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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 April issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* Our editors have worked hard over the past month to bring you a topical and relevant series of columns and reviews. We will present this month's issue in a correspondingly non-typical and irreverent way.

We welcome you to the "On the Rocks" issue of ATPM. For those who wonder how we developed the theme for our April issue, we mixed in a shot of economic discontent, added two jiggers of sour financial news, stirred in some sweet talk and an ounce of Apple optimism, and poured the concoction into a tumbler full of digital ice.

China: the iPhone's Rocky Road

It's ironic the place where iPhones are made is a place where the locals don't have easy access to acquire and use them. Negotiations between Apple and its prospective iPhone partner on China's mainland continue. For now, Hong Kong remains the point of iPhone entry (and for mainlanders a source of iPhone envy) until agreements are signed. Announcements of a deal should come any day now. Really, announcements should come any day now. We think.

Follow the Cobblestone Road

Apple has announced the dates of this year's annual conference for developers. From June 8–12, Apple developers will descend upon San Francisco's Moscone Center for a five-day celebration of Mac OS X and the iPhone OS.

Apple has been cobbling together a multi-device operating system roadmap to satisfy the economic interests of developers large and small while the company continues to lead the industry with innovative hardware designs. Will this cobblestone road lead to prosperity for Apple developers and further gains in market share for the maker of the Mac and the iPhone? We don't know what kind of wizardry will be behind the curtain for this year's event, but we suspect the return of Steve Jobs may be one of the happenings that will make headlines at WWDC 2009.

Rock On!

In March, Apple released updates to its computers including the iMac and Mac Pro lines. The new hardware releases are notable for not being particularly notable. In challenging economic times, the company is taking a determined course of incremental and evolutionary product updates. The Mac mini is now hailed as the world's most energy efficient desktop computer. In response to environmentalists who have been critical of the company's products, the new desktops are lean and have become continually more green.

Sisyphus

In response to the thousands of e-mails our managing editor has received asking us to make more references to Greek mythology in our work, this month we are happy to oblige. Please

keep the e-mails coming. Like many of our readers, our editors can't get enough of this ancient stuff.

For our new readers who might not be aware of our scholarly interest in ancient Greek culture and mythology, Sisyphus is the mythical creature destined for eternity to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll back down again as he and the boulder approached the top. Monumental undertakings are often referred to as "Sisyphean challenges."

Those of us desiring Apple's share price to rise back to its all-time high in this difficult market no matter the company's strong balance sheet, amazing product line, and recent history of creating billions of dollars in net cash each year, might see ourselves reflected in the mythical story.

The Rocky Horror Photo Show

There's really no horror involved in viewing this month's desktop photos. The horror belongs to this writer and photographer of the photo series of Vasquez Rocks. During the photo excursion, he found himself hanging off the sides of cliffs and dangling precariously from many a ridge. The photo set is an accompaniment to the forthcoming review of Apple's iWeb component of iLife '09. The review entitled "iWeb: The Good, The Bad, and The Sublime" is scheduled for publication in our May issue. You can follow the progress of the [review site](#).

So why is a photo series for a May review appearing in our April issue? After this writer and photographer submitted the photos for the desktop picture series, all was good until he submitted photos his daughter had taken at Yosemite National Park for a future series of desktop photos.

The timing of the publication of this desktop series of rock formations in the April issue has nothing to do with the publisher's polite and constructive critique that the next time this writer and photographer embarks on a photo excursion he take his daughter along to handle the camera. There's absolutely nothing to that rumor. Nor is there any credence to the story that this writer and photographer was concerned about being upstaged by his teenage daughter should both desktop photo sets be published in the May issue. It has everything to do with this month's theme. Now that we've rationalized the timing of this month's desktop picture set, we'll depart from the theme for just a moment.

If you'd like to submit a series of pictures for consideration for publication as a desktop photo set, please contact editor@atpm.com. Please note: Vasquez Rocks as a location is already taken. This writer and photographer desires no additional competition.

Espionage

This month, Linus Ly looks at a solution for those who desire to keep everything private. Not that he's apt to hide the dealings of a long-running Ponzi scheme, but he may have found a way to hide the remaining assets. Even if the Feds seized his Mac, he'd have encrypted knowledge to barter for a lighter sentence. Absent illegal dealings, we may all

have stuff we want to keep away from even the most creative snoops. Please see his review in this month's issue.

The Many Faces of Facebook

In this month's issue, Lee Bennett explores the many digital faces of Facebook and how the iPhone and its Facebook application keep one connected whether at work, at home, and at play. In today's constant connection digital world, whether you are hanging off the cliffs at Vasquez Rocks or hiking the trails to Half Dome, the Facebook iPhone application keeps you current with friends and family.

Rocks Along the Road of Life

Life can seem like a rather rocky path. New and unforeseen adventures await us almost every day. The editors of ATPM have been chronicling what we call the "personal computing experience" since 1995. We've seen tough times come and go and opportunities arrive when we least expected them. Join us each month as we take you along to surprise locations from San Andreas rock formations to the African savanna. From your iMac or MacBook we'll take you all over the world. Next month, we visit Yosemite National Park in winter.

Our April issue includes:

MacMuser: Getting le Ver de Terre

A story from Mark Tennent written an hour before before it should've been written.

MacMuser: Very Interesting...But Stupid

Mark Tennent muses about the Safari 4 beta.

Next Actions: File and Inbox Management

How does automation help GTD on the Mac? This month's *Next Actions* takes a look at some ways to automate file management. Also, an updated Master List.

Desktop Pictures: Vasquez Rocks

Contributing editor Robert Paul Leitao provides this month's photos from the Vasquez Rocks, north of Los Angeles.

Qaptain Qwerty

Are Macs immune to Windows viruses?

Review: Elements+ 1.1

Elements+ transforms your existing copy of Adobe's Photoshop Elements, "unlocking" features and tools that otherwise require the full version of Photoshop.

Review: Espionage 2.0.2

Espionage makes it easy to password protect and encrypt individual folders, not the entire home folder, but does it get in the way?

Review: Facebook for iPhone 2.2

It's not like anyone has any other choice of competing utilities, but is the Facebook application for iPhone worth using?

Review: iFlyz Personal Media Solution Stand

Solves your personal media problems, provided your personal media are contained on a player with a smooth case.

Review: KavaServices 3.1.1

KavaServices is not your father's Character Converter! Lee Bennett looks at this substantial retooling of the former HTML Character Converter utility.

Review: OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things

Frank H. Wu hands out high marks for three leading task management applications and shares the differences between them.

Review: Showcase for iPhone 3G

Not too hard, not too soft, not too big, and not too pricey, but not perfect, either.



Eye-Fi Explore

Did you notice any effect on battery life?

—*Andy Lee*

My apologies for not mentioning that in the review, because this is something that was pretty much an automatic given.

Yes, the Eye-Fi card will put an additional drain on your battery—no question. The degree to which it drains was a little hard for me to relate because my Nikon D90 has the add-on battery pack that lets me install two batteries simultaneously. In addition, the D90 uses heavy-duty, long-life Li-Ion batteries, which last much longer than the tiny batteries that come in pocket/point-and-shoot cameras.

If you promise not to take the following as factual data, I'll attempt a "guesstimation." The number of photos I shot during the Epcot trip I feel may have normally used somewhere between 1/3 to 1/2 of the power in one of the two batteries. (The D90 doesn't drain both batteries simultaneously—it auto switches over to the other when one is empty.) Best I can recall, after I let all the photos upload at home when I returned from the park, the remaining power in the battery that was used was certainly no less than half.

When you're talking about pro and prosumer DSLRs that use the heavy-duty batteries like the Nikon D90 does, the perceived drain is going to be barely noticeable. Whereas a single D90 battery might have enough charge for me to shoot for a few days, using the Eye-Fi might shave a day or two off that. But the truth is, if I was in a place that Wi-Fi was readily available for the Eye-Fi to work, it means I'm also in a place where I can top off the battery long before it runs dry. If I were shooting for days out somewhere and wouldn't have power for a while, I'd certainly not use the Eye-Fi since it wouldn't be able to find a signal to upload, anyway.

For the small batteries in point-and-shoots: I'd be grateful if a reader who has used the Eye-Fi with a smaller camera would like to share his or her experiences with battery life estimates.

—*Lee Bennett*

ChronoSync 4.0.1

Good review; ChronoSync does an excellent job as a backup utility, and you did a nice job covering that aspect.

Two comments: what ChronoSync lacks (that Time Machine and even Apple's Backup offer) is something of an incremental backup. If you make changes that are backed up, you can never undo them; that's one of the things that makes Time Machine so compelling. For what you're doing, something akin to SuperDuper! would be sufficient (though admittedly

the ChronoSync scheduling features are more robust, and the ability to back up more selectively is an important distinction).

Secondly: as is implied by the name, ChronoSync is more than simply a backup program; it also has surprisingly robust capabilities for synchronizing between multiple machines. You alluded to this in your review, but I would like to have seen more devoted to this idea, as it is an increasingly appealing option for those of us who use multiple machines.

—*Ed Eubanks, Jr.*



You can use [FolderOrgX](#), a freeware folder action to create a Time Machine-like backup. FolderOrg is an AppleScript Folder Action that organizes files and folders by moving them into dated subfolders. This is helpful in keeping files and folders organized by the day they were added, not created or modified.

—*Diane Ross*



Very competent review. Thanks for the great information. I am considering purchasing ChronoSync and am comparing it to Intego Personal Backup X5. Your review will help me make the final decision.

—*Michael*



As the name indicates, ChronoSync is first and foremost a folder synchronization utility and it is the best one I know of. I found it easy to use, fast, and flexible. It offers the option to ignore aliases, the choice to synchronize deletions, and the choice to treat bundles as files or as folders. It detects conflicts, offers trial synchronizations, has many options to exclude files or folders, allows many different scheduling schemes and (unlike several other synchronization and backup utilities I used or tried) warns when a scheduled synchronization failed (e.g., because a disk is full).

Like many file synchronization utilities ChronoSync can also be used as a backup utility, and as such it does a very good job, as Linus explained very well.

I don't understand Ed's remark:

what ChronoSync lacks (that Time Machine and even Apple's Backup offer) is something of an incremental backup. If you make changes that are backed up, you can never undo them; that's one of the things that makes Time Machine so compelling.

ChronoSync does not only do incremental backups (it only copies files that have been modified since the last backup), but (as Linus explains) like Time Machine and Apple Backup, it can also maintain an archive of modified and/or deleted files which can easily be moved back to the place they came from with the restore function. Version 4 adds compression to this, a feature Time Machine lacks. What is lacking in ChronoSync, though, is the nice snapshot feature of Time Machine, which gives you a picture of entire folders at a certain time in the past.

—*Arno Wouters*

Backup Grows Up

Very nice, Qaptain. We need more Mac-related Comics!

—*The Lone Gunman*



Love the way you've got binary going up into MobileMe! Nicely done...all of it!

—*golobos*

Time Travel: Introduction to Time Machine

Time Machine proved to be priceless when one of the MacBooks in the house lost its drive. After suffering under the demands of a teen's virtually 24/7 use, after two and one-half years the drive finally gave out.

Apple replaced the drive under the AppleCare warranty and Time Machine restored the contents of the old drive without a hiccup.

While it's true one cannot boot from a Time Machine backup, the step of starting from an OS X install disk and performing the restore from Time Machine was really not a hassle.

—*Robert Paul Leitao*



Good review, but you missed the real power of Time Machine. It doesn't (just) restore files, it restores *things*. What I mean is that if you enter Time Machine from an application, Time Machine will restore things (files) that that application uses.

Try this: open Mail (assuming you use Mail). Enter Time Machine. Now you'll see your Mail interface in 3-D Time Machine mode, where you can go back in time and find that brilliant satirical e-mail you sent to some political figure, but have since deleted.

My point is that most people don't think in terms of *files*, they think in terms of *things* that a given application uses.

—Patrick Weigel

Thanks for that tidbit Patrick. In my setup I am only using Time Machine to back up data (which is stored outside of my user folder) so I probably wouldn't have noticed that.

You may be right about the way people think of files. That might be especially good metaphor for filetypes that can be read by multiple applications (PDF, JPEG, text, etc.).

—Sylvester Roque

Time Machine's special "things" restoration mode only works in a small number of Apple applications (Mail, iPhoto, and Address Book are the ones I know about), and the facility is not open to third-party developers.

—Michael Tsai



In addition to the methods you mentioned for changing the backup interval for Time Machine, there is the freeware program [Lingon](#). Lingon is useful for creating and modifying all sorts of daemons launched by `launchd`. Specifically, to change the time machine backup interval.

1. Launch Lingon.
2. Click on the arrow beside System Daemons.
3. Select `com.apple.backup-auto`.
4. Dismiss the warning.
5. Change the time interval as desired and save.

Another useful utility to use with Time Machine is Tri-Edre's [Back-In-Time](#). This utility allows you to manipulate the Time Machine backup in a number of useful ways. Two in particular are noteworthy.

- Back-In-Time allows access to Time Machine data for machines other than the one you happen to be using. This allows movement of files from machine to machine using the Time Machine data.

- Back-In-Time works well with PathFinder. In particular, you can restore files using Back-In-Time and PathFinder without launching Finder.

—*Bill Rowe*

Mac About Town: Hurry Up and Slow Down!

I still own a iBook Tangerine 300 that handles my needs just fine. Don't really need anything newer.

—*Alan Xenos*

The Zippy Quest for Jazzy Flash

Been there, done that, except I go back to 8" floppies, magnetic tape, disk packs, paper tape, and punched cards.

Now I've just bought a pair of FireWire/USB/eSATA hotswap docks and four 1 TB SATA drives!

And the scary part is I've already filled three of them without really trying. Thinking hard about the latest 2 TB drives next. Just as well: they only cost as much as a couple of boxes of 8" disks used to.

