combines an outline view (of all your various nested projects and tasks) with a to-do list view that is sorted for you—combining the importance of the overall project with the urgency of the specific task. So you always see the most important tasks at the top, and you don’t have to always scan your whole list. It seamlessly connects actions in contexts with their projects. I’m just a user, and there are many features that it doesn’t have that others like OmniFocus have, but it is an excellent application for making quick decisions about what to do, especially if you want the synchronization to the Palm and iPhone.

—George Garrett

I realize my coverage of Life Balance is spotty. Thanks for pointing out the advantage of the outline view—I can see how that would be an asset to many users for sorting and planning. I’ll include it in my summary next time.

—Ed Eubanks

Whoomp Earbud Enhancers

Update: I’ve just tried these out with the headphones that ship with the iPhone 3G, and they don’t work at all. They’re too big for the iPhone earbuds. I’m not sure if Apple has redesigned all their iPod earbuds or just the iPhone buds, but these definitely won’t work with the latest iPhone earbuds.

—Chris Lawson

Harmon Kardon Soundsticks II

This is without a doubt the nicest audio review I have read!

I would like to know which recordings you use to test the products you review (not just these) because I’m making a list of CDs I should get!

Also, are the SACDs or Ultradiscs from MFSL really worth their price in comparison to normal CDs?

Oh, and can you tell me where I can find other reviews by you?

Thanks a lot,

—*Rodrigo Euan Pacheco*

Thanks for your kind remarks. It's good to know that even 4+ years on this review is bringing readers some laughs.

There is no definitive list of recordings for auditioning speakers or sound equipment. You can find albums on *Stereophile's* R2D4 (Records to Die For) and *The Absolute Sound* has their own list as well. But my advice has always been to bring albums you know very well so that you can detect differences in the reproduction easily. That having been said, there are obviously albums which are more demanding in terms of their bandwidth, tonal or dynamic range, etc. or are of higher fidelity in terms of the recording quality. It would be hard for me to provide a list here for you—networking with other audiophiles and reading some of the magazines may help. I have discovered a lot of music by spending time with other music lovers and audiophiles who spread the word about great albums from artists who often fly below the radar.

My advice is to bring a variety with you so that you can cover a wide cross section of your own music library. Personally whenever I audition equipment I bring at least one very demanding large scale orchestral recording (Mahler, Beethoven, etc.). The two recordings I mention here, the Dvorak and Mahler, are good examples but there are countless others. I always bring a vocal recording or two—at least one male and one female, as human voice can be very challenging to reproduce accurately. I typically bring something big that rocks to make sure the system isn't just sterile and "audiophile" but can actually swing too. Pink Floyd, The Who, The Stones, etc. whatever your particular preference. I also typically bring one or two small scale ensemble recordings—a jazz trio or quartet (say Keith Jarrett Trio, Oscar Peterson Trio, etc.) and a chamber music recording, say Bach or something along those lines, to ensure the system can handle delicate passages as well as bombastic ones.

In terms of your other question. I am not a big fan of SACD personally, but there are others who feel differently. There is some merit to the MFSL discs, but they run the gamut—some are really no better than the original aluminum CD release, some are significantly better, and many fall somewhere in between. The prices out there can be kind of goofy, so use your own judgment. MFSL was really mostly about their high-end LP releases, which typically were worth the extra money and did sound significantly better than regular LP releases (there were some exceptions, and people spend hours online debating this stuff—but overall the MFSL LP releases were excellent, especially given when they were released). The MFSL CD concept didn't really offer the same level of improvement.

One format that is absolutely worth the money is the XRCD, which is a standard aluminum CD, but which is mastered using a proprietary process by JVC in Japan. The resulting sound quality is vastly superior to a conventionally recorded/produced CD. There is a limited catalog in large part because they go back to the original master tapes to

create the discs, but most of the titles are really excellent so the collection makes up in quality what it lacks in quantity.

At the end of the day I am very cynical about digital formats and SACD vs. CD etc. because I am really an analog guru and I listen to LPs about 90% of the time. So to me the digital debates are pretty uninteresting. But then again I am an audiophile and willing to deal with all the hassles that come with LPs.

As to your last question—I have never actually written any formal audio reviews. I am an audiophile, and for years I owned a store by the name of Symphony Sound in Chicago where we designed, sold, and installed high-end audio and home theater systems. But I have not written any reviews. I mostly wrote this piece as a send-off of the typical audiophile reviews out there because after spending a number of years in the industry the reviews started to really drive me nuts.

Trust your own ears, find a good store—one which treats people the way I'd like to believe our customers would say we treated them, a store that will spend time with you and is serious about good sound and about music and not just about the next sale. And recognize it is a gradual process. It took me about 10 years to get my system where I wanted it, in part because I couldn't afford to do it all right in one fell swoop, and in part because I needed to spend more time listening and learning what I like and dislike, and in part because some products in my system only recently became available. So it's unlikely to all come together overnight, but now that I have my system the way I want it, I don't fiddle with it anymore. I just leave it alone and listen to music. And that is what I call reaching audio nirvana...

Thanks for reading,
—Evan Trent

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That and 99 Cents Will Get You...

When I was a kid, if I had a really good idea but it was something impractical, my mom's way of bringing me back to Earth was to tell me, "You know, that and a quarter will get you on the bus." (I regret once telling her that Tri-Met was all the way up to \$1.35 by the time she said that.)

It seems a lot of would-be high-end iPhone software developers are feeling that way.

[Last month](#), I mentioned briefly that there was a bit of a gang-up from some big names in the Mac world—Paul Kafasis, Daniel Jalkut, and Brent Simmons—complaining that the iPhone App Store's pricing and purchasing model discourages high-end and higher-priced applications. But it seems that, in spite of my short shrift, the discussion kept on going. (*What? You mean people don't set their agendas by my input?*)

Macworld's Dan Moren wrote a great opinion piece on the topic, with a central insightful observation: the 99-cent price point is tempting, especially because the iTunes Music Store relies so heavily on it, but the market for software [doesn't work like](#) the market for music. He hits a couple of points: (1) production costs for music are usually at the album level rather than the song level; and (2) music producers have a whole catalogue to sell, so they can make up nominal losses on one song with significant gains on another. To this, I'd add a corollary, (2a): the music industry has a massive back catalogue to sell, and the cost of producing the back catalogue is a sunk cost in the past, which means that its current production cost is zero.

He uses this opportunity to interview developers of 99-cent apps to find out what they're doing. For instance, David Barnard (App Cubby) tells Moren that he's pricing his applications at 99 cents and then asking for donations from users.

His own opinion is that the iPhone's new, lower price point of \$199 may have driven down the market's tolerance for variable App Store price points. If you want to appeal to a larger audience, as a developer, you end up driving down your price and hoping to make it up on volume. That's a solution that works great for big companies but not for the individual producer. Moren also gets back to the point that [Kafasis argued](#) in December, that by offering fully functional, complex applications at 99 cents, you end up leaving consumers wondering what could possibly make a \$9.99 application worth buying.

You can put this to a real-world test. Moren links to an interview with *Ars Technica's* David Chartier, for *Infinite Loop*, in which a developer from High Gloss Software demonstrates himself to be a [real asshole](#). Apparently this developer, who wants to remain anonymous

(!), was inspired by [Craig Hockenberry's post](#) and wrote a “terrible app” in 20 minutes. (This would be Sound Grenade.) Seven days later, it made it into the Top 10 for free apps—he got 106,831 downloads in a single day. Chartier speculates that, if he had priced it at 99¢, the developer might’ve made \$70,000 that day. More astonishing, he added ad requests to the application when it cracked the Top 50, and now it makes him \$200 an hour in click-through revenue.

(*AppleInsider* has a similar interview, but with [less analysis](#).)

With applications like this succeeding, it does make you wonder—with, as Brent Simmons pointed out last month, no supported trial period—what the point of even a \$1.99 application is.

Andy Finnell has a parable that he uses to illustrate precisely this problem: his hypothetical Little Timmy slaved over an application for three months and then priced his application at 99¢—but at that price, [only made \\$4,000](#). There’s some research that went into this, which Andy detailed in a [previous post](#), that an application not in the Top 100 can expect to sell just 16 copies a day on average, or about 6,000 copies a year.