—*Fulvio Gerardi*

Apple Keyboard

I was visiting an Apple store and for the first time in my life—after 20 years in the industry—decided to see what is an Apple Mac—that people are so attached to. I tapped away on the keyboard and thought—*wow*—this is a keyboard. Five minutes later—I had bought the wired version and attached it to my PC. I must say that this keyboard is amazing—anyone considering a new keyboard needs to look at this. I never thought that a keyboard could make such a difference.

—*Kon Manos*

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Getting le Ver de Terre

This is being written a good hour earlier than it ought to be. The reason being that we accidentally got up an hour earlier today. Actually, more than an hour earlier because we left our bed at what we thought was a little “early” as it’s Spring. The days are getting longer, the weather sunnier, and a blessed blackbird has taken to singing all night long and not just from his usual 4 AM.

The real reason for our extra early rising is the fault of our iPods. It is indicative that we ignored our alarm clocks and watches and believed our Nanos instead. Both had clocks which leaped forward an hour last weekend for no apparent reason.

We have been assuming their internal clock is corrected whenever they are plugged into their host Macs. As they check automatically for software updates and sync preferences, contacts, playlists and other data with the Macs, we also assumed they check time as well. Probably using the Macs’ internal clocks (which are synchronised every day with a time server) or because the Nanos go off to find the time all by themselves.

Not so, apparently. What should have been a Zzzzzz became a Grrrrr. The trouble is that once we learned the real time, we had been out of bed for so long we weren’t tired.

Checking the Nanos, both had jumped from London’s time zone to Cork’s. Being a better European state than England, Cork time moved to summer time last weekend to become an hour ahead of GMT/ZULU/UTC, even though it is further west of us in Blighty. This is something we approve of and wish England would follow—not only to embrace our European friends and neighbours, but also because the Australian Grand Prix is on the same weekend as England moves to summer time. Instead of getting up at 6 AM BST to watch the race, it will really be 5 AM GMT.

At least getting up an hour early gave extra time on the elliptical trainer and more importantly, with Mark and Anna, my tutor and fellow student in podcast [Coffee Break French](#).

C’est la vie.

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Very Interesting. . .But Stupid

British Telecom e-mailed us today with the message that our monthly online bill is ready for reading. Coincidentally, 18185.co.uk also e-mailed our call-charges bill. All very good and supposedly saving paper, just like HSBC, which has been struggling to get us to accept paperless bank statements—assuming we can get at our account to read the bad news.

Of the three companies, only one, the smallest of the lot, has got a paperless bill that lets us see the amount we owe and log into our account with ease. That is 18185.co.uk, which sends an e-mail in the form of a single-page invoice, ready to print if necessary. Full call details are on the Web site if we want them.

This is the firm we pay for the call part of our telephone use. We dial 18185 in front of any local, national, or international telephone number. We usually get the conversation for free, plus a tiny connection charge.

The other two companies, BT and HSBC, are so untrustworthy in their online offerings that we will not move to their “paperless” accounts. (Read: less paper for them to buy and more for us to supply for them.) Both companies send accounts with numerous near-empty pages, bar their logos and corporate rubbish. If they stopped using them, they would halve their paper costs—especially if they kept to a single ink colour.

BT revamped its Web site recently, and the new one is not recognized in our password loggers, the Mac OS Keychain, or 1Password. The site won't accept our username and password, and clicking on Forgotten Password results in an automated e-mail uselessly saying, “This is an example template for forgotten password.” So much for its paperless bills.

HSBC was also locking out Safari 3 following a Web site revamp last year. It is fixed now, just in time for Safari 4 to be released in beta form.

Look That Up in Your Funk & Wagnalls

What can be said about [Safari 4](#)? Apple's engineers have given it a whole new face, copying Google's Chrome by putting tabs across the top of the window. Other new tweaks include dropping the blue progress bar, omitting the reload button, and adding automatic suggestions for Google searches and URLs. Apparently, Safari 4 is faster than its predecessor, but it still has problems with some sites that Firefox opens with ease.

The final flourish is a new window of Top Sites based on the recent history log. It resembles a Rowan and Martin joke wall. Click on a little Web page in the wall and expect a wide-eyed, giggly Goldie Hawn to pop her head out.

We've used the new-look Safari for a week before screaming in frustration and wanting it to look like good old Safari 3. There are various terminal commands that turn off most of the new features. Better still, however, is the free haxie [Safari-Tweaks](#) from pointum.

It gives Safari a new Tweaks menu, in which all the new toys that Apple's engineers have devised can be turned off.

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Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

File and Inbox Management

I am assuming that you have your inbox(es) designated and understood, and that you have a basic system for filing/archiving data after it has been “processed.” (If you haven’t gotten that far yet, jump back to some of the [earliest articles](#) in this column.)

One of the assets of digital technology is that it is easy to automate things like sorting and filing; that’s one of the reasons we use computers. How, then, do we automate the inflow of our files and documents?

Apple’s Solution

Apple’s Automator is one option. Scripting has long been an effective way to set up automation and background events, and Apple’s system-wide (or nearly so) AppleScript has been generally effective at accomplishing this. Most people who set out to write AppleScripts find that the scripting language is quirky and, at times, difficult—and, while writing scripts is a good way to dip a toe into coding, it isn’t something that just anyone can sit down and pull off in a half-hour.

Enter Automator, an application introduced with Mac OS X 10.4 that frees all of us from needing to learn how to write AppleScripts. Sort of.

Automator gives a drag-and-drop approach to scripting and makes it easy to develop fairly customized scripts (and Finder plug-ins, droplets, and even stand-alone applications) without *any* knowledge of code or scripting. Many applications ship with Automator actions and support, allowing you easy access to “under the hood” aspects of the application. With a bit of poking around, you can figure out how to do some fairly amazing things with just a mouse click or two—or even none.

For example, I’ve mentioned in a previous column that I [use Automator actions](#) to easily import files into DEVONthink for archiving. It’s possible with Automator to do much more in terms of automation. In fact, the latest version of Automator can record actions that you do (like a set of menu executions, for example) and replay these as actions or parts of actions.

ATPM has [covered Automator before](#). These articles are a good place to start if you wish to begin toying with Automator. You might also check out these tutorial articles from [OS X Daily](#) and [Pirate Skool](#). There are also a number of ready-made Automator actions available; Apple [lists some](#), and there is also an entire third-party Web site devoted to Automator called [Automator World](#), which has a large collection of actions.

If you’re looking for automation, Automator can be a good place to start.

More Apple Goodness

Apple offers other ways to get things into different places. In fact, there's a surprising amount of automation built into Mac OS X, and the accompanying applications, that is often overlooked.

One of the keys to automation is scheduling, right? Remember iCal? That's right—oddly enough, it is *designed* for scheduling! Of course, many of us use iCal for scheduling events in our lives, but did you know that you can use iCal to schedule events for your Mac, too?

Any new event has a number of alarm options; you probably either have these turned off by default, or set to give you a reminder—say, 15 minutes before—with a message and sound. But any event alarm can be other things, too: send an e-mail, open a file, or *run a script*.

The last one is where the magic happens. Particularly when combined with Automator, you can schedule iCal to fire any number of events at a predefined time. Do you want to have the contents of your desktop sorted by type and filed into your Documents folder every night at 2 AM? You can automate this with Automator and iCal. Do you want your Task Management application, iCal, and your archiving database opened, and all other applications closed or hidden, at 9:30 AM every weekday when it's time for your daily review? iCal and Automator can accomplish this. Things that need “manual” syncing might be scheduled this way. Files can be renamed and countless other tasks—things that you've been doing manually, because you didn't know (or remember) that iCal could schedule a script—accomplished in the background or while you're away from your Mac.

iCal isn't the only built-in automation, either. Mail has a lot of automation ability, too—using rules. This is especially useful for GTD, since many of us use e-mail heavily as one of our primary inboxes. (Many of us also use it as a part of our archiving/reference filing system, too.)

A lot of folks use Mail rules to automatically sort their e-mail for them: messages from certain senders, to particular addresses, etc. are dished out into specific folders rather than just sitting in the “inbox.” (I'm wary of such systems, since they can give a false sense of having “dealt” with e-mails without actually having processed them in a real way. Still, I see how they can be useful to many.) But you can fire scripts using Mail rules, just as you can with iCal, with an incoming message of a certain type being the trigger instead of a scheduled event.

Two companion tools to Mail that I use heavily are both from InDev: [MailTags](#) and [Mail Act-On](#). If you use MailTags, your filing and retrieval are improved, since project names, keywords, comments, flags, and other data can be appended to messages. You can even set “tickle” dates for messages, reminding you to follow up on them at a later date (which is great for a Waiting folder of e-mails). Mail Act-On offers a sort of “semi-automated” manner for sorting and processing mail: using keystrokes, you can move messages, add tags, or mark as read or unread—anything that you can accomplish with a rule can be invoked with a keystroke. If you're trying to do an [Inbox Zero](#) workflow with your e-mail, Mail Act-On is very helpful.

No, Not the Odd Maid in a Dated TV Show...

Another option that I use heavily is Noodlesoft's [Hazel](#). I first encountered Hazel as a good tool for GTD-style file management through Ethan "Kinkless" Schoonover's [screencast](#) about how he uses Hazel a few years ago. Since then, I've become a committed Hazel fan.

Hazel works like this: it will watch for certain things to happen, then automatically make other things happen. For example, I have Hazel set up to watch my Downloads folder for photos. When one appears, Hazel imports it into iPhoto and moves the original to the trash. It does the same for audio files in Downloads, putting them into iTunes. Probably everyone could use (and benefit from) something like this.

I have some other tools set up that are more specific to my file management but just as important. For example, I regularly use an [Olympus DM-10 Recorder](#) for recording lectures and classes, which I'll later put into podcast. The hitch is, the DM-10 only records in a proprietary format, or in WMA. This adds several steps to the process for me—or for Hazel. Here's my Hazel setup for these: Hazel watches my Inbox folder for any WMA-format files. When one appears, Hazel opens the file in [EasyWMA](#) for conversion. Then Hazel moves the WMA file to the trash, and the new MP3 file to a folder called "To Be Podcasted." Super handy.

But Hazel does much, much more because (big surprise here) it can invoke AppleScripts, too. So I use it to automate some steps in filing, for example: I keep a lot of my active files on my desktop while they are in use (not unlike my physical desktop). When Hazel sees that a file has not been modified in, say, a week (which is a time frame that works for me—yours may be different), it automatically fires the script that imports that file into DEVONthink, then puts the original file in the Trash. When I review one of the files in DEVONthink (usually as part of a weekly review), I can add the metadata I wish to and put it where it belongs in the "file cabinet"—but until then, it isn't cluttering my desktop. I have Hazel do similar things with my Documents folder and even with my Inbox.

I'm not sure that going into details about how *my* Hazel rules are set up (maybe posting a copy of them for you to try) would really be a productive way to spend your time. Hazel, and all of these automation techniques, will benefit you very differently than they do me. However, I will offer this suggestion: for several days to a week, pay attention to what things you do repetitively, particularly with regard to file management. Make a list of these as you go. When you go back to review the list, make notes on each step that it takes to accomplish these repetitive tasks. What you have effectively done is create a template, of sorts, for how you should set up an Automator action, rules in Mail or Hazel, or some other form of automation. 90% of the time or more, I would bet that these repeated actions would be able to be automated by one or more of the tools above.

Automating file management is a great way to keep things cleaner and more organized. We have the advantage of digital technology and its ability to do things in fewer steps that would require many, many more steps done manually. Making good use of that ability is one valuable step toward greater productivity.

New Additions and Apps to Watch

Check out these additions to the list.

I've added [Pluto menu bar](#) to the GTD local apps section. This is a really great program, with a good bit of maturity; I'm surprised it hasn't turned up before. It's a menu-bar application, but don't let that dissuade you from giving it a good look if you're looking for something fully featured: Pluto has everything that most GTD apps have—plus a number of features that are less-common—all wrapped up in a tight and efficient menu bar tool. The developer is working on a full desktop application *and* an iPhone application that will complement. A [free version of Pluto](#) is also available. Definitely something to watch.

Another novel approach is [Qu-s](#), which allows you to place lists (and other objects, like notes, links, or any content that is dynamic and “temporary”) directly onto your Mac's desktop—as in, integrated into the desktop, not just a floating window. This might be too flat or sparse for many users, but I see it as another straightforward way to keep a simple list in front of you.

A couple of iPhone apps were brought to my attention. [Actions](#) is from the makers of GhostAction, and is currently in beta testing. [Firetask](#), which is *not* beta, promises “GTD-style” task management for the iPhone. (By the way, my hunch from a couple of months ago was confirmed when I did a simple App Store search for the word “task.” It revealed literally dozens of apps, the vast majority of which are task-list apps.

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

OS Requirements: None (FileMaker file)

Required Applications: FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

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

News: It looks like the developer failed to renew the domain. I'm not sure what this means for the production of Action Tracker, though I can venture a guess.

[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

OS Requirements: Unknown

Required Applications: None

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

News: There is no way to download the current version (or *any* version!) at the Web site, as-is. Jon hasn't updated this in quite a while; if it persists for another month or two, I'll take it off the list.

[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)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4 [only](#)

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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
OS Requirements: Unknown
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
OS Requirements: None (Mori template)
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: App coming soon

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

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

News: Version 1.4 beta is available for download. Version 2.0 is promised for spring 2009, according to the Web site.

OmniFocus



Developer: Omni Group

Current Version: 1.6

Price: \$80

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$20)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.8

Required Applications: None

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

News: Version 1.6 was recently released, bringing a nice collection of new and upgraded features and bug fixes. Also, Omni now offers “OmniFidget,” which is an OmniFocus-related Dashboard widget.

Pluto menubar



Developer: MOApp Software Manufactory

Current Version: 3.3

Price: €12.00 (about \$16.40)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

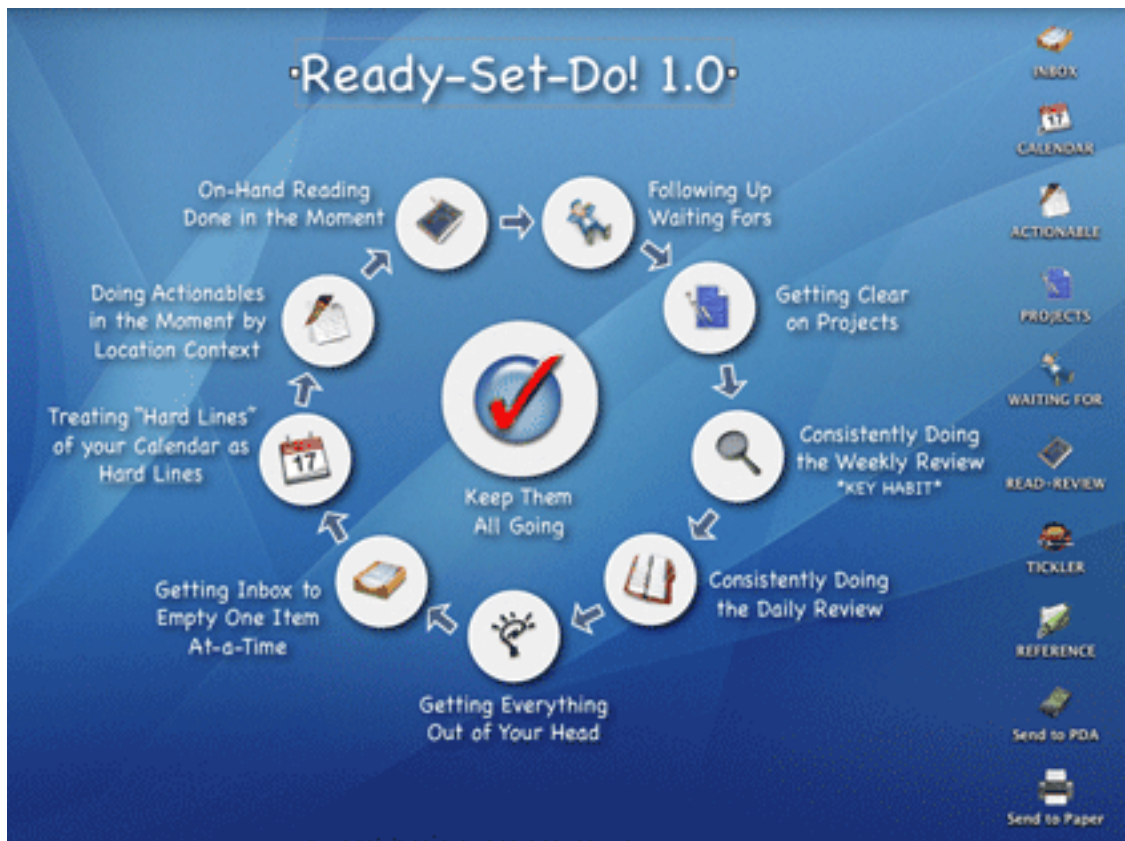
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: This is a menu-bar application, but don't be fooled—it is a very fully featured GTD tool. There is a lot to see here, and you won't find any of the standard features you're looking for missing. Note the full-screen editing, searching, tags, contacts, and priorities.

News: Pluto Pro (stand-alone app) is promised as coming soon, as an iPhone application and a Windows version.

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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: None



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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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: 1.0.4

Price: \$50

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$10)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.9
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
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
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: 1.0.2
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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.2

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

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)

OS Requirements: Unknown (would assume 10.4 or later, due to presence of Spotlight functions)

Distinguishing Features: A simple yet powerful menu bar-style task list manager, with tags, groups, notes, and a handful of other options.

News: Web site is back up, offering version 1.2, which does *not* include iCal syncing (though previous versions still do). Also, they've announced that version 2.0 will be released in August 2009.

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.1

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
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
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
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
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.9

Distinguishing Features: Tracks a substantial amount of information about a given task, including completion status, priority, and 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

OS Requirements: Unknown

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

News: Web site is currently down, with no explanation. . .

[Life Balance](#)

Developer: Llamagraphics

Current Version: 5.0.4

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)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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: None

[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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11

Distinguishing Features: Highly-customizable system, with project management built-in; also works well for heavy day-to-day GTD use.

News: None

[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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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

News: None

[Qu-s](#)

Developer: Urban Design Limited

Current Version: 1.2

Price: \$17

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Distinguishing Features: Allows lists (and other things) to be created as an editable part of the desktop. Good for simple lists.

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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Distinguishing Features: 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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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 check box. 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

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2

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

OS Requirements: Unknown

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, checklists 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; 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 undoing 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 plug-in 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](#)
- [CoMindWork](#)
- [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](#)
- [GTD TiddlyWiki](#)
- [MonkeyGTD](#)
- [Pimki](#)

iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)

- [Chores,](#)
- [Dejumble](#)
- [DoBot ToDos](#)
- [EasyTask Manager](#)
- [Firetask](#)
- [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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Desktop Pictures

by Robert Paul Leitao, <http://web.me.com/robertpaul>

Vasquez Rocks

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos of the Vasquez Rocks, which are part of the San Andreas Fault just north of Los Angeles, were taken by ATPM contributing editor Robert Paul Leitao using a Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi. They were processed using Aperture.



[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.

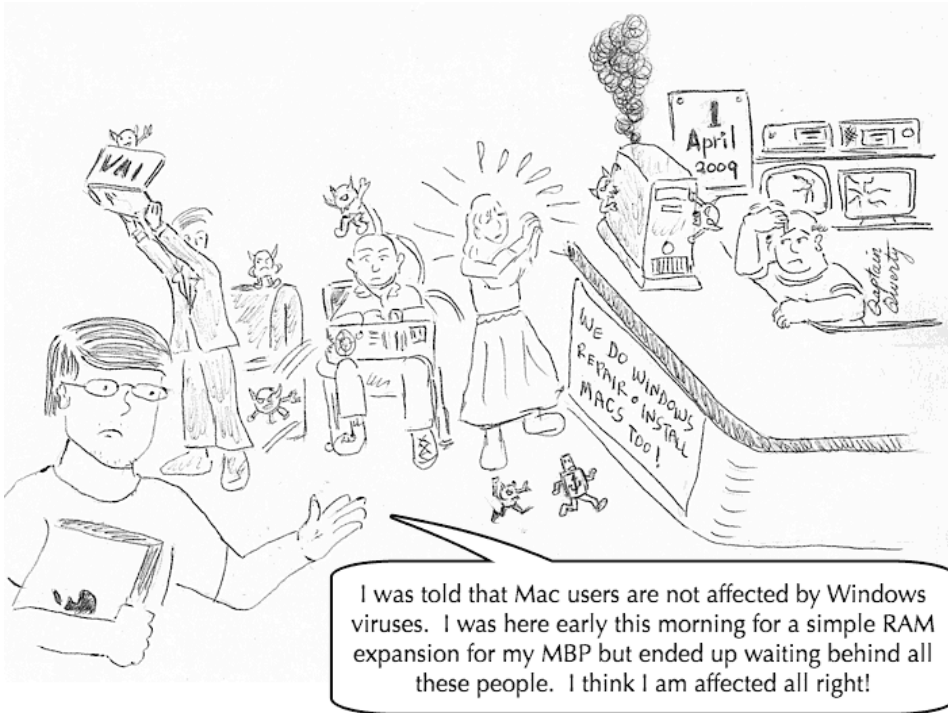
You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X’s built-in screen saver. Choose “System Preferences...” from the Apple menu. Click the Screen Saver (10.1.x) or Screen Effects (10.2.x) button. Then click on Custom Slide Show in the list of screen savers. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, 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.



Are Macs Immune to Windows Viruses?



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Software Review

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

Elements+ 1.1

Developer: [As Simple As Photoshop](#)

Price: \$12

Requirements: Adobe Photoshop Elements (versions 1-6). Not [Universal](#).

Trial: Feature-limited (9 tools out of 152)



Photoshop Elements is one of those applications that filled a much-needed niche when first introduced, and it has only gotten better since then. A lot of photographers find that Photoshop Elements is all they need—the full Photoshop is overkill for many of us, and the learning curve is notoriously high (though, admittedly, for those who need it the work is more than worth it). Even in my work in professional photography, I have found that Photoshop Elements is sufficient, if not ideal, for all but the most particular needs.

Still, there are those particular needs; and there are a good handful of tools that are, to say the least, less than optimally efficient in accomplishing certain goals. While Photoshop Elements has gotten better through the many (now six) different versions, it is still somewhat “crippled” in terms of the features offered by the full Photoshop.

What is interesting is that a number of these features are still latent within the code of Photoshop Elements. Whether this is a testimony to the common heritage that Photoshop Elements shares with its big brother (likely), or an indication that future versions will include some or all of these features (given the track record of versions one through six, also likely!), this reality presents something of an opportunity, or at least a curiosity: how can we get to those features? Is the mother of all [easter eggs](#) awaiting the right combination of mouse-clicks?

Fortunately, we don’t have to wait to find out: Andrei (Andrew) Doubrovski, whose company is As Simple as Photoshop, has developed Elements+, which is a patch that unlocks many of the features that are hidden in Photoshop Elements. All told, Elements+ unlocks up to 152 different features, including Color and Tone tools such as curves, channel mixing, and soft proofs, layer tools, masks, smart filters, and more. (A full list, broken down by category and Photoshop Elements version, is [viewable here](#).)

How Does It Work?

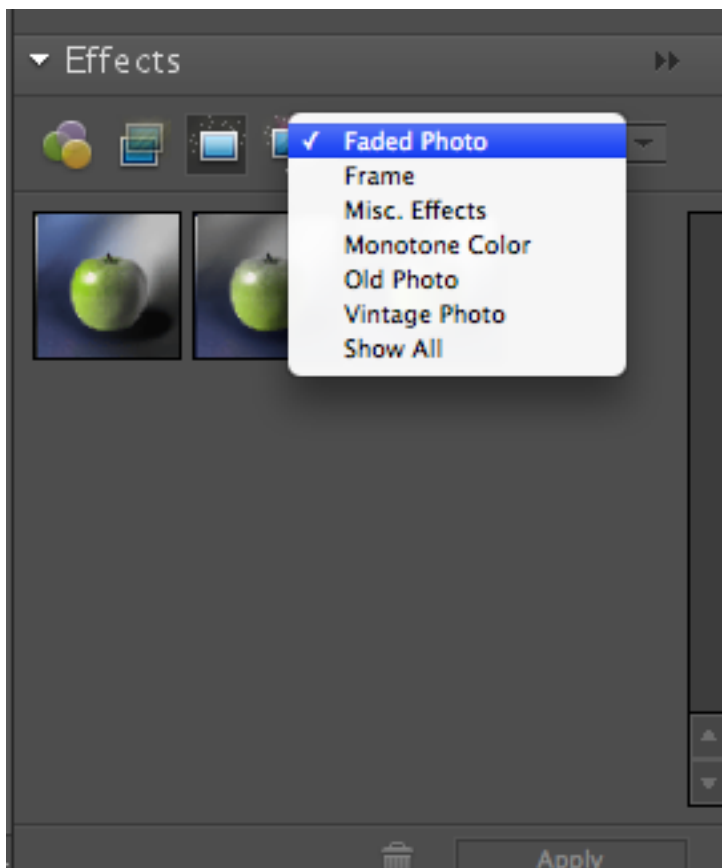
For the most part, Elements+ is a large collection of XML files that take advantage of Photoshop Elements’s extensible architecture—the same thing that makes plugins possible. But they aren’t plugins, and they aren’t simply pre-defined workflows or macros; they are full implementations of the features named.

Elements+ comes with a simple installer, which does all the work for you. You simply quit Photoshop Elements, install, then re-start Photoshop Elements; you'll find the tools you seek in the "Effects" panel.

How Well Does It Work?

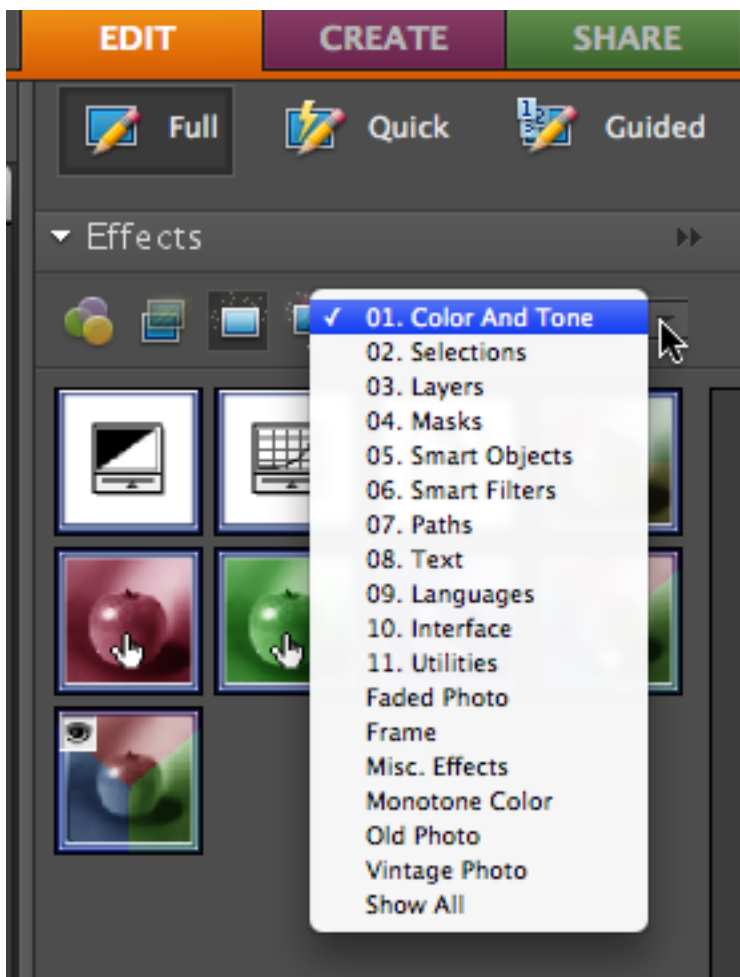
Elements+ does everything promised: it invoked all of the features listed, and they work exactly as promised. There's not much more to say.