(If I extend his math, if he had priced his application at just \$4.99, he would make \$20,399 a year after the initial launch, and at \$9.99, \$40,839.12. And if people were willing to pay what most Mac apps cost, in the \$19.99 ballpark, and sell 16 copies a day, he’d make \$81,719.12. Not bad. Even better, if he could sell the median 49 copies that Finnell found, at \$4.99, he’d make \$62,472.30 with the same low effort!)

Finnell suggests that \$9.99 should be the new 99¢. As I said, at 16 copies a day, you’d get \$40,000 a year, not enough to send a kid to college but at least enough to pay your rent. Finnell is pretty dismissive of that sum, but \$40,000 a year goes a relatively long way even in Florida—you won’t save a lot, you won’t have a flat-screen HDTV, but you can have an apartment and a car, health care, and groceries on \$40K. I did it.

In November, the guys at Veiled Games described their experience doing just this. It’s a nice, how-you-get-from-99 cents-to-meaningful-sales essay, and it sounds like a [valuable lesson](#) for anyone doing App Store development. Along the same lines, Marco Arment wrote about his own App Store development, and suggests one other really good idea: offer a [free version](#), which is version-limited but still “doesn’t suck,” and encourage users to upgrade. (This gets around Simmons’ complaint.)

Mike Schramm from *The Unofficial Apple Weblog* is on the “other side of the debate. He writes, “If someone can sell 100,000 copies of an application for [a buck apiece](#). . . why are the talented developers leaving? Surely you can make a quality application for less than \$70,000, right?” He eventually adds that, if developers really can’t figure out how to do this, maybe it is time to look at the pricing setup—but that we’re not there yet.

I didn’t hear much from that side of the debate. Some of this is that everyone’s sort of talking past each other: users want cheap, developers want more expensive, but users shellack developers of expensive software for the most part.

It's a hard topic. I happily paid for PCalc for my Mac and for my iPhone, four years apart, for instance. The default Mac calculator sucks, although not as bad as Windows', and the default iPhone calculator is borderline useless. I paid for OmniWeb because it's vastly superior to Safari. But would I pay for a Web browser for the iPhone? Maybe not.

What do you think? Are you a developer, an iPhone user, the prototypical 13-year-old Nickelback listener who won't pay for software? Tell me why, tell me how you're making do. I'll reverse-blog the best next month.

Get Well, Get Well Soon, We Wish You to Get Well

I've deliberately resisted writing about Steve Jobs' health for a long time. I just don't think it's germane. Frankly, he's only a public figure up to a point, and as long as he doesn't have his finger on The Button, why should I really care whether he's healthy or sick? But at some point, I guess it crosses the threshold where, if I don't write about it, it looks like I'm holding out because I don't want to talk about it, not because my news judgment tells me to stay away.

You may have heard that he's taking a medical [leave of absence](#) to deal with a hormone issue that is keeping his body from absorbing nutrients. The *Baltimore Sun's* David Zeiler said everything I think needed to be said about this:

Let's think positively and hope (the day Steve Jobs leaves Apple for good) won't arrive for a long time. [Get well soon](#), Steve.

Some other Mac journalists and bloggers threw themselves into the story with much *Sturm und Drang*. All I have to say about this is, well, read [Dan Miller's analysis](#) in *Macworld*. It was not our finest hour. But *Macworld* really stayed above the fray.

If you're wondering who will man the helm while Steve is out, *AdAge's* Simon Dumenco and *Macworld's* Jason Snell discussed Tim Cook, in a [fascinating Q&A](#).

Other Leftovers

- *Electronista* caught Belkin's Mark Bayard [seeking positive reviews](#) for Belkin products on Amazon.com—using Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk service. Seriously. In addition to being awfully stupid, it's a violation of Amazon's Terms of Service. And "awfully stupid" is intended to encompass "unethical" and "against the entire spirit of the Internet." I love stuff like this, because it shows that there is justice in the world.
- *Edge Magazine* has a really, really, really interesting read from a corner of the universe I hardly ever cover: Apple platform (Mac, iPhone) gaming. *Edge* asks Apple's Greg Joswiak whether the iPhone can make a difference in the [portable gaming market](#). One really nice touch: when asked whether having only one button was a problem for

game developers, he had a great answer at the ready. Joswiak said, “The screen we have is a blank canvas for developers to paint on it whatever they need to paint at the moment they need it.”

- A Psystar update, because, well, who can resist? Psystar is claiming that Apple is undermining the first sale doctrine—§109 and §117(b) of the [Copyright Act of 1976](#), if I read them correctly—to protect them. They say that if Apple sells the software to them, retail, and then Psystar resells them on their computers, Apple doesn’t have any control over [what Psystar’s customers do](#) with them. I have no idea what their theory is here, but they’re always good for an inch or two of copy.

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Phone Bills and Forms

What a difference a decade has made to telephone bills. We realised it after a reply was left for us this week on [a column](#) from ATPM 12.09. All good stuff too, but I would say that, wouldn't I?

Back in 1990, when we got our first modem and thought faxes were a neat way to communicate, we needed four telephone lines: one each for conversation and one each for our fax machines. Sending and receiving files involved long-distance telephone calls, which only became local as the Internet took off. In those days, Mistral, our first ISP, was a back bedroom in Brighton, stuffed full of modems, and a front garden with a permanent telecom trench for the ever-increasing number of cables.

It was not unusual to have a monthly telephone bill of £150, which grew to £300 when we bonded the two lines together to get BT's ISDN. That must have been the worst-value narrowband transmission going. But at least it was quicker than modem alone. One Christmas Eve, I transmitted an urgent file by [XMODEM](#) to the same ICL factory where a motorcycle courier was taking a delivery. He collected the package and drove the 150 miles, arriving quicker than the file, which was less than a couple of floppy disks in size.

When Mistral offered ADSL, we were among its first customers. Our monthly phone bill shrank to £100, which was mainly for the ADSL line. We thought this was quite reasonable at the time. Fast forward to now, and broadband and hosting are less than thirty quid a month, the telephone bill is less than twenty, and the cost of calls is a couple of quid because we use the 18185 system. This brilliant service is free after a one-time [Web registration](#), and most calls and SMS texts, even international, cost zero pence. You pay for the connection only, five pence usually.

Forms Become Headaches

The recession has hit us severely, our U.S. publishers haven't ordered any books, UK publishers are laying off staff, and no one has work for us. After sitting out too much of last year, it is time to apply for jobs. This is not something we do with any enthusiasm after working from our own office for the last twenty years.

Consequently, we have been completing a zillion forms, one over 28 pages long. Some have been created in Word, which lets us type in the information; but others are PDFs. Even though Adobe's latest versions of Acrobat Pro include editable forms (with Adobe Reader), none of the forms we've had to complete have this feature. Short of finding a typewriter or opening each page in Illustrator, the only way we could fill the forms in was by creating a document in InDesign or XPress with a PDF page on each document page, then inserting

text across the top of the blank spaces. That's easy for a short form, but longer ones can take ages to make.

In the end, we wrote in block capitals in our best handwriting—which is illegible even to us. So we hope no one can read it enough to offer us a job. Meanwhile, Obama wields his mighty axe and kills the recession.

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Broadband Endowment

When we got our mortgage some years ago, Mike, the chap arranging it, told us about endowment mortgages. He drew charts to show how good they could be, by paying for the house and leaving a pot in the bank. Mike gave us the documentation, for us to sign alongside the warning that it was not guaranteed there would be enough money to pay the mortgage at the end of the term. We elected to get a repayment mortgage instead.

Come forward a few years to see people complaining because they were also told about wonderful returns from endowment mortgages and chose to buy one. They had signed to say they understood that the final amount depended on the financial markets, with just as much chance of a shortfall as a windfall at the end of the term. As the last recession hit and with endowment mortgages running extremely short, the government decided we would all bail them out by saying that the policies were “mis-sold.”

The same thing is happening with broadband. Millions of customers, according to Ofcom the telephones regulator, are being ripped-off because they get less than half the broadband speed they pay for. Speeds are at their lowest during peak times, which is between 5 PM and 6 PM on Sundays for some strange reason. In rural areas, throughput is likely to be 15% lower than in urban areas. Like endowment mortgages, why did some Ofcom jobsworth think this research showed anything we didn't know already?

The Small Print

Broadband suppliers' contracts state clearly that they will not guarantee line speed, and most will have a fall-back position for those unhappy with throughput. For many situations where an 8 Mb line produces an unreliable speed, a 2 Mb link will give a consistent, almost maximum figure, at a lower cost to the subscriber.