I've taken a couple of screenshots to illustrate. In the first one, you'll see my bare Effects panel in its native state. Four icons or "tabs" are present: Filters, Layer Styles, Photo Effects, and All. You'll also notice that the contents of the Photo Effects menu is a bit thin, with only six items.



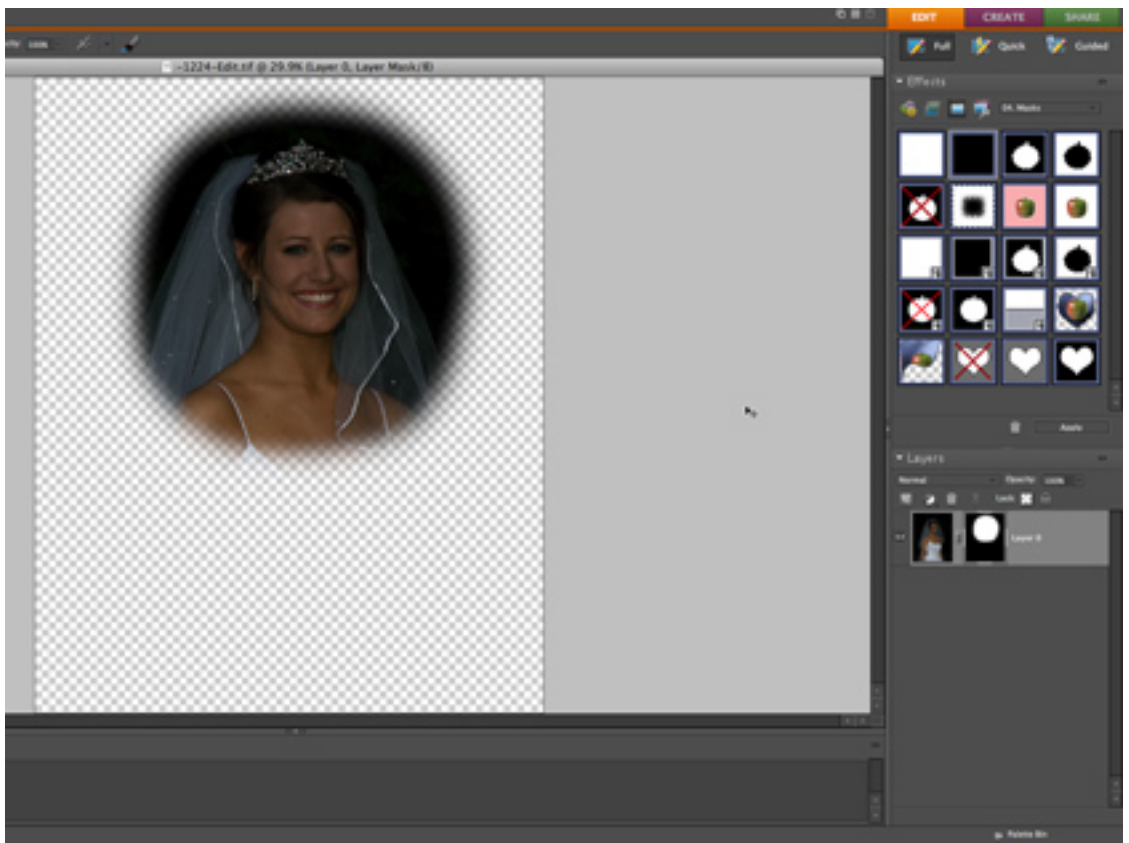
The Photo Effects tab *before* installation. Note the sparse number of items.

Now notice the second shot of the Photo Effects menu: eleven new categories have been added. These are where you will live for days after you've installed Elements+, while you play around with the new tools afforded to you.



The Photo Effects tab *after* installation. 11 new items!

For example, here I've done a basic mask using the tools afforded by Elements+. A simple vignette around this bride might be exactly how I want to present the cover of an album. The first mask took only minutes and was done free-hand; the second was done with a bit more work using a shape, but with the same tool. Both were easy to do, and even just dabbling with this shows how powerful the mask tools are.

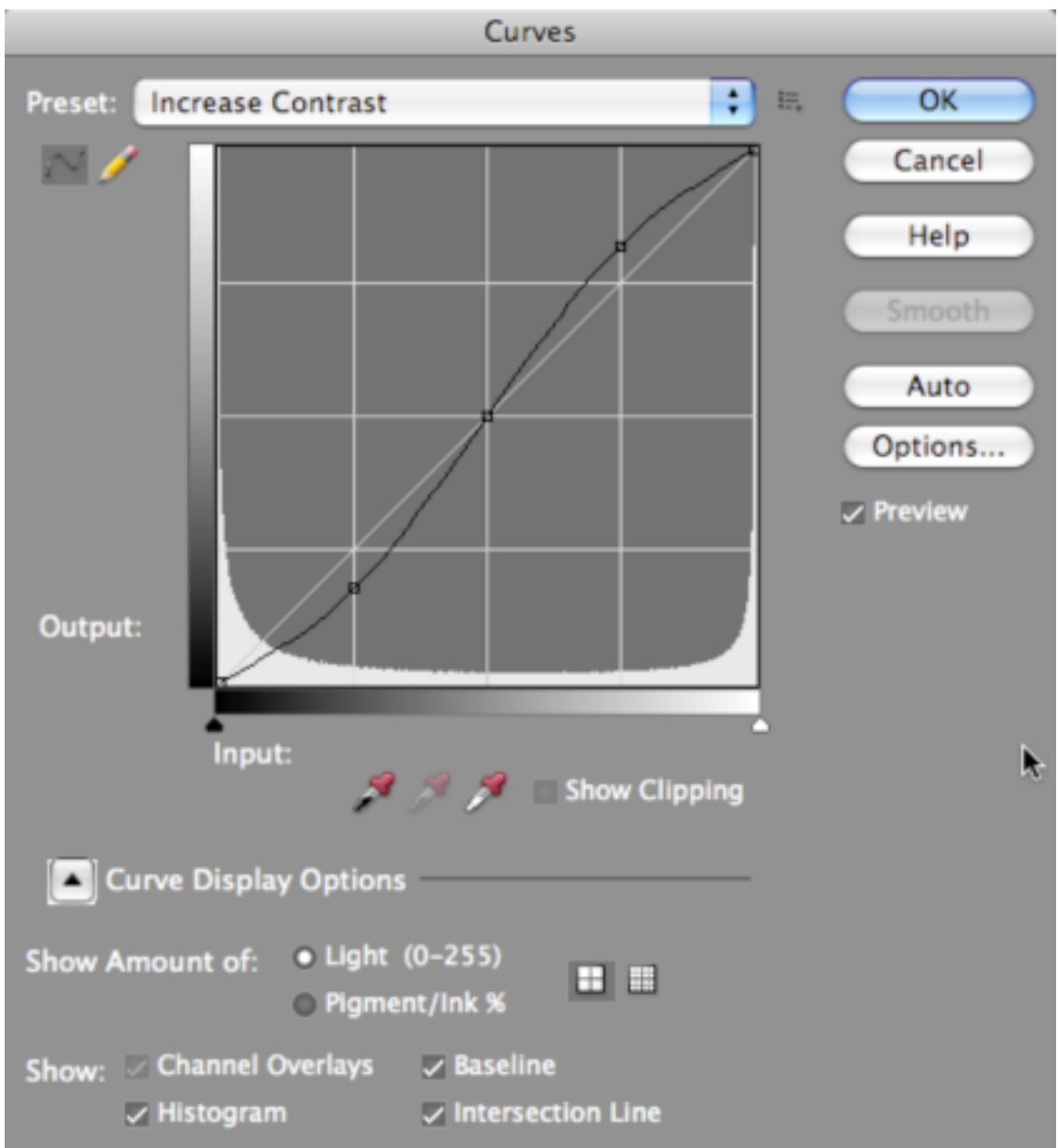


Here's a basic mask I did in just minutes.



This one took a little bit longer, but was still easy thanks to the Masks tools. There's a lot of room to play here, and much to learn about making good masks.

Likewise, curves are the popular way to impose adjustments on photos these days. They offer a way to exercise an enormous amount of control in adjustments, and they were conspicuously absent in Photoshop Elements. No more—with Elements+, curves are available, with a few presets present, and a handful of options available (as you can see).



Finally (for many): Curves comes to Photoshop Elements.

Elements+ also has great documentation available on the Web site. Each section is nicely broken down into easy steps and instructions, and it has the feel of a tutorial as much as a manual. This is likely due to the fact that the developer does tutorials as a major part of his work online; but, for whatever reason, the documentation is very helpful.

Any Problems?

Elements+ does not have an elegant installation process: the installer is a simple AppleScript, with no security, progress, or indication of what is being done. You must simply “listen” to progress as various system sounds are fired! There is a dialog box at the end

that informs you that the installation is complete, but this is not exactly what most users will be expecting in terms of installation.

My biggest “complaint” is an ironic one: Elements+ introduces a level of complexity that is otherwise absent in Photoshop Elements. That’s the goal, right? Yes, but users must keep in mind that Photoshop Elements is designed to be a fully consumer-level application, while Photoshop is the professional version; this means that the lines are clearly drawn, even if they exclude some features that are desirable to some. Elements+ blurs these lines and brings forth features that you can’t just “click and try” but that require some fundamental knowledge of how they work.

This shortcoming is compensated greatly by the excellent documentation, which can help the most average user overcome any difficulties with the Elements+ features. Still, your copy of Photoshop Elements will no longer be one that just anyone can sit down and fully utilize comfortably.

Summary

To wrap up, Elements+ is a fantastic tool for those of us seeking just a few more key features out of Photoshop Elements. For a price of \$12, this will be a huge savings for hundreds of photographers (or more), allowing them to continue using Photoshop Elements and avoid the upgrade costs to the full Photoshop suite.

Elements+ isn’t for everyone, but for those who need it, it is welcome.

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Software Review

by Linus Ly, lly@atpm.com

Espionage 2.0.2

Developer: [Tao Effect](#)

Price: \$25; \$5 (upgrade from 1.x)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5. [Universal](#).

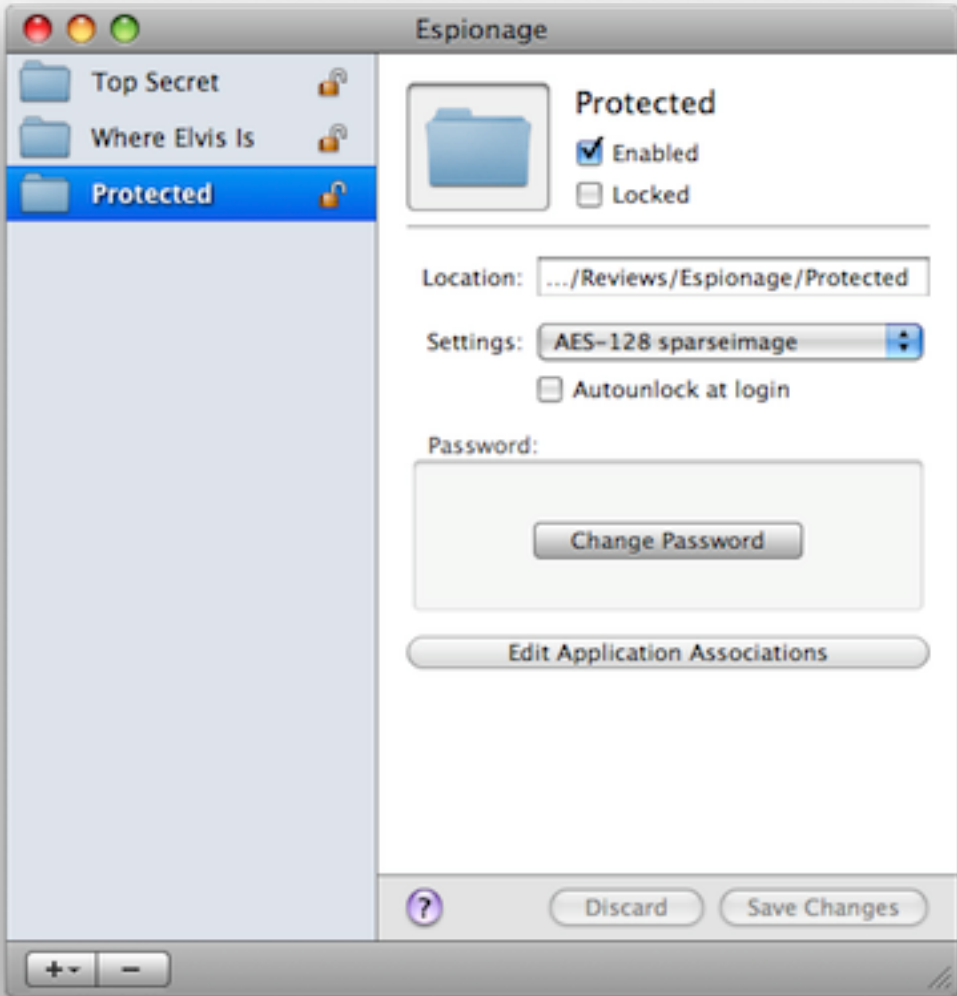
Trial: Fully-featured (14 days)



“I have nothing to hide.” I wish that were true. I don’t run a Ponzi scheme, so I don’t have to worry about hiding the list of places where my investors’ money really goes. Still, just by using Address Book, I have data like names and e-mail addresses that I prefer to keep away from prying eyes. Having separate accounts on a Mac, with separate passwords, is no defense against unwanted data access. Anyone with physical access to a Mac, with a moderate level of technical know-how, can access the data on the Mac’s hard disk. If you really need to safeguard the data you have on your hard disk, you need passwords and encryption, something that Tao Effect’s Espionage offers. Unlike Apple’s FileVault, Espionage can protect individual folders rather than your entire home folder, thus resulting in better performance.

Usage

The first time you launch Espionage, you will be prompted to set up a master password for use with the application. The password can be your login password or a different, new password. To protect a folder, you drag and drop the folder onto Espionage’s window and set a password. The next time you try to access the folder, you will be prompted to supply the password.



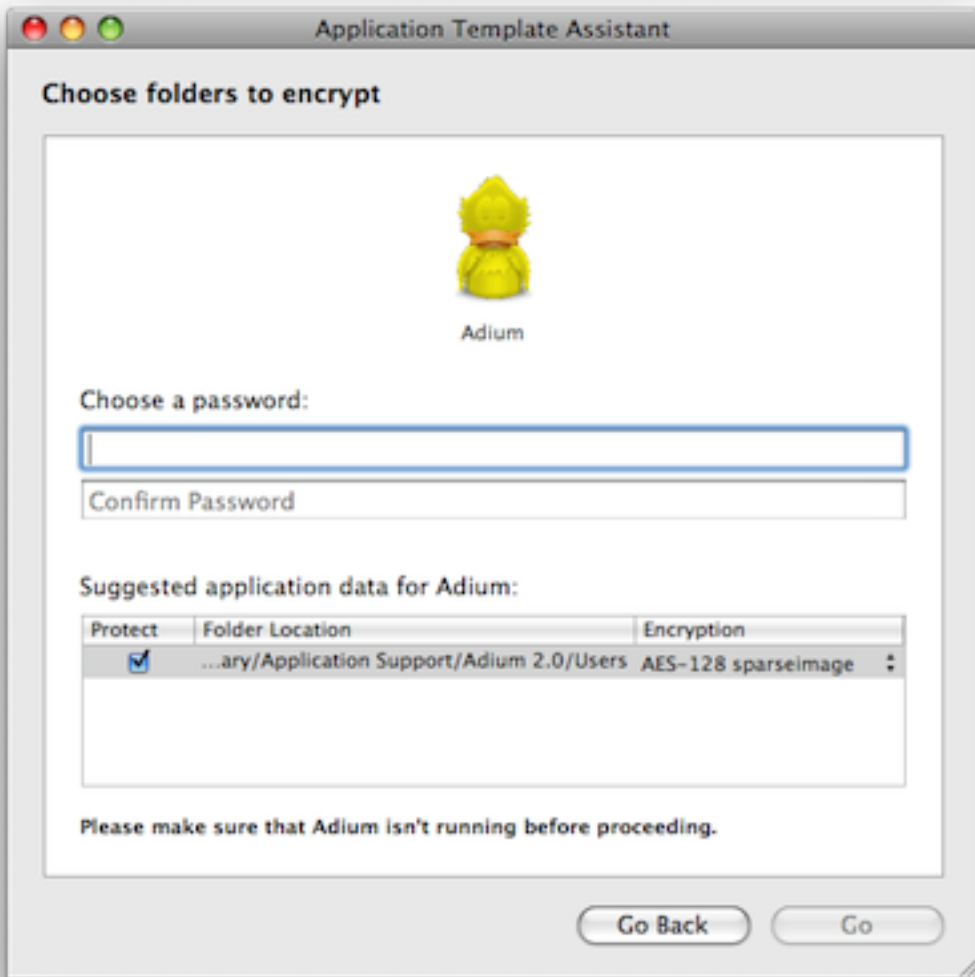
The Espionage interface.



You need a password to see the folder's content.

You can choose to only password protect the folder or to also encrypt the folder's content. Espionage stores folders using Mac OS X disk images in one of two formats: `.sparesbundle` (more efficient for Time Machine) or `.sparseimage` (can save space for smaller folders). Encryption options are AES-128 or AES-256, which are government approved for Top Secret documents.

New with version 2.0 is Application Association. All users know where their movies, music, and pictures are, but many probably don't know where to locate files related to Mail, iChat, etc. Espionage comes with an application template whereby you choose the application and Espionage looks up the path to the data associated with the application. In my example, I told Espionage to protect the data associated with the multi-protocol chat client Adium. If your application is not in the template, you do have to somehow identify its data location and drag the folder into Espionage. Once set up, when launched, the application will ask for the password. When you exit the application, its data is locked again.



Espionage knows where Adium's data is.

Even if someone boots my computer up from a system DVD and uses the password reset tool to make up a new admin password, my protected folder is still off-limits to the intruder. Likewise, if someone boots the computer in target disk mode and hooks a FireWire cable to it, while he can roam about the entire hard drive unobstructed, he does not really see the content of the protected folders. Instead, he is greeted by three “folders” whose names present the message:

This folder contains encrypted data. It is controlled by Espionage. Do not modify it in this state.



Even in Target Disk Mode, the folder is protected.

Under the Hood

Espionage works by replacing a folder that it protects with a hidden image file. Yes, Espionage actually deletes the folder and put in its place a different version of the original folder. Working with the kernel extension iSpy, Espionage listens for events requesting folder access and interferes with the request by presenting a password prompt. Espionage's help shows you how to exclude certain processes from iSpy so that they do not generate password prompts. When the password check is passed, Espionage mounts the disk image file, also invisibly. If you have something important to protect, use a password *and* encryption.

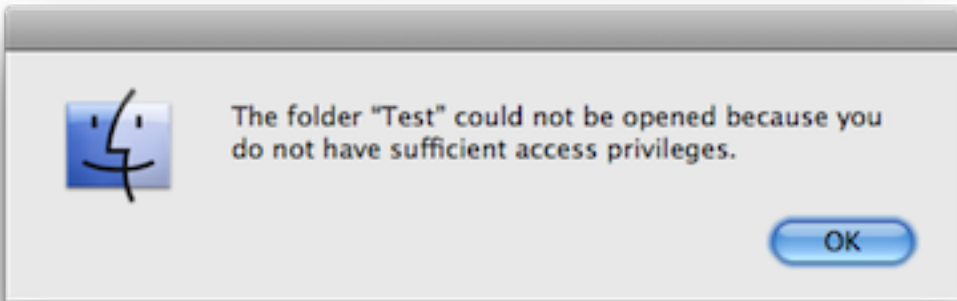
When you first set up Apple's FileVault, it sternly warns you that if you ever forget your password, no one in the world can help you. Espionage does not have such warnings, but I suppose it is the same deal. Be sure to use passwords that you've used elsewhere or that you won't forget; do not choose something hard to remember. Before you have Espionage protect your data, it would be a good idea to back it up and to put the backup physically far from the production data.

Is It Transparent?

Tao Effect touts Espionage as intuitive, simple to use, and unobtrusive. While I agree with the first two claims, I have to disagree with the third one. So far, we know that once a folder is locked, trying to open it via the Finder and you will be prompted for the password. In reality, even when I was nowhere near the protected folder, just switching to the Finder triggered password prompts—yes, one prompt for every protected folder. I ended up unprotecting all the test folders. It seems any interaction between applications and the Finder makes Espionage think the protected folders are to be accessed. It is possible to add the Finder to Espionage's whitelist, but then when you really want to go into the protected folders, you are no longer prompted for the password but instead are informed that the folder is protected by Espionage and so on. To access the folders, you would have to select the folders within Espionage and uncheck the Locked box.

Another example of quirky Finder integration is the Lock contextual menu. While you can select an unlocked folder and re-lock it this way, subsequent attempts at going into the re-locked folder would result with the error message:

The folder “folder_name” could not be opened because you do not have sufficient access privileges.



Instead of being prompted for the password, you are denied access instantly when folder is re-locked via the contextual menu.

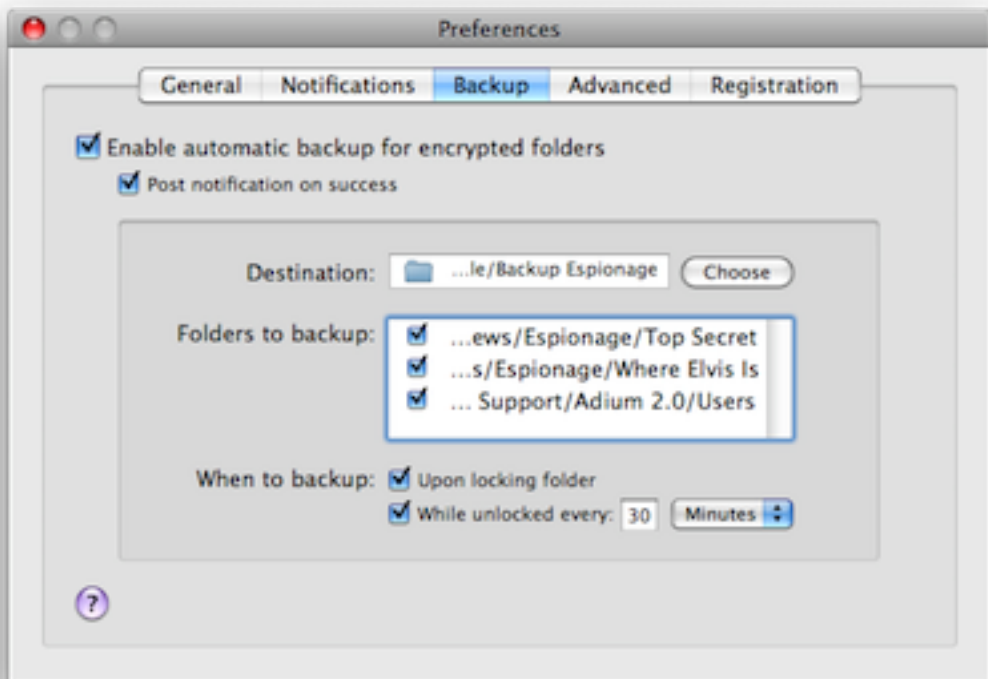
Again, to unlock the re-locked folder, you would have to launch Espionage, select the re-locked folder, and uncheck its Locked checkbox. Tao Effect is aware of this issue and invites users to send in their system configurations.

Recall that folders protected by Espionage, when in use, are really mounted disk images. That means they are on the same level as other mounted volumes, like the hard drive. One of my favorite Finder shortcuts is to go to up a folder level by holding down the Command key and clicking the folder name. The entire folder structure leading up to the current folder is presented, and I can traverse it quickly. But with Espionage’s use of disk images, there is no folder structure to traverse. I still can use the back button, but it does not always correspond to a level up.

Just because Espionage allows having passwords for every folder that it protects does not mean you should use the feature. Eventually, the many passwords would become unwieldy. You may end up having to group folders that need to be protected under one folder. You now trade the freedom to keep separate folders in exchange for Espionage’s protection. Perhaps in a future release Espionage will allow unlocking all the folders once one of them is unprotected. Likewise, when setting up folders for protection, it would be convenient if there were an option to use an existing password by clicking some checkbox. All these examples translate to an obtrusive presence Espionage has on the protected computer.

While the process of protecting folders and unlocking them is intuitive, making use of the built-in backup feature is not. Introduced in version 2, the backup feature makes Espionage look worse. You tell Espionage which protected folder to backup via the Preferences panel. In my case, I told Espionage to use my Time Capsule to store the backups. The backups of

protected folders appear in the backup location in the folder called EspionageBackups. An extra folder level is introduced to keep folders by the same name separated. The backups are already encrypted so that instead of the folder content, you see the now familiar message indicating that the folder are protected.



Backup is set up in Espionage's Preferences panel, not in Tools of the main menu.

I can live with the strange placement of the backup function, but finding how to restore backed up folders got me totally confused. I looked for a button or menu option that would spell Restore but none was to be found. Instead, to restore a folder, you would copy it via Finder, in its protected state, back to where the original folder was, or any other place. You would drag the newly copied folder back into Espionage's window and apply the same security settings. The folder, supposedly already encrypted before, would now be encrypted again. Open it with the correct password, and the folder is back where it should be. I think the more straightforward way to restore a folder from backup would be to select a menu option under Tools.

Summary

If you have sensitive data on your computer, Espionage provides a good solution to protecting the data. Someone with physical access to your computer has to overcome Espionage's password protection and encryption to get to your data. Protected application data works

fine, but the Finder interaction is not transparent. In my experience, Espionage prompted for the passwords for each protected folder at times when I was nowhere close to such folders. You can open up Espionage and lock or unlock folders within Espionage, but then you lose the transparency. The newly added built-in backup feature works fine in backup mode, but restoring folders involves a rather quirky process. Espionage gets the job done as far as encrypting and protecting folders, but it is obtrusive and not totally intuitive in the backup area, so for me it is only a Good product.

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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

Facebook for iPhone 2.2

Developer: [Facebook](#).

Publisher: [iTunes App Store](#)

Price: free

Requirements: iPhone, iPhone 3G, or iPod Touch



Maybe I'm way off base, but I'd just about make a wager that there are few iPhone owners who don't maintain a Facebook profile. Somehow, to me, it feels logical to assume that one begets the other. Well, fine, maybe more so in only one direction, but my point is made.

When Apple opened up the ability to create custom applications for the iPhone, no one doubted that Facebook developers would be at the head of the line with their own submission, and the version 1.0 release was one of the first apps made available for the iPhone. Several months later, a variety of shortcomings were addressed in the second major version of the iPhone application. Some say the application still feels incomplete, but do those people consider that may be by design?