When one signs-up for broadband there is an initial check on the line to show its theoretical maximum. With telephone line-based broadband, it depends on distance from exchange and the quality of lines inside and outside the home. Add another extension or fax, or even plug into the wrong port in the wall socket, and connection speed can drop significantly.

Different software used by broadband suppliers can also affect line speed. We are lucky to have almost the full set of unbundled services available at our local exchange. Yet we also find that BT's 8 Mb Max services, albeit bought via ISPs such as Aquiss, give consistently higher speeds than the other suppliers' 8 Mb links through the same local loop. From what we can make out, BT's Max software checks line speeds regularly and adjusts it up and down whilst other suppliers use fixed “profiles,” which can provide a slower throughput in return for reliability.

Our BT service improved even more this week when BT switched our ISP to IPStream Connect instead of IPStream Central Pipes. It could be even better if BT were able to charge more for letting other broadband suppliers to use BT's lines, then invest in Ethernet service to the street cabinet. With the government and opposition parties complaining about Britain's outdated Internet services, BT also needs to get back any investment it makes in a fibre optic network or it won't start to build one. It is Ofcom who are holding this development back by not allowing BT scope in charges for access to the proposed £1.5 billion upgrade.

For most users, broadband speeds are acceptably fast already. Even a 2 Mb link can go faster than much data is transmitted. It is only the rise in bandwidth-hogging for TV and movie downloads that puts a great strain on BT's copper network. The TV companies already have their own monopoly methods of digital transmission via RF and cable, with satellite coming on stream as well. If they are swamping broadband services, surely they too should be paying towards improving the delivery methods?

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Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

February 2009 Master List

New Additions and Apps to Watch

Check out these additions, some of which I'll be covering in more detail next month.

A lot of us go a hold of [Jumsoft's Process](#) through the recent MacHeist. Billed as a project manager, it nevertheless offers features that some will want in a task-management application. It might be a bit more than usually fits into the Master List, but I'll cover it in more detail when I deal with project planning and management.

I've been remiss in overlooking [Chandler](#), an open-source project that has been developing nicely. One of the real strengths of Chandler is that it is strong with lists and tasks, but it also includes a capable calendar. You could view it as an iCal replacement that has all of the task management many wanted iCal to have—or you could use it alongside iCal and sync them, which the Chandler Project has made simple. Keep an eye on this one.

Potion Factory has released a preview version of [The Hit List](#) which is getting a good bit of affirming attention. I'm not ready to add this one to the big list yet, but if the preview looks good for you then get it for the pre-release discount price of \$50 (instead of \$70 once version 1.0 arrives).

[ToodleDo](#) now has an iPhone application that complements their online presence.

Finally, [CalToDo](#) offers a solution for syncing tasks on iPhone with iCal. Somebody remind me why Apple didn't develop this?

More About the List

As usual, I welcome any feedback on my list, or suggestions for additions. I won't always add every suggestion, but I'll look at them and evaluate whether they fit with what I'm trying to cover.

Locally Installed GTD Applications

[Action Tracker](#)



Developer: Mac Productive

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

Distinguishing Features: Also organizes notes, contacts, and other information related to projects.

News: None

[ActionTastic](#)



Developer: Jon Crosby

Current Version: 0.9.3

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Beta

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Processing engine; iPod sync; Mail and MailTags compatibility.

News: None.

[EasyTask Manager](#)



Developer: Orionbelt.com

Current Version: 2.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (free); Web App (free)

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Windows version available; automatic advance of uncompleted due tasks to today.

News: Tags are promised as a high priority in the next upgrade.

[Frictionless](#)



Developer: Twin Forces

Current Version: 2.0d18

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Quick-entry box; fuzzy repeated actions.

News: None

[Ghost Action](#)



Developer: Ghost Park Software

Current Version: 1.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: .Mac syncing (without iCal running); PDA/iPod syncing.

News: None

[iGTD](#)



Developer: Bartek

Current Version: 1.4.5.6

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Compatible with Address Book, Mail, iSync, and MailTags, as well as Web browser support, Path Finder, Yojimbo, MacJournal, and others; quick-entry feature; simple yet powerful interface.

News: None.

[iCog](#)



Developer: HensPace
Current Version: 1.90
Price: Free
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
Required Applications: Python 2.4 or later
Distinguishing Features: Compatible with any OS running Python (including Windows); very simple text-only utility.
News: A recent jump to version 1.9 includes a date bug fix and a Python maintenance issue, plus it adds support for plug-ins, thereby opening the door to user modifications.

[mGTD](#)



Developer: Jeff Fisher
Current Version: 1.3
Price: Free
Development Status: Pre-final
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
Required Applications: Mori 1.6.11
Distinguishing Features: Expands Mori (digital notebook) functions to include GTD principles.
News: None

[Midnight Inbox](#)



Developer: Midnight Beep Softworks

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: \$35

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Action timer; quick-note and quick-action hot keys; Mail compatible; automatic data collection.

News: The Web site recently saw big changes, including doing away with all of the promises of version 2.0, no more blog, and no forums linked on the front page. Also, version 1.4 beta is available for download.

[OmniFocus](#)



Developer: Omni Group

Current Version: 1.5

Price: \$80

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

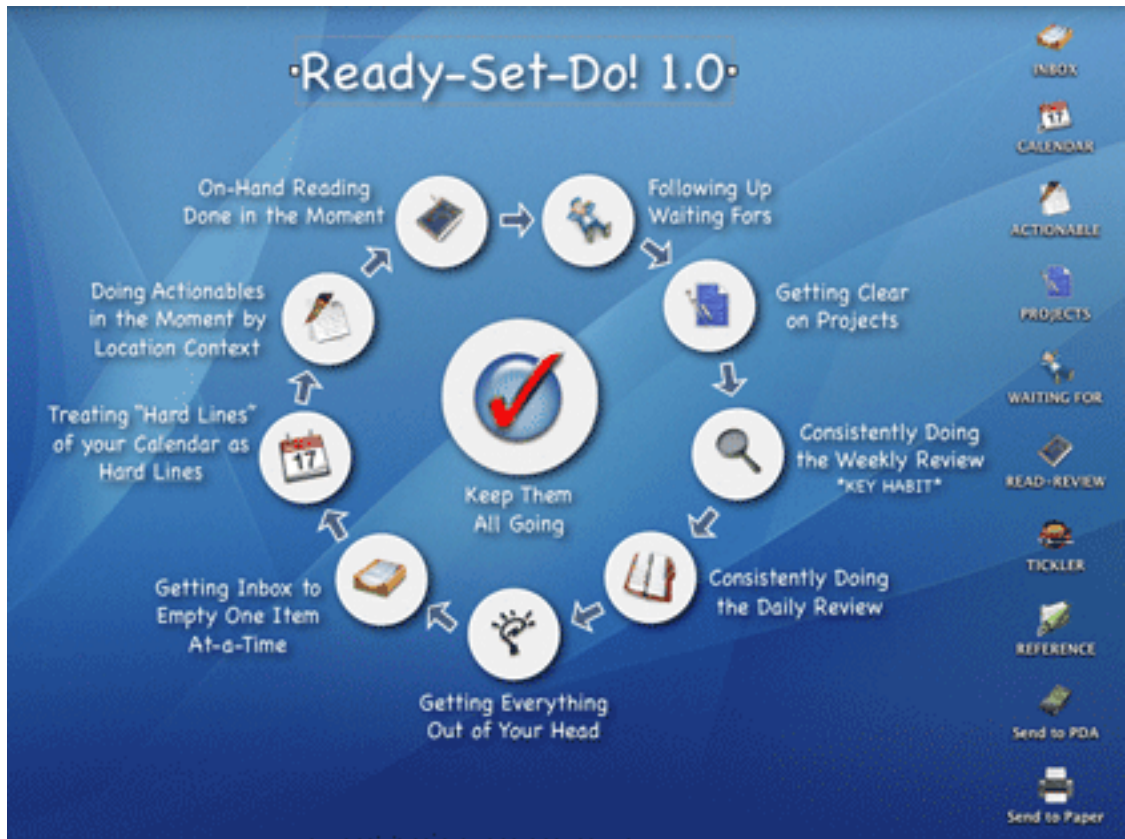
iPhone Presence: App (\$20)

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Mail- and Spotlight-compatible; simple interface with powerful view features.