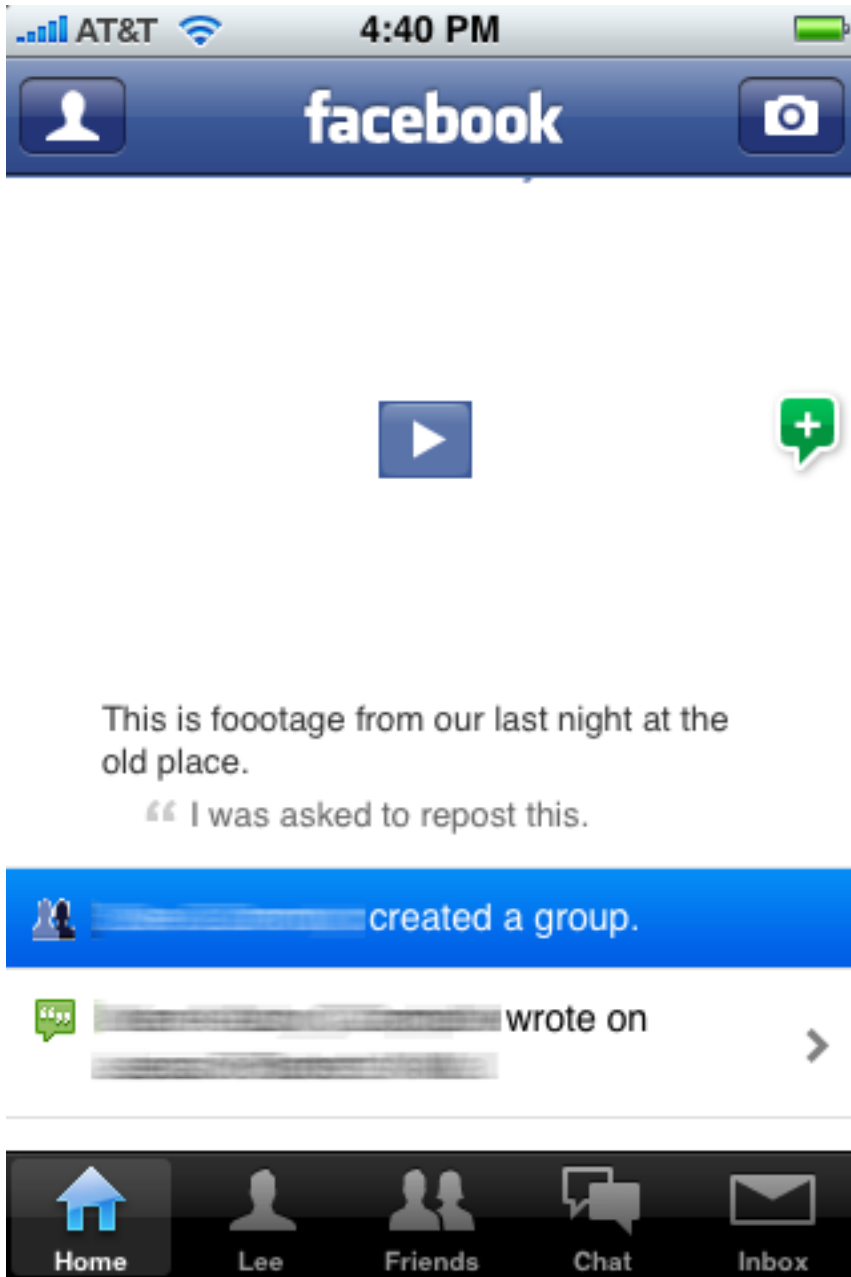
Let me get something cleared up: the Facebook application for iPhone is not a substitute for the full-blown Web site, and I would argue that it should stay that way. The mentality to have is that many iPhone apps—Facebook included—are extensions of a service and not a replacement interface. It came as a small surprise to me to hear someone say they don't use the Facebook application on their iPhone because they can't access any of the groups to which they're connected or manage event invitations or use friend lists they've defined. Actually, the latter of those caveats isn't entirely true, but the person was correct that it's not possible to add or remove people to friend lists from within the iPhone application.

Tell me I'm crazy, but this sounds no different from choosing to never go on lengthy trips. Staying in a hotel or camping out is only a subset of your home. Sure, you may not have access to your brand new 52" plasma television or your closet full of your entire wardrobe, but you have, presumably, taken what you need for the trip.

I choose to think of the Facebook application in the same manner. When I'm out and about, the Facebook application provides me with the core features that are most frequently updated—be it status updates, private messages, and even making or accepting friend requests.

Sure, there are some areas that would benefit from a bit of additional polish. I already know the News Feed lists a sampling of events that are supposedly a calculation of what I

probably want to see most and does not display every single item. But, if the News Feed is already a subset of notifications, why bother indicating on the iPhone application that so-and-so has created a new group when I can't access the group via the iPhone app? In fact, for a moment, I was confused when I tapped a News Feed listing indicating a new group. The listing highlighted, but nothing happened afterward. I thought the application had frozen until I tapped a different item.



The News Feed indicated that someone had created a new group. I tapped and it highlighted, but nothing happened after that. (Also notice that YouTube video links don't always pull the thumbnail preview over, and I'm only left with a big white area with a play button in the middle.)

Probably the most troublesome behavior of the iPhone application is a frequent tendency to not display a properly refreshed page. Normally, one would expect that when details for a particular update are accessed, the page would refresh to show those details—such as comments to a status update. Unfortunately, far too often, accessing such information only results in a blank page.



Pages will often fail to refresh properly. In the left screen capture, a friend’s witty status update intrigued me, and I wanted to see the three comments other friends had made. When I tapped the entry, the blank page on the right is what appeared. Once this behavior began, all other updates behaved this same way.

The workaround I finally discovered is to use what I consider a hidden feature of the Facebook application—Shake to Refresh. I consider it hidden because the developers followed Apple’s suggestion for application settings to be located within the Settings application. I’m certain I am not alone in disliking this. I seem to always forget that application settings might be located there. As such, I didn’t realize the Facebook application had the Shake to Refresh feature. For the benefit of anyone, like myself, who didn’t know about shaking the phone to refresh a page, and for those who don’t care to enable the feature, Facebook application pages need to have a refresh button or icon.

I have ideas, too. Presently, there’s no interaction with Facebook Events in the iPhone application. Suppose a new Event was received and it could be copied to the iPhone’s regular calendar in addition to being added to your Facebook profile?

But I digress. Facebook developers have done a pretty remarkable job with creating a subset of the Web page and packing the most popular tools into the iPhone application. I'm looking forward to the upcoming iPhone OS 3.0 Push Notification service finally being available, but I hope that the Facebook iPhone application can be customized to only push certain desired notifications. My phone would be beeping at me nonstop if every friend's status update caused a Push Notification event!

Kudos to Facebook for a splendid iPhone application and for understanding what the term "subset" means.

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Accessory Review

by Chris Lawson, <http://chrislawson.net>

iFlyz Personal Media Solution Stand

Developer: [iFlyz](#)

Price: \$30

Trial: None.



Hey, frequent flyers, how many of you wanted to clip your iPhone or iPod to the tray table in front of you so you could watch videos on your last flight, or even just so you could get it out of your lap, jacket, or the seatback pocket? Yeah, me, too. The iFlyz is an attempt to solve that problem. Let's take a look and see how well it works.

The basic idea of the iFlyz is pretty good. There's an adjustable clip that attaches the device to the tray table, in either the stowed or deployed position. Sprouting from the clip is a six-inch gooseneck shaft topped with a one-inch suction cup.

Yes, that's right, a suction cup. Therein lies the device's fatal flaw.

I guess iFlyz assumes that you don't use a silicone "skin" for your iPhone (or any other sort of case that has texture to it) because the suction cup will only stick to a fairly smooth surface, like the bare plastic back of an iPhone 3G or the chrome back of an iPod. Based on the popularity of protective cases for the iPhone around the office—a quick straw poll of co-workers shows at least three-quarters of them using cases—this is probably a flawed assumption.

Granted, there aren't a whole lot of universal solutions out there—some variant on Thought Out's PED3, or maybe one of Gamber-Johnson's mounts, comes to mind. PDO's Aluminum V2 iPod case, [reviewed in the June 2008 issue](#), has a threaded belt-clip mount on the back. That design would translate very well to the iFlyz should they be interested in making companion cases—or partnering with a case manufacturer that is.

If you happen to be using a case that's suction cup-compatible, or you enjoy carrying your iPhone or iPod around unprotected, the iFlyz works pretty well. The gooseneck holds its shape well, especially with the weight of an iPhone on it, and the suction cup mount allows for easy rotation of the screen from portrait to landscape orientation, eminently useful for watching video hands-free on a long flight. The iFlyz's ability to clip on to a retracted tray table is particularly nice when the guy in front of you drops his seatback on your knees, making it nearly impossible to deploy your own tray table or forcing it to deploy at a strange angle.

One other benefit to the iFlyz is that it gets your iPod out of the seatback pocket. I don't have any hard statistics, but I would estimate that at least one personal electronic device gets left behind in a seatback pocket on about one-third to one-half of all airline flights. (I've even done it myself once, though I realized it very quickly after leaving the airplane.) It's a lot more difficult to forget your iPod if it's sprouting out of the tray table than if it's buried in the seatback pocket.

There's not really a whole lot else to say about it. Either a suction cup sticks to your device or it doesn't. If it doesn't, you're not going to find the iFlyz useful at all. My advice to frequent flyers? Go to the hardware store and try to stick a small suction cup to your current "personal media solution." If it doesn't stick, keep your \$30.

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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

KavaServices 3.1.1

Developer: [KavaSoft](#)

Price: \$25; \$10 (for owners of [HTML Character Converter](#))

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4 (Mac OS X 10.5 required to replace text in Mail application). Works with any Cocoa application and some Carbon applications. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (7 days).

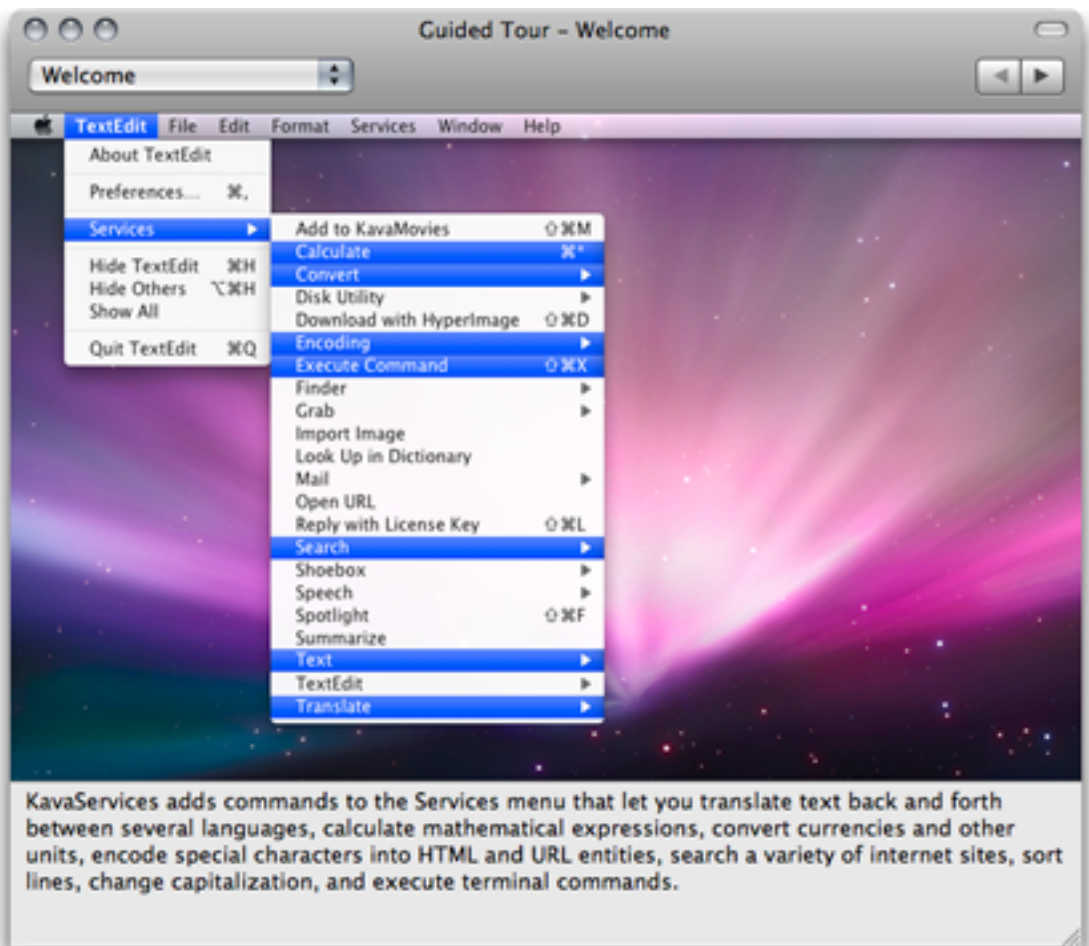


It was nearly six years ago that I turned in a review for [HTML Character Converter 1.0](#). In that review, I was quite favorable to the inexpensive Services menu utility to convert extended characters such as accented letters into HTML entity codes and vice versa. Some time ago, KavaSoft discontinued Character Converter and folded its functionality into KavaServices.

Changing the name of the utility makes sense because KavaServices can perform a wealth of additional conversions and text replacements. The utility is no longer a niche application for the last few people who still hand-code HTML. Instead, there are functions that can benefit essentially anyone who lays hands on a keyboard.

Perhaps one of the most useful features is that text to be converted does not have to be in an editable text window. Most any text that can be highlighted can be processed by KavaServices. This especially includes text on Web pages. Converted text is displayed inline where the original text was previously located.

When KavaServices is first launched, a Guided Tour window appears, introducing the user to all the available commands.



The first Guided Tour screen indicates all the new items added to the Services menu.