News: Version 1.5 is now in full release, bringing interface improvements, Bonjour syncing, better archiving, and an improved ability for the database to self-maintain and repair.

Ready, Set, Do!



Developer: Todd Vasquez

Current Version: 1.3f

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: A very different approach using a set of AppleScript routines to impose organization and communication across a computer's entire file system; multiple language support.

News: The last 1.3 release, according to the developer—version 1.4 is on the way. 1.3f brings “speed and performance” improvement and some bug fixes.



Developer: Hog Bay Software

Current Version: 2.0

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Simple, text-based system; no-frills, intentionally designed as an alternative to more fully featured systems.

News: New version 2.0 brings a system-wide quick entry window, AppleScript support, improved search, and a handful of other improvements.

Things



Developer: Cultured Code

Current Version: 1.0.1

Price: \$50

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$10)

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: iCal sync; repeating tasks; Mail compatibility; tags; network and multi-computer operation; and import/export options.

News: Release at Macworld Expo took Best of Show.

[Thinking Rock](#)



Developer: Avente Pty Ltd

Current Version: 2.0.1

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Cross-platform compatibility through Java; interactive collection and processing; can be run off of a flash-drive.

News: The developers have a new Web site, including “membership,” which apparently offers, at least, member-only modules for Thinking Rock.

[What To Do](#)



Developer: Objective Satisfaction

Current Version: 1.3.2

Price: \$29

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Drag-and-drop intensive for easy reorganization; .Mac syncing for multiple computers; XML export.

News: None

Locally Installed General Task Managers

Anxiety

Developer: Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that gives a HUD-like interface to iCal tasks; sorts by calendar; Mac OS X 10.5 only.

News: None

Chandler

Developer: The Chandler Project

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Open Source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A good integrated calendar makes this one a fairly full-orbed PIM.

News: None

Check Off

Developer: Second Gear
Current Version: 3.8
Price: Free/Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that manages basic task lists; syncs with iPods; a .Mac Backup QuickPick is provided.
News: None

[Dejumble](#)

Developer: Thinking Code Software, Inc.
Current Version: 1.2.b19
Price: \$19
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: App (\$8)
Distinguishing Features: A simple yet powerful menu-bar style task list manager, with tags, groups, notes, and a handful of other options.
News: The Web site is currently down, preparing for 2.0.

[Docket](#)

Developer: Surprise Software
Current Version: 1.3
Price: \$20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A neat basic list management application. A Windows version is also available.

News: None

Dolt

Developer: Jim McGowan

Current Version: 2.6

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: .Mac support and AppleScriptability. Also supports file attachments and categories for lists.

News: None

FlexCal

Developer: flexgames

Current Version: 1.10

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A task and event creator for iCal—something of a collection bucket for GTD users.

News: None

High Priority

Developer: Aram Kudurshian

Current Version: 1.11 (Mac OS X 10.4 *only*)

Price: \$6 (personal); \$12 (family); \$60 (business)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A system preference pane, creates a menu in the menu bar that lets you create and update your iCal tasks.

News: None

Hot Plan

Developer: Intuiware

Current Version: 1.4.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: Tracks a substantial amount of information about a given task, including completion status, priority, time remaining; supports tagging, color-coding, and locking of tasks. Also allows collection of URLs and files.

News: None

iClock

Developer: Script Software

Current Version: 3.0.5

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

Distinguishing Features: Offers a menu bar-based method of managing task lists; includes .Mac syncing.

News: None

[Life Balance](#)

Developer: Llamagraphics

Current Version: 5.0.2

Price: \$65 (\$80 bundled with Palm version)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

Distinguishing Features: Gives “meta-feedback” about tasks: how much time are you spending in different areas of your life (i.e., work, family, hobbies, etc.), and are you keeping it balanced? Palm and Windows versions available.

News: A [Life Balance iPhone app](#) is now available [through the App Store](#) for \$20.

[NoteBook](#)

Developer: Circus Ponies

Current Version: 3.0

Price: \$50 (academic and family pack pricing available)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Distinguishing Features:

News:

[Organized](#)

Developer: iSlayer

Current Version: 1.11

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: Dashboard widget with calendar events, tasks, notes, and world clock.

News: None

Stapler

Developer: The Blue Technologies Group

Current Version: 1.1

Price: €7.50 (about \$10)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: Is a combination notepad and to-do list manager, with creation date, notes, and a check-box for completed items. Tasks can be color-coded based on a low-level preference set-up.

News: None

TaskMate

Developer: Ryan Conway

Current Version: 1.1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: Ultra-simple task list: remaining tasks in a simple list, completed tasks in a drawer (which can be hidden). Tasks are just single-line descriptions with a checkbox. Could be right for the super-simplified life.

News: None

[ToDo X](#)

Developer: Omicron Software Systems, Inc.

Current Version: 2.2

Price: \$15

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Import from iCal only

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: Offers categories, priorities, and attached notes.

News: None

[ZooDo](#)

Developer: InterfaceThis

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

Distinguishing Features: A basic task creator for iCal, serving as a collection bucket.

News: None

Browser and Web-based GTD Applications

[30 Boxes](#)

Price: Free

Description: Lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction.

Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface, too.

[43 Actions](#)

Price: Free (donations get extra features)

Description: Specifically designed as an iPhone web-app, it's light and lean for EDGE network optimization. Submit inbox items via e-mail, Twitter (with donation), Jott (with donation), and the usual features.

[GTDAgenda](#)

Price: Free

Description: Another Web version of a GTD tool, with the standard features, plus addition of Goals, check-lists for recurring tasks, schedule management, and an iCal-compatible calendar. A mobile version is also available.

[GTDInbox](#)

Price: Free

Description: A Firefox extension for GTD integration with Gmail. Prepackaged labels, a Review process, specialized searches within Gmail, quick-entry for tasks, and printable. Works well in conjunction with RememberTheMilk. Current version, 2.0.8.4, is open-source; requires Firefox.

[GTD-PHP](#)

Price: Free

Description: A PHP solution designed to be locally installed. A simple tabbed interface, capture, and process stages; weekly review. Currently at version 0.8.

[Neptune](#)

Price: \$10/year

Description: Includes a collection inbox and context or project task viewing panes, as well as inactive projects and tasks. Daily e-mail reminders of tasks; new tasks can be added by e-mail; data export.

[Next Action](#)

Price: Free

Description: Uses Google Gears and Firefox; has a lean, basic interface with multiple-list management capability. Works with or without a network connection.

[Nexty](#)

Price: Free

Description: PHP-based, so it installs locally and runs in your browser; supports contexts and reminders.

[Nozbe](#)

Price: Free

Description: Has markers for which action will be next and a time estimation for tasks. Contexts are visible and identifiable. And it is easy to collect and process quickly. iPhone-ready.

[SimpleGTD](#)

Price: Free

Description: Tabs for next actions, contexts, projects, and done actions; drag-and-drop organization; easy un-doing of tasks.

[Task Writer](#)

Price: Free

Description: Easy keyboard navigation, good use of calendaring for tasks, and a useful set of attributes for tasks, as well as the ability to auto-hide unneeded list views, help Task Writer to stand out a bit.

[Toodledo](#)

Price: Free

Description: Has a Firefox plugin and a Google gadget for easy collection; also supports e-mail, voice mail, and traditional entry for collection. Includes a good overview of GTD in co-operation with its tools, as well. iPhone-optimized.

Tracks

Price: Free

Description: A Web server that runs locally, or hosted through tracks.tra.in. Fast, lean, and pretty, it offers calendaring and a multi-user component. Currently at version 1.6.

Vitalist

Price: \$5/month (premium)

Description: Is a wide-scale GTD system: collection, project management, recurring actions, and tickler files. Includes a mobile edition, iCal and RSS feeds, and e-mail and SMS reminders. An iPhone-specific version is available. A premium (paid) version also includes security encryption, collaboration, file attachments, and calendaring.

Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

- [Backpack](#)
- [Basecamp](#)
- [HiTask](#)
- [Hiveminder](#)
- [Joe's Goals](#)
- [Mojonote](#)
- [Remember the Milk](#)
- [Scrybe](#)
- [Sproutliner](#)
- [Task Freak!](#)

- [Tasks](#)
- [Tasktoy](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Tweeto](#)
- [Zenlists](#)
- [ZenPages](#)

GTD and Task Management Wikis

- [D3](#)
- [GTDTiddlyWiki](#)
- [MonkeyGTD](#)
- [Pimki](#)

iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)

- [Chores](#),
- [Dejumble](#)
- [DoBot ToDos](#)
- [EasyTask Manager](#)
- [Life Balance](#)
- [Lists by MobilityWare](#)
- [Lists by Tynsoe.org](#)
- [My Lists](#)
- [OmniFocus](#)
- [Outliner by CarbonFin](#)
- [Tanjias Checklist](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Things](#)

- [ToDo by Appigo](#)
- [To Do by Erica Sadun](#)
- [ToodleDo](#)
- [Zenbe Lists](#)

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Report

by Christopher Turner, With Lee Bennett and Eric Blair

Macworld Expo 2009

Our road to the 2009 Macworld Conference & Expo started something like this:

Friends in different parts of the country watch live-blogs of the 2008 Macworld Expo Keynote address by Steve Jobs, while instant messaging one another about the various announcements therein. At some point afterward, someone (alright, it was me) said something to the effect of, “Hey, we should all get together at Macworld Expo next year.” All of the friends thought this was a terrific idea.

The thing about attending Macworld Expo is this: it’s not cheap. Even if you can get in to the Expo for free, there’s still a plane ticket to purchase (unless you like to spend a few days driving across country), accommodations (unless you like to sleep on benches and sidewalks), and food (unless you like to, well, not eat). One reason this trip came to fruition is that the accommodation problem resolved itself fairly quickly: my wife and I own a time-share condo in Hawaii, which we can transfer to other locations around the world. Once we secured a week in San Francisco for January 2009, the rest began to fall in to place.

Originally there were to be six of us on the trip, but over the course of the rest of 2008, with changes to the economy and the health of family members, this was whittled down to three: myself, Lee Bennett, and Eric Blair.

Eric and I had both been to Macworld Expos before. I had been to the summer Expo in New York twice, in 2001 and 2002, and to San Francisco in January of 2002. It was at the New York shows that Eric and I were able to meet in person for the first time. In case you were unaware, the ATPM staff works totally in cyberspace. We have no central office, and staff members are located across the globe. I’m in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, Lee is in Orlando, and Eric resides in the D.C. area. You can understand, then, that an opportunity to get together, especially for something like Macworld Expo, is something we were excited about.

For Lee, this would be his first Macworld Expo, and, he noted at one point, possibly his last and only. Who knows how the Expo will change in the coming years, now that Apple will no longer be exhibiting. We’ll discuss that in a bit.

Each and every Macworld Conference & Expo begins with the Keynote Address, which has traditionally been handled by Apple’s CEO, most notably Steve Jobs. Many of us, Lee included, were disappointed that Jobs elected to not deliver this year’s keynote, but we looked forward to the shiny new toys Phil Schiller would pull out of his hat for us.

(Incidentally, IDG limited us to only two press passes with keynote access, so Eric had to follow along online from the press room. Of course, had Eric not been in the press room, none of us would have witnessed [Mac Rumors getting hacked](#), nor heard the plaintive wail, “Steve Jobs is dead?” from a pre-teen writer covering the show.)



I thought Phil did a great job with the keynote, so much so that at one point I twittered how I [wasn't really missing Steve](#). Phil had obviously rehearsed; I wouldn't expect anything less from anyone taking Jobs' place. But he was very personable, and self-deprecating where appropriate. In other words, he was as much Phil as he could be in that particular situation.

No, the keynote was not particularly earth-shattering. Too many people have come to expect Apple to unveil The Next Great Thing at each and every media event. This was my fourth keynote, and I'm hard-pressed to recall if there was such an earth-shattering revelation, on par with the iPhone, at any of them. Most of the time, the keynote is filled with announcements that *make sense*, and this one, with the revealing of iLife 09, iWork 09, and the new unibody 17-inch MacBook Pro, was just such a keynote. The highlight of the keynote for me, however, was [Tony Bennett](#)! Apple may be pulling out of Macworld Expo, but at least they closed their last keynote address in *style*.



On Wednesday of the Expo, IDG held a Town Hall wherein IDG Vice President Paul Kent discussed and fielded questions about the future of Macworld Expo, sans Apple's presence. From IDG's perspective, the show will go on, and we certainly hope they use this opportunity to their advantage.

One impression we took away was that too many folks have forgotten the "Conference" part of the event's official name. There are many worthwhile classes and seminars for attendees to take in, and IDG would do well to look to improving and promoting this aspect of the event more. A caveat, however: they should take care to not let the conference tracks get stale. I went to three Expos in a row—July 2001, January 2002, and July 2002—and I heard the same material, a couple of times verbatim, in some of the conference classes I took across all three events. If IDG can rotate speakers and keep the material as fresh as possible, we don't see why the Conference part of the event couldn't help keep the event going strong.

The centerpiece, however, remains the Expo. This may require an overhaul to keep the event relevant and meaningful, in light of Apple's absence. (Apple isn't the only big name no longer exhibiting. Notably, Adobe, Epson, and Belkin chose not to participate in this year's Expo.)

Apple contends that it no longer needs to be at the Expo because of its now vast retail presence. Supposedly more folks visit Apple's retail stores each week than attend the once-a-year Macworld Expo. That may be fine and dandy for Apple, but as Paul Kent noted at the aforementioned Town Hall, around 90 percent of the products you'd find at Macworld

Expo [aren't even available in Apple's retail stores](#). Not only that, but of the ones which are available at an Apple Store, you certainly don't have the same sort of access to trying said product out, or talking with someone from the company which manufactures it, up to and including the product's chief developer. Macworld Expo gives users an unprecedented access to companies' personnel and products.



Apple's space at the 2009 Macworld Expo.

It's also very expensive to exhibit at Macworld Expo. Apple's booth alone must cost them into the tens of millions of dollars. One can imagine that even the tiniest booth size is of no small consequence for the small developers and vendors. For Apple, the money it doesn't have to spend on the Expo is money that could be spent toward product development. Personnel required to man the booth, many of whom are flown in from other Apple offices around the country, would no longer have to take time away from the work they're doing for the company, meaning there is no lost productivity for the week of the Expo. This, in turn, contributes to Apple's bottom line.

Can Macworld Conference & Expo survive without Apple? We believe yes.

For as important as the show floor full of products is, we believe the connection of people, face-to-face instead of via flat-panel computer screens, is just as important, and could be one of the main reasons the Expo continues to thrive, if IDG embraces and builds upon this phenomenon.

It was a lot of fun walking the North and South Halls of the Moscone Center, taking in what each developer or vendor had to offer, but it was just as much fun meeting folks in person whom you had only spoken with via text online. [Twitter](#) has lowered the barrier of accessibility to many people, and over the past two years of my using Twitter, I've engaged in conversations with people I never would have thought possible to talk to.

Microsoft's [Nadyne Mielke](#) is utterly charming and is exactly the sort of person Microsoft needs working in its Macintosh Business Unit: friendly, professional, passionate about the company's products, and just as passionate about being a Mac user. [Jeff Gamet](#), Managing Editor of [The Mac Observer](#), was, not surprisingly, just as funny in person as on Twitter, and he was kind enough to invite us to the [Cirque du Mac party](#). Jeff also turned us on to checking out the [John Lennon Educational Tour Bus](#), which is not to be missed if you ever get the chance to see it.

Lee has been in close contact with [Colby Palmer](#), the man behind [iTweet](#), for some time, and it was great spending some time with him talking about Twitter, the Expo, being a developer, and life in general over some [In-N-Out](#). Likewise, I've held many a conversation via instant message with fellow sci-fi fan [Gedeon Maheux](#) of the [Iconfactory](#), so it was fun meeting him in the person, as well as his fellow factory workers. Eric was able to reconnect with former coworkers as they manned the booths of their new companies, including Ken Aspelagh of [Ecomm Network](#) and the man behind [last month's desktop pictures](#).

This face time cannot be underestimated in the appeal, and the future, of Macworld Expo. In fact, looking back, this was just as much of a reason for our attendance as seeing what new products were available. IDG would do well to consider this in its future marketing efforts for the Expo.

We heard talk that this year's Expo wasn't as energetic as those past. There may have been a kernel of truth there, considering the news of Apple's departure hanging like a cloud over Moscone. Yet you could've fooled us as we strolled the aisles of the North and South Halls. There were plenty of vendors and developers on hand, with plenty of people stopping by each booth, and plenty of money changing hands as attendees took advantage of Expo sales. The air was *still* electric, there was an exciting undertone to the whole thing.