Configuration of KavaServices' commands is divided into six categories:

Encoding

Encoding services are what started it all and, in KavaServices, are taken to a higher level. Their original functions were converting extended characters into entity codes and back. Since HTML may not properly display characters such as é, ñ, ¢, and -- on a Web page, they must be encoded as `é`, `ñ`, `¢`, and `—`. KavaServices can encode or decode these with a single menu selection or a programmable keystroke. New in KavaServices are options to use numeric or hexadecimal encoding, such as `é` or `é`. Also, options to skip certain characters such as the `<` `>` brackets for HTML tags that were added in a later version of HTML Character Converter are still available in KavaServices.

An enhancement to the Encoding commands are functions to convert URLs with characters that normally should not be part of a URL, such as:

<http://foo.com/A%20filename%20with%20spaces.txt>

and converting words with extended characters into plain ASCII equivalents, such as *Résumé* into *Resume* and *Français* into *Francais*.

Convert

Even though it's relatively simple to type something like, "20 British Pounds in American Dollars" into Google for a conversion, if there is data already typed out on a Web page, it may be easier to just highlight it and invoke KavaServices' *Convert* command.

Several of the most common conversions are enabled by default, and dozens of other conversions in categories such as Area, Speed, Time, etc. can be enabled as needed.

Text

The commands in this category allow for quickly converting text to all UPPER CASE, lower case, or Title Case. There is also a very useful command to alphanumerically sort several lines of text and optionally remove duplicates. This means I no longer have to copy text into a spreadsheet for sorting.

Translate

Even though there are plenty of online services for language translation, the ability to highlight and translate text in place can be extremely useful.

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WELCOME

by Robert Paul Leita, rleita@atpm.com

Добро пожаловать к варианту в март около этого определенного Макинтоша. Мы на крае зимы, и мы закончимся этот месяц в первом немногие дни весны. Экономия упавшая с края, и и едоки и предпринимательства на крае о когда возвращение к экономическому росту могло случиться. Акционеры Яблока нервный о благополучии сооснователя и CEO компании. Это делает для первого должностного лица «на вариант крае» вашей кассеты фаворита Яблок-сфокусированной и размещённой в Интернетее ежемесячной.

Stock Prices Over the Edge

In the final day of February trading, Apple's share price ended the session at the lowly price of \$89.31 per share, a more than fifty percent fall off from its all-time high. In today's trading environment, even the iPhone and iPod maker gets little respect. It doesn't help matters that the world's #2 PC maker, Dell, reported less than satisfactory results for its most recent quarter. Revenue and earnings were off sharply from the year-ago period, and the company has continued to view cost-cutting as the most viable means to improve its profit picture. Sony has announced yet another reorganization with the company's CEO and chairman taking on the additional title of president to push

As far as I know, Robert hasn't taken up learning the Russian language. Thanks to KavaServices, I can make it look as though he did.

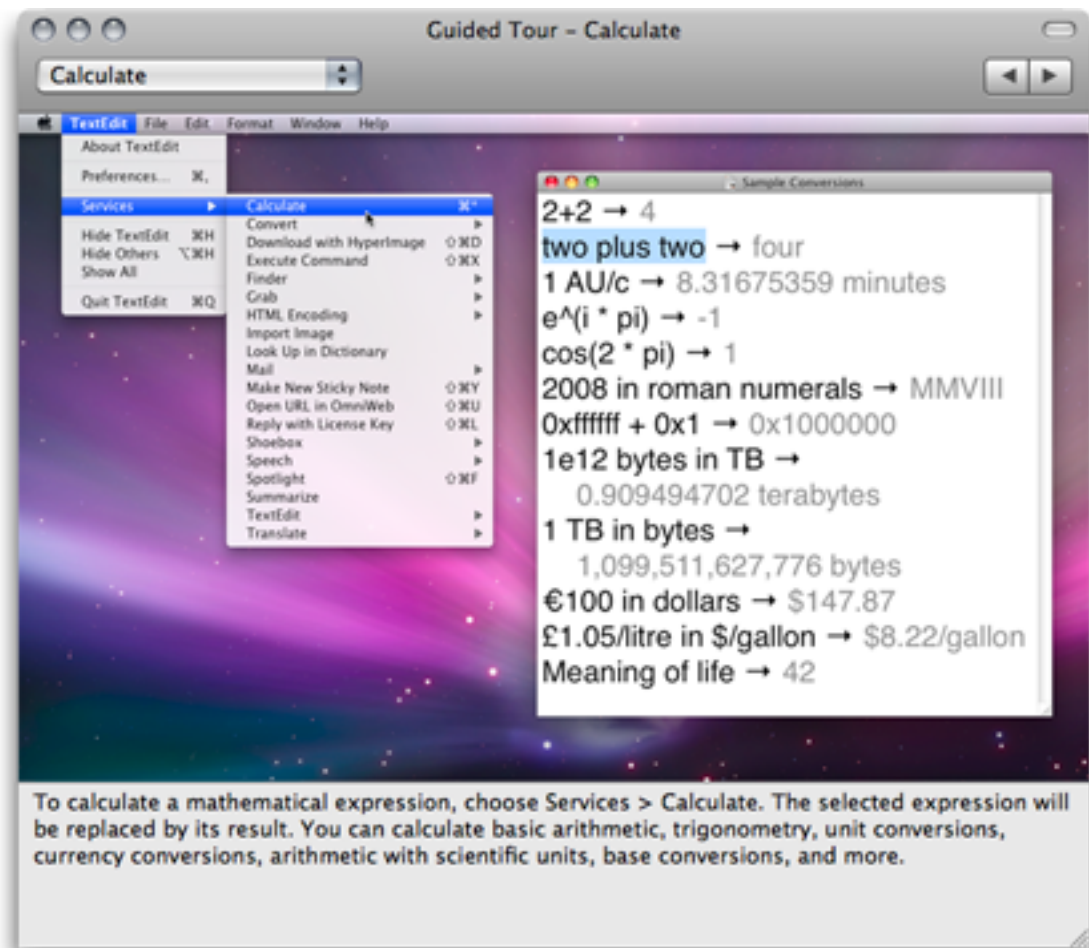
Search

The Search commands will enact a search of whatever text is currently highlighted through the chosen Web site, such as Amazon, Google, Internet Movie Database, etc. Any site with a standard search query URL can be added to the list.

Other

The two remaining commands are Calculate and Execute Command.

Calculate will convert almost all manner of figures in terms of basic arithmetic, trigonometry, scientific units, base conversions, and more.



Calculation examples from KavaService's Guided Tour.

Execute Command turns just about any application into a mini Terminal window. The next time a Web page indicates a Terminal command you wish to run, instead of highlighting the command, copying, opening a Terminal window, pasting, and running it, the Execute

Command function can be used to invoke the command just by highlighting it and selecting Execute Command from the Services menu.

Could KavaServices Be Better?

Price

KavaServices brings a lot to the table in terms of text functions. One comment on a popular software version tracking Web site complained that the \$25 price tag is too high for just some scripts added to the Mac OS X Services menu. I disagree. What makes the price tag reasonable and appropriate is the sheer volume of commands available in KavaServices and the ability to perform conversions on blocks of text that are not otherwise text editable.

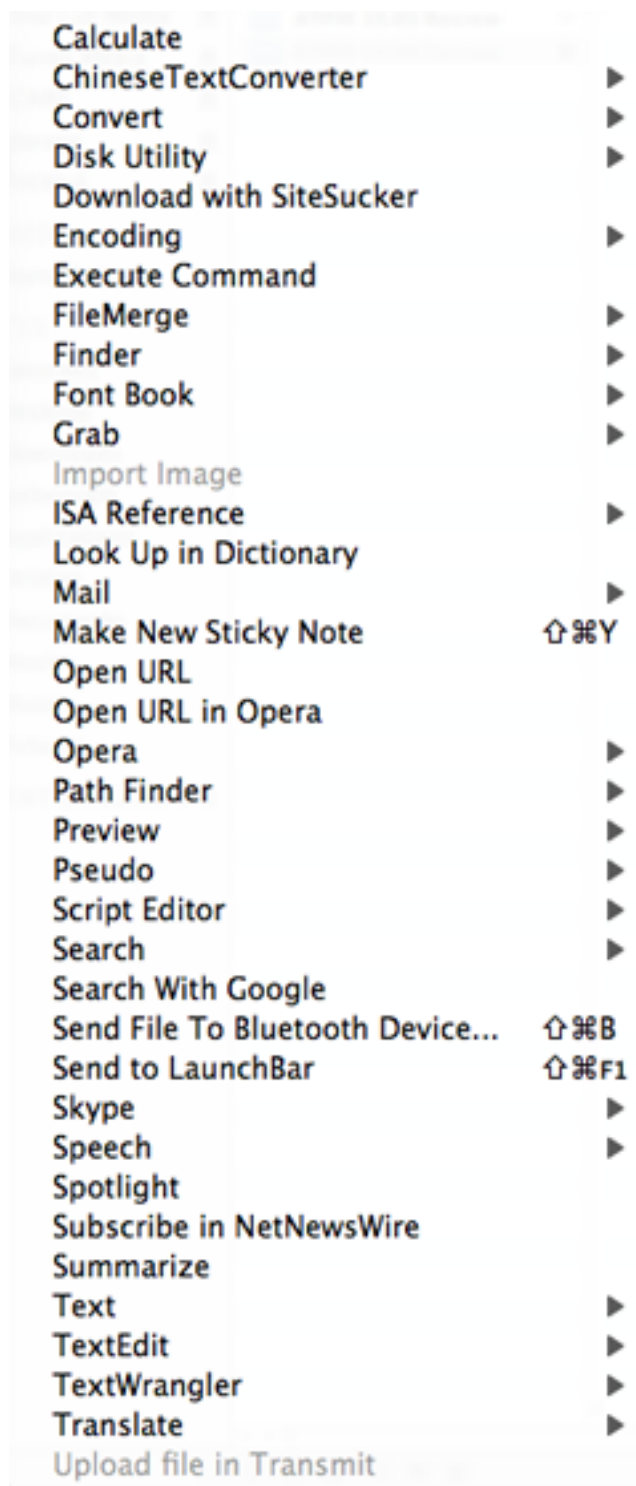
True, someone who is only looking for the HTML entity code conversion may lament the loss of a \$5 utility for this purpose, but such a person would almost certainly gain a rapid appreciation of the other tools KavaServices offers. Plus, those who previously purchased HTML Character Converter can buy KavaServices for only \$10. In my mind, KavaServices is a bargain.

Shortcuts

Keyboard shortcuts can be assigned to any KavaServices command. It is probably wise that most commands do not have a shortcut pre-assigned so as not to conflict with other existing system-wide shortcuts. However, though I may be mistaken, it seems that the few pre-assigned shortcuts that are in KavaServices already take a back seat to conflicting commands in other applications—or perhaps that's the nature of the entire Services menu. The only adjustment I could see in this area is that a defined shortcut *must* include the Command key modifier. Unless this is a condition of the Services menu, there are some instances where I wouldn't mind being able to specify the Control and/or Option key without the Command key.

Organization

As seen in the first screenshot early in this review, KavaServices adds its commands into several categories in the Services menu. Maybe this is ideal for some people. For others, myself included, who have a lot of items in the Services menu, it may seem better to have all the commands optionally grouped into a single KavaServices item in the Services menu. Perhaps a problem here is that I've never before seen a Services menu item go beyond a single level of hierarchy. I'm not positive whether the Services menu permits subdivisions beneath a menu item. If not, considering that it's possible to enable perhaps 100 or more KavaServices commands, listing all of them under one menu may be impractical.



The Mac OS X Services menu can get rather long-winded.

Interface

The method of access to KavaServices commands is probably the only area I feel could possibly use a fresh look. Doing so might go a long way toward addressing both the Services menu placement described above and the individual who thinks \$25 is too expensive for some Services menu scripts.

Arguably, there are too many KavaServices commands to assign and memorize shortcuts for each one. Perhaps it's time for the KavaServices setup application to do a little more. On the minimal side, there could be an optional menu bar icon to access a hierarchical menu of commands instead of hunting for the category in a lengthy Services menu. On the extreme side, a single keystroke might invoke some sort of pop-up interface to select a command. I admit, the latter of these two would probably be massive overkill, and maybe the best answer lies somewhere in between these possibilities. But I, for one, would be interested in a menu bar or Dock item that would make finding a command a bit faster than hunting through a long Services menu.

Conclusion

Casual conversion seekers may be well-advised to keep their \$25 and just use Google queries to perform a lot of the commands KavaServices offers. However, text entry power users who have a firm grasp of keyboard shortcut management should find KavaServices an indispensable tool.

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Software Reviews

by Frank H. Wu, frankhwu@mac.com

OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things

OmniFocus 1.6

Developer: [The Omni Group](#)

Price: \$80 (Mac version); \$20 (iPhone version)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.8. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (14 days)



TaskPaper 2.1

Developer: [Hog Bay Software](#)

Price: \$30

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (15 days)



Things 1.0.4

Developer: [Cultured Code](#)

Price: \$50 (Mac version); \$10 (iPhone version)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (15 days)



This is a review of three leading task management software programs for the Mac OS X platform: OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things (in alphabetical order). I was motivated to write it by my own desire to adopt a program, and my interest in researching the possibilities in a thorough manner. So I downloaded these popular software titles, paid the respective license fees, watched the screencasts, and then started using them all simultaneously, with the intention of spending a week trying to run my life in parallel through each. Before I explain the results of this experiment, allow me to offer background on what I needed to do.

In my last job, I typically had at least a dozen appointments on any given day. That meant about 60 in a week, 240 in a month, and so on. Even with 99% accuracy in scheduling, that also meant that at least a couple of items in a month would be wrong: I'd show up at the wrong place or the wrong time, etc. Beyond appointments, for which I have long used iCal, I usually have at least 100 to-do items I need to track at any given time, ranging from writing assignments to phone calls to family responsibilities. Each appointment generates

at least one more to-do, typically more: that's another 60 tasks per week, 240 per month, and so on. It was and is an astonishing amount of activity to track.