Macworld Conference & Expo *can* survive in an Apple-less era. It all depends on how IDG manages the image and cost of the Expo moving forward, and we look forward to attending another Expo in the near future.

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Segments: Slices from the Macintosh Life

by Linus Ly, lly@atpm.com

The Zippy Quest for Jazzy Flash

Aaaah, removable media. Is it not the ultimate storage device? Fill up one unit, pop it out, and pop a new unit into the drive, then keep collecting more stuff. When I started computing in the early 1980s, 5.25" floppy diskettes were still in use. They were originally 360K in capacity and with some mutilation could go up to 720K. High density version was available, too, with a whopping size of 1.2 MB!



5.25" Floppy

Still the 5.25" floppy couldn't fight off the rising star of the time, the 3.5" diskette, with a top size of 1.4 MB.



3.5" Floppy

Soon 1.4 MB was not enough, and we saw the arrival of the Iomega Bernoulli and SyQuest cartridges. One regret I have about cleaning up my junk collection involves a 10 MB Bernoulli cartridge. It was the size of a college notebook! I threw it out when I moved years ago. I cannot remember the capacity of the Bernoulli media that was battling with the SyQuest. I know that SyQuest cartridges came in capacities of 44 MB, then 88 MB. Knowing that competing products usually outdo their competitor just slightly, I am sure it was probably somewhere around those numbers.



SyQuest 88



SyQuest EZ 135

Almost out of nowhere, Iomega upped the ante with the Zip drive, at 100 MB and in the 3.5" form factor, and just a bit thicker than a floppy disk. It was wildly successful and rang the death knell for SyQuest. SyQuest did try to keep up with a 135 MB 3.5" drive and media, but it was a case of being late to the market.



Iomega Zip

Iomega even had the 1 GB Jaz, later upgraded to 2 GB.



Omega Jaz

For my Wall Street PowerBook, I got an Imation SuperDisk with a capacity of 120 MB. Remember what I said about edging out the competition just a little? The SuperDisk drive could also read 3.5" floppy disks, but again Imation was late to the booming removable hard drive scene and joined other companies as losers to Iomega.



Imation SuperDisk

The problem with removable hard drives is that you need the drives to use them. You need some other physical device that has to be hooked up to the computer in order to use the cartridge. I used to have to carry an Iomega USB drive back and forth between the office and home. Sometimes I would remember to bring everything; other times I would forget the power cable for the drive, or the USB cable for the device. Too much hassle!

Nowadays, the de facto removable media is the USB flash drive. About the size of the human thumb, you usually just plug them in and start using them. No need for any extra cables. Over the years, I have come to own a few such drives, such as a 2 GB Kingston then a 4 GB SanDisk. It seems not that long ago that I paid \$50 for a 128 MB flash drive. These days you can buy a spindle of blank DVDs and get a 512 MB flash drive for free!



USB Flash Drives

Memory cards are somewhat like old removable media, in that you don't use them directly like flash drives but you must have some kind of card readers. Their most popular use is probably in cameras, but they are also used in other electronic devices, such as cell phones (SIM card), the Wii console, and the Nintendo DS. My first memory card was an 8 MB SD card, used to hold still photos in my ancient camcorder. Later, I got a real digital camera and splurged on a 128 MB CompactFlash card. These days all my cameras use 2 GB SD cards. I also have uses for microSD cards but always have to use them with adapters because they are so small.



Memory Cards

Money probably cannot buy you happiness, but it sure can get you lots of removable storage.

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Desktop Pictures

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

San Francisco

We need new desktop pictures each month. [Write](#) to us!

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's desktop photos were taken by Lee Bennett during a trip to the Macworld Expo 2009. The images, taken with a Nikon D90, feature the Golden Gate Bridge, Fort Point, and the Marin Headlands. Each photo was resized and retouched in Adobe Photoshop CS3.



[View Pictures](#)

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

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 all linked files in same folder” and configure the limits to download only the linked images.

OmniWeb Choose “Save Linked ▸ Images...” from the File menu.

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#).

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 Through 10.5.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.

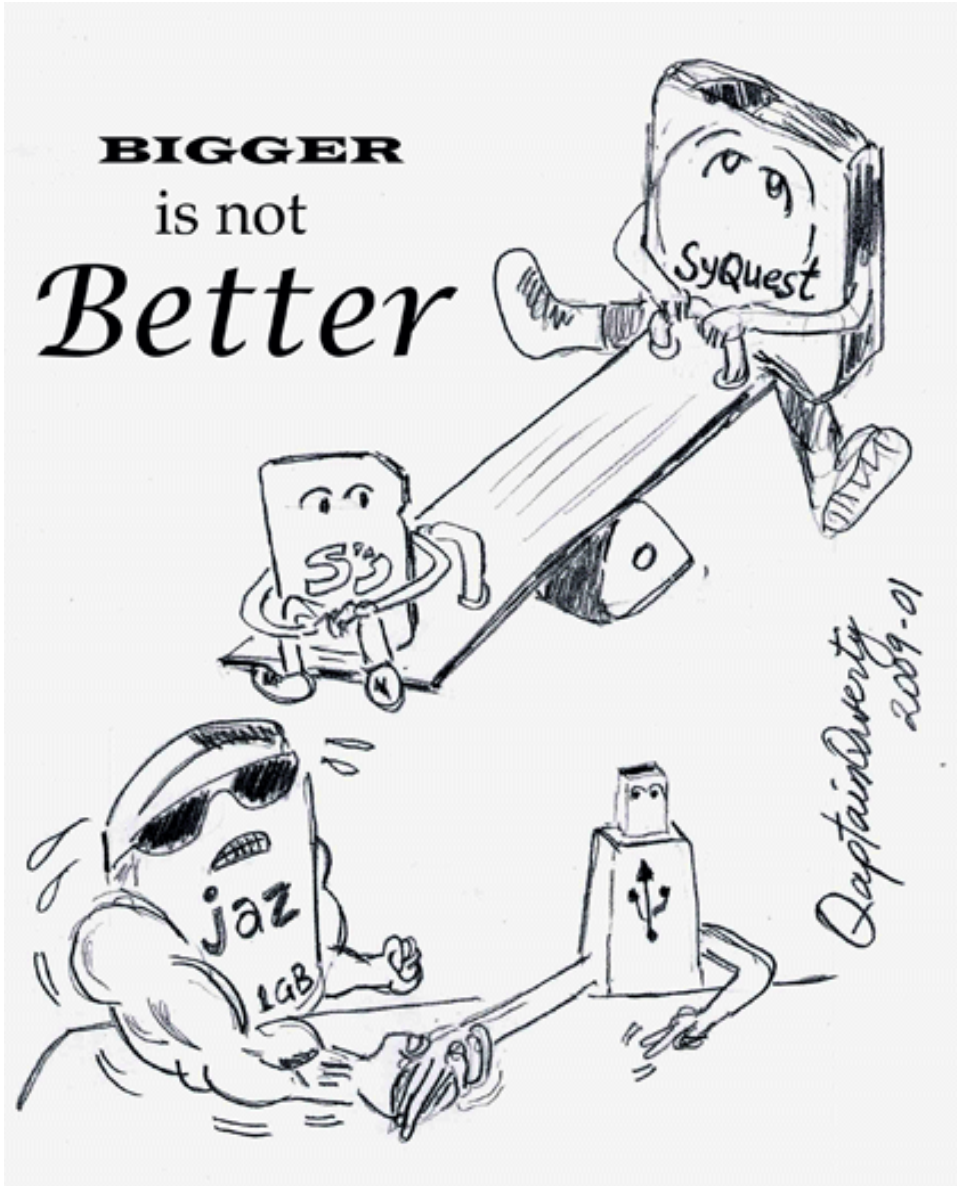
Mac OS X 10.0.x

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.



Qaptain Qwerty

by Linus Ly, <http://qaptainqwerty.blogspot.com>



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Accessory Review

by Frank H. Wu, frankhwu@mac.com

Cricket Laptop Stand

Developer: [Innovative](#)

Price: \$40

Requirements: tablet or laptop

Trial: None



A friend of mine from college, Dr. Sean, bought a first-generation Mazda Miata, the roadster that blended a retro English style and modern Japanese engineering. Once you experienced it with the top down, it was so much fun you might exclaim, “Wow, every car should be a convertible.” But then you likely would realize the compromises compelled by the removal of part of the structure: higher cost, lower stability, risk of accidents, and general unpleasantness in inclement weather. Yet like only a few other vehicles—none in its price class—the little Miata came with a hardtop two people could install without difficulty to make this indulgence more practical during the winter: once it was latched into place, it was as if you were riding in a regular coupe. It was an instant transformation.

Well, this is a perfect analogy, suitable for multiple choice exam testing. I just bought an Axiotron Modbook, the Apple-based tablet. I love it for many reasons, despite not being the graphic-designer type who would most benefit from this innovation. When I’m teaching, it’s great to have a second machine to display the textbook in PDF format and other materials I need to access; the primary machine is for note taking and mindmapping. I’ve even started to take the stylus and poke at my plain MacBook, accidentally and ineffectively. The Modbook is like the Miata. It’s lots of fun. But it has some inherent limitations. Its greatest advantages turn out to be its greatest disadvantages.

And that is how the analogy is completed. The Cricket stand is to the Axiotron Modbook as the removable hardtop is to the Mazda Miata. Made by Innovative and sold by the LCD Arms Web site, it is a handy device that changes the tablet form factor into the laptop clamshell form factor—sort of. Opened up, it props up the Modbook at roughly the same angle you would have a MacBook set to.



Modbook on Cricket

Of course, the keyboard is still independent. However, that's much more of an advantage than a disadvantage. If you had the Cricket stand and a Bluetooth keyboard, you could use the Axiotron Modbook as your sole computer in virtually the same manner as a regular laptop. True, you can't prop the Cricket on your lap, but you can just use the tablet in your lap in most instances. The only situation where the Modbook on a Cricket is inferior is where there isn't a flat, hard surface to use.



The Cricket is pretty much perfect. The design is simple, elegant, and flawless. It is essentially a folding tripod with several detents at specific angles through a wide range of motion (11 degrees to 60 degrees) and capable of holding up to 12 pounds.



There is a large button that unlocks the main, back leg. The two front legs expand outward, and a prop pivots down from each of the legs. The structure also works to hold up a laptop or other device (i.e., it is not Modbook-specific), which if you believe what they say about good posture, is important ergonomically. I have always been a sloucher, so I don't much care.

The execution is top-notch. The hinge is metal, and the back leg is metal reinforced; the primary material is plastic. The props that hold the bottom of the device are ridged and have enough friction for a secure grip. That's probably the most important aspect of the matter: confidence that your precious Modbook is being cradled safely.



Ridged Props

The device has a nice heft and feel (any lighter and it would likely feel flimsy even if it weren't); the moving parts click into place reassuringly; it does not seem likely that they will wear out within a reasonable lifetime of use. It comes in a plain box with a nylon carrying pouch. The manufacturer claims 70% of the components are made from recycled materials, and it is available in three colors (green, white, and gray).



Pouch

There really is nothing at all that isn't just terrific on the Cricket. The only quibble that might be offered is that the pouch has a drawstring which doesn't stay shut without tying a knot into it. The pouch is a throwaway accessory anyway, so it's really a stretch to find anything to nitpick about. It is important to note, however, that the Cricket is slightly too small to hold a 17-inch laptop all that securely.

When I bought the Cricket, I had not intended to write a review. I had spent an hour or so surfing the Web, looking for information on a stand suitable for the Modbook. I stumbled across a blog entry about the Cricket. I was surprised by the relative lack of publicity it's received. It has received design awards from industry groups.

So I am writing this short evaluation to ensure that others are aware of an excellent product likely to be useful to many readers. This is a product that inspires a consumer to make recommendations to others.

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Software Review

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

MacSpeech Dictate 2.1

Developer: [MacSpeech](#)

Price: \$199 (boxed version only; includes a noise-canceling headset microphone);
Educational pricing is available.

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11; noise-canceling microphone (included)

Trial: None.



A few years ago, I began consulting with a family that had a large amount of technology in place to compensate for severe hearing loss and legal blindness. Working with this family, I have learned a significant amount about a part of the world of Mac computing that I knew almost nothing about: assistive technology.

Now, before I continue, let me say clearly that MacSpeech Dictate is not billed exclusively (or even primarily) as assistive technology. Many users with no impairments at all will find Dictate a useful tool in many ways. Those who require assistive technology, however, will also appreciate Dictate.

In my ongoing quest to help this family find versatile tools to assist them, MacSpeech Dictate has emerged as a great hope and promise of a new level of freedom. I plan to explore that aspect, along with some other things, in a second article. For now, I want to talk about Dictate more objectively.

What It Is

MacSpeech Dictate is a supportive software tool that allows speech to be converted into text and/or commands. It is not an application that you work directly within; rather, most of the time it resides in the background, serving in a support capacity to most of the applications you already own and use.

Dictate does this by utilizing a noise-canceling microphone and a software engine for translating what comes in via the microphone into the appropriate soft-output. The microphone part is easy; any of a variety of [“certified” microphones](#) will do the trick. (Others may work, as well, but are not supported by MacSpeech.) In fact, MacSpeech includes a good headset microphone with the boxed product; the one that came with mine was made by Plantronics, and it both sounds and works great. Those preferring a different style of microphone will find good ones ranging from \$50-\$350.

The software engine is another matter—a good matter, but one that deserves explanation.

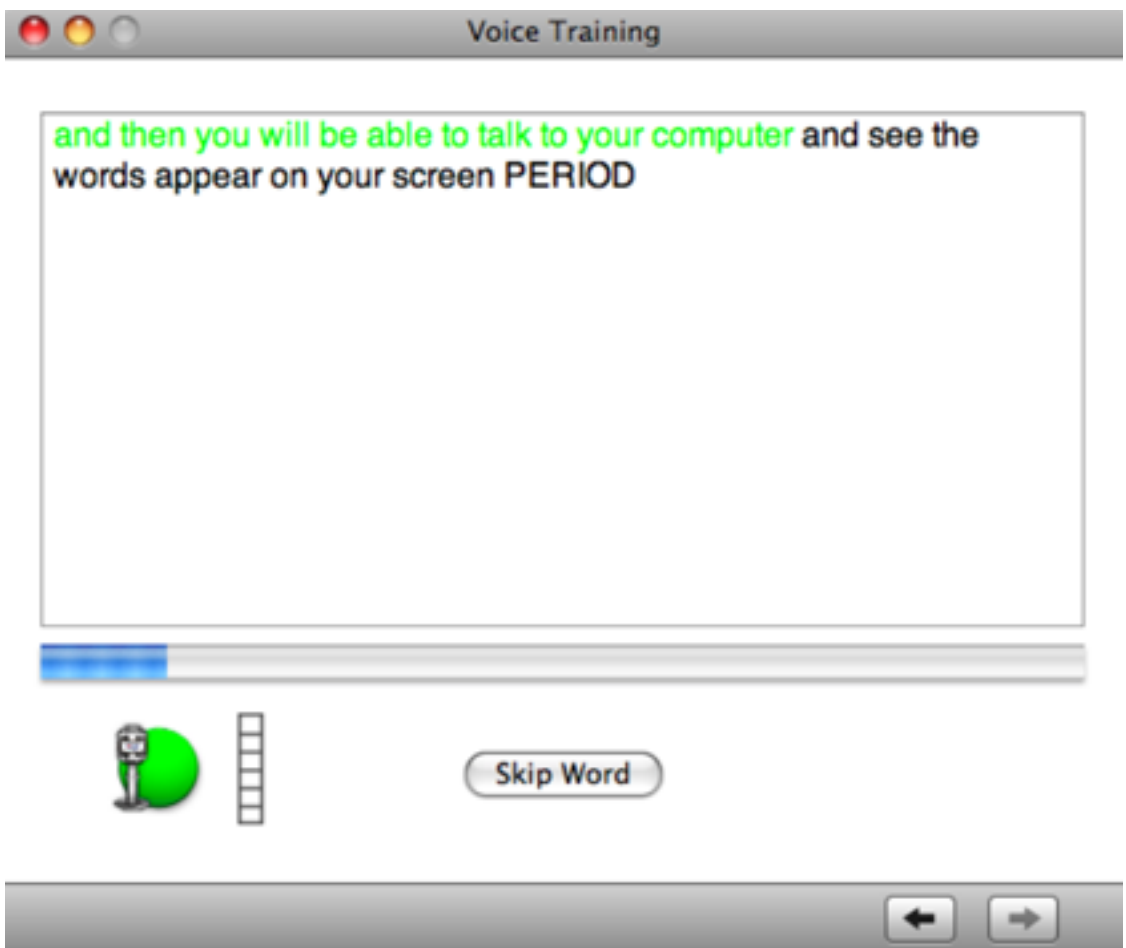
Nuanced Communications

As longtime ATPM readers will recall, Dictate is not MacSpeech's [first foray](#) into the world of speech-to-text software. iListen, now defunct (replaced by Dictate), was received with mixed results. Generally considered quirky, iListen was in that peculiar, "as good as it gets until some competition comes along" category. Training was somewhat tedious, a very limited number of microphones were supported, and output still hit only around 90% in accuracy. For the most part, this didn't seem to be attributable to iListen, per se, but to the voice recognition engine that drove it, which was developed by Philips.

Enter Dictate: essentially a bottom-up redesign of iListen, keeping the best parts and discarding the rest. This included the voice recognition engine, which amounts to the biggest and best change about MacSpeech's offering: for Dictate, they have licensed the superlative engine developed by Nuance Communications, makers of Dragon Naturally Speaking for Windows. In fact, Nuance also owns the now-discontinued ViaVoice, once developed by IBM, and has emerged as effectively the premier developer of voice recognition technology.

Does It Work?

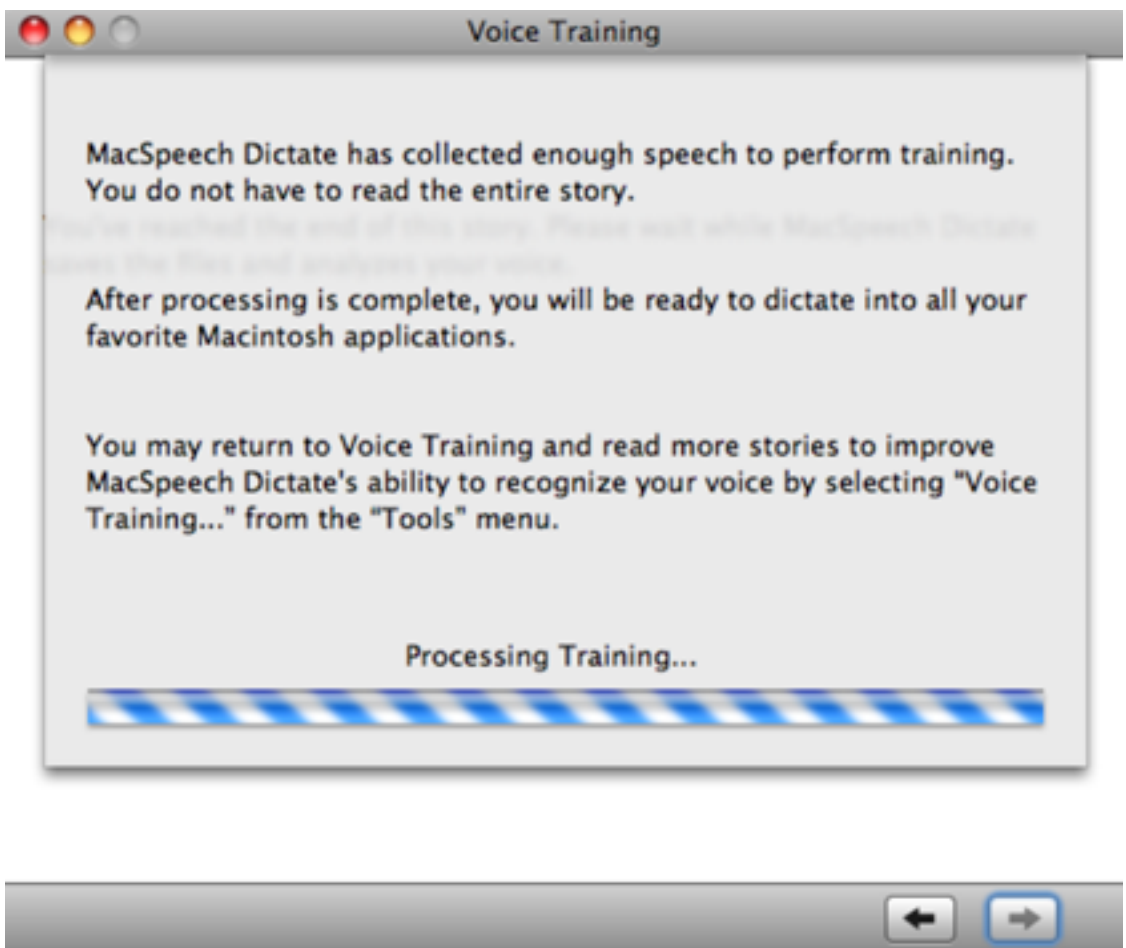
Having the Nuance/Dragon engine behind Dictate makes a world of difference. Setup is surprisingly fast: create a profile with sparse information, then read through a series of interactive training pages to teach your voice to the program. In most cases, that's it—then you're up and running.



Once that is done, simply leaving Dictate running in the background allows you to jump in and out of speech-to-text modes at will; you can even use a voice command to do so. In fact, Dictate recognizes a host of [system-wide and program-specific commands](#), allowing you to do almost all of your work via voice input, if you prefer.

A notepad is included as a part of Dictate, but you probably won't use it much. That's because Dictate will translate voice into text in just about any application that you might type into: word processors, spreadsheets, databases, Web sites, e-mail. There isn't an application that I use commonly that Dictate didn't work with problem-free.

And the best part is, the accuracy is far better than anything reported about iListen. I found that mistakes were quite rare, and they usually involved complex homophones (i.e., entire phrases that sound alike) or large, multisyllabic words that themselves are fairly esoteric (think: *infralapsarianism*). The rest of the time, I was actually surprised at how accurate the translation was.



If accuracy were a problem, however, Dictate provides a surprising number of means to improve it. For starters, it offers more than one “training story” to read; in fact, it offers three by default, and two of them are quite lengthy. Furthermore, you can “feed” documents directly into the Dictate engine, then use those to train the engine’s vocabulary for recognizing how you say certain words. This is especially helpful to train Dictate how you tend to put words together, if you feed it documents you have written, for example. And, of course, Dictate learns and improves in accuracy as you use it more and more.

Problems? Only a Few...

What’s not to like about MacSpeech Dictate? There are a few items, and some of these may be dealbreakers for you. Here’s what I’ve found:

Microphone Support

Because it requires a noise-canceling microphone, the built-in mic on a Mac won’t work very well. Neither will a Bluetooth microphone, even though there are some high-quality ones available for use with a Mac. Dictate requires a certain level of gain, so even a good gaming or VOIP microphone might not work properly.

Not Entirely Hands-free

If you're looking for something to replace the mouse and keyboard utterly, you won't find it with Dictate. While you can certainly get a lot done by voice, Dictate doesn't quite eliminate the others (nor does it aim to).

Lots to Remember

There are a lot of commands that Dictate can execute—if you know the correct wording. If you want to reply to an e-mail message, for example, you cannot simply enter Command mode and then say, “reply” or “reply all.” Instead, you must say, “reply to this message” or “reply all to this message.” If you don't get the command exactly right, it does nothing. This gets tedious if you try to use a large number of commands right out of the gate; it's best to master a few commands at a time, then move on to more.

No Demo

At \$199, Dictate is a bit pricey—and naturally many folks would like to give it a test-run before laying down that sort of coin. Alas, no demo is available, likely because it would be more difficult to mitigate whether supported microphones are used for the evaluation.

Wrap-Up, and What's Next

Overall, I highly recommend MacSpeech Dictate. All of the major problems with iListen, it seems, have been addressed. Accuracy is high, and the program is as easy to use as one of this caliber and capability can be. Apart from coming across as picky about the wording on commands, there is little to prevent someone seeking this type of application from being satisfied.

So, what is to come in my follow-up article? I plan to take a look at a variety of usage scenarios. Specifically, what are some ways that Dictate can work that aren't simply straight-up text entry, how much does it work with other applications, and how does it fit into an assistive setting. I also plan to look more at commands, how they work, and how flexible the command system is. Look for this article in the April issue.

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FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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

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What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

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.