Previously, I had an administrative assistant who managed me, so I could manage the business. Now, the pace has slowed, but I do it all with no staff. Perhaps it is my character, not my profession, that has determined the type of life that I lead.

I offer the background as a means of explaining why I need a good task management system. I have a reputation for being a workaholic and for not sleeping. In truth, I am lazy, inclined to procrastinate, and happy if I can change into my pajamas in the late afternoon and stay in the house the remainder of the day. I have realized, well into adulthood, that an organized life is a less stressful life.

That is all the more reason to adopt David Allen's "Getting Things Done" (GTD) protocol or something similar. Incidentally, I am assuming the reader has heard of GTD. It's popular and worthwhile, and it happens to be a set of concepts that is suited for digital implementation. A full explanation is beyond the scope of this review, and, indeed, Allen has several books, a Web site, a podcast, and a consultancy emanating from his innovations in GTD. For more information, see [David Allen's site](#). Ed Eubanks Jr., has also done a good bit of work on this subject [in ATPM](#).

Before laptop computers existed, when I was a student, I used a breast pocket appointment book in which every inch of every page, including over the holidays, was covered with scrawled reminders. For some time, when I was stuck on the Windows platform, I used Ecco Pro software (since discontinued) but printed out my calendar and to-do lists. I used a Palm when it was still called "Palm Pilot," and I had a Phillips Nino and Compaq iPaq as well. I remember when "PIM" for "Personal Information Manager" was the latest acronym; it seems to have fallen out of use. I've even tried reverting to pen and paper, with a Moleskine notebook. I have played with just about every possible configuration with varying levels of enthusiasm and perseverance.

Most recently, I was using iCal. My practice was to list my tasks in the calendar section, rather than as to-do items, because I found it made me more diligent about execution. I also do what I believe many people do, which is use my e-mail client (Apple Mail in this instance) as a crude task manager. I just left messages that required follow-up in my inbox to prompt me. I'd also create messages to myself with further tasks. The problem is that none of these methods promotes strategic thinking, which requires setting priorities based on a comprehensive overview, and they are not efficient.

While I have been interested in the GTD system, I've resisted it for two reasons, one good, one bad.

The good reason for avoiding GTD is that I always had a feeling that it was too easy to be enamored with the concept, and to allow the means to become an end in itself. Any system has to be a tool, and the main impediments to effectiveness tend to be human rather than technological.

The bad reason is that I did not want to have to impose order on my mess, and the assignment of tasks to projects and contexts and the setting of deadlines seemed like too much work in itself. Even the most ambitious individuals can become paralyzed in the face of their own workload, and I fear that risk. As my long-suffering wife does not hesitate to observe, it is less important that I write down “Take the garbage out” than that I in fact take the garbage out.

Thus, for me, GTD has always been like mass transit and walking. I live in a city with a great subway, and I’m close to many businesses. I envision myself riding the Metro and hoofing it from here to there. Yet in reality it is too tempting to climb into the car and contribute to traffic jams and environmental degradation.

So I’m merely an average consumer, trying out these options and reporting to other potential users. I have no special skills in task management or with software (I last programmed BASIC on a Commodore 25 years ago). My goals are to see what I need to do, have a listing of to-dos handy when I need it, and be able to sort through it systematically.

Here is the most important point. All three of these programs are terrific. They are stable—by and large free of bugs—and they do what they say they do. The distinctions among them are about not substance but style. The average user, I would wager, will be attracted to one of them much more than the other two.

OmniFocus and Things are similar, and they are direct competitors. It’s easier to use them than to describe them, but here are my summaries:

OmniFocus

OmniFocus, from the well-respected Omni Group, had a long development period, being available in beta, as has been true of several other Omni Group products. It started when Ethan Schoonover penned a set of scripts for the popular OmniOutliner to implement the GTD system. Merlin Mann of the 43 folders Web site also has played a consulting role. It’s been possible to follow the gestation of the program on the Web.

In OmniFocus, the fundamental unit you work with is the *action*. Actions make up *projects*. For each action, you can assign a *context*, such as Home, Office, Phone, Errand, or Spouse, indicating where and when you expect to accomplish the action. The actions can be set to default to a parallel or sequential order, which determines what shows up as a *next action*. Actions can have “children,” which are actions themselves. You also can create *folders* in which to group multiple projects. Folders can have folders within them. Contexts also can have sub-contexts nested within them. Everything can be assigned a *due date*, and *notes* can be attached.

When you open OmniFocus, you have a toolbar at the top, a narrow left sidebar and a big right pane. The toolbar allows you to select among the inbox, which is the place where you are able to make entries quickly without having to do more than type the text of the action, a quick entry pane (easily accessible through a keyboard shortcut at any point from anywhere so long as OmniFocus is running, even if it is not the front window), and the two

main means of looking at your life (projects and contexts). Plus, you can select a view that shows items due soon or those that are flagged. There is an inspector for adjusting the detailed settings of any action; OmniFocus allows fonts and colors to be customized, and it's possible to match them to different conditions (X font and Y color for actions that are due today, but a different font and color for actions that are not imminent).

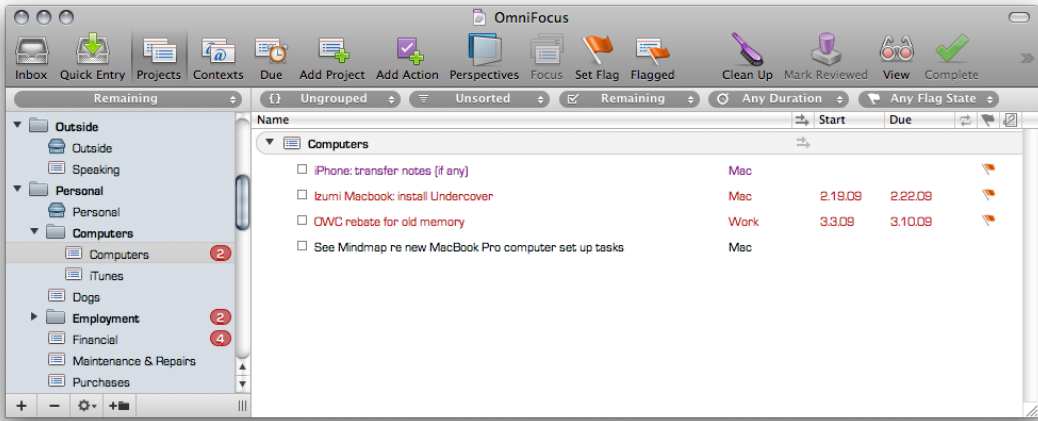
So here's how it works in action. Let's say I have the following new projects and actions: writing this review for ATPM, drafting a memorandum for the Executive Committee of a board I am on, overseeing the external auditor for another board I am on, planning a party with my wife, and finding a book at the library. So, if I am in a hurry, I can just type in the description of each action in the inbox view, as described above. Then, when I have time, I can decide what projects they are associated with and what context they fit within.

If I originally created an item as an action, not a project, that's no problem: I can drag it to an appropriate place in the hierarchy and OmniFocus will convert it automatically. I have a folder for Writing, because I usually have several projects underway. I drag "GTD Review" to the left column, in the folder for Writing, and it appears as a project. Then I can add actions under that: Download OmniFocus, Download TaskPaper, Download Things, Trying OmniFocus, Trying TaskPaper, Trying Things, and so on. I can assign these to a context.

There is a Clean Up command, represented by a hairbrush icon. It takes the various actions in the inbox and moves them into the appropriate projects and contexts (the preferences setting allow you to make the command operative on actions with either a project or a context, or to require that both be set).

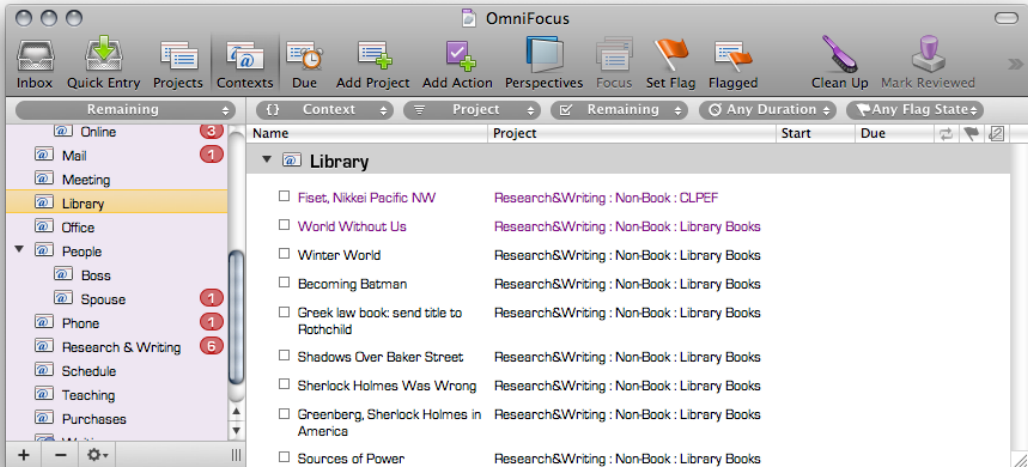
It's easy to understand why you assign actions to projects. It's not difficult, either, to understand why you assign actions to contexts. I assign contexts such as Phone so when I am sitting at my desk and have my phone out, I can see the five different phone calls I need to make, and I can do them all at once; Spouse allows me to list everything I have to discuss with my wife over dinner; Library is a list of books I want to find the next time I am there; and so on.

In the planning mode, in the sidebar you have all the folders shown, and you can expand them to show the projects contained within. A red balloon shows the number of actions due (it can be turned off). The main pane shows the actions belonging to the project you have selected. The View bar allows you to be more selective in determining what to look at. You can filter the results to show all actions, remaining actions, completed actions, next actions, and so on; you also can filter by the duration of the action and the flag state. You can sort by name or various other criteria. I use planning mode when I am planning a project.



OmniFocus planning mode showing actions to undertake with Computers in the main window and a list of projects in the sidebar.

In the context mode, in the sidebar you have all the contexts shown. The main pane shows the actions belonging to the context you have selected. You also can focus on specific projects and create unique *perspectives*. Commands also allow expansion or collapsing of all rows. I use context mode when I am at a place that matches the context: when I'm in front of the phone, I show all the actions that require me to be at the Phone; when I'm out and about, I show all the actions that are Errands; if I am at the library, I look at what I've categorized under Library.



OmniFocus context mode showing library books to check out in the main window and a list of different contexts in the sidebar.

As you complete actions, you check off the box to the left of the item. A strikethrough line appears. If you have the view set to show all actions, it still remains visible. If you have it set to show only remaining actions, it vanishes. Eventually, you can send all the completed actions to a separate archive to prevent database bloat. Entire projects can be identified as Stalled, Pending, On Hold, or Dropped.

There are flag settings to emphasize a particular action item; they can be turned on and off with a single click in the flag column. For actions that do not belong to projects, you can create a *single action list*. In columns, you can type and rely on autocomplete, or you can use a pop-up menu: for example, in the planning mode, you have a contexts column, and you can assign each new action to a context by typing or relying on the pop-up menu.

OmniFocus Issues

The problems with OmniFocus are its bells and whistles, the rigidity of its system, and hence the extra time it takes to enter information. As one of the tutorial notes, “[o]nce you have a significant amount of information in your OmniFocus database, it can start to get overwhelming.” That is an understatement. I read the 62-page manual (there also are advanced screencasts), and after more than a month of daily use, I have not exhausted the features. There is a method for extracting actions from Mail messages, for example, that I have yet to master.

OmniFocus doesn’t give you as much freedom as its philosophy would suggest. Projects can be marked as dropped, but not actions. Actions have checkboxes to be marked as done, but projects do not. The menus are long, and the keyboard shortcuts many. To add a note, for example, you have to use either a menu command or a keyboard shortcut; there isn’t a field readily available. It takes less than a second, of course, to create the note. Yet that second is a disadvantage, especially because increased efficiency is the whole purpose of the exercise.

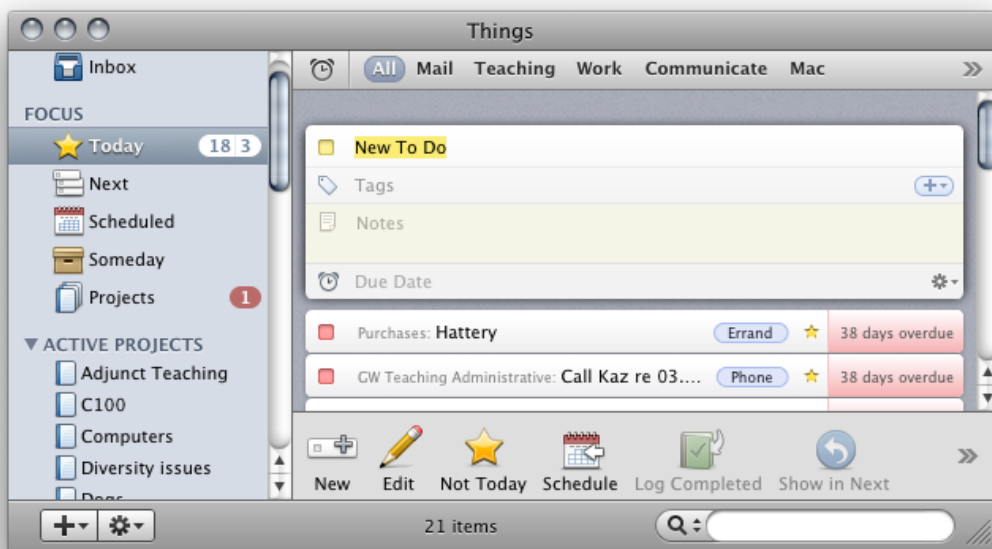
Things

In Things, you have the same basic features as in OmniFocus. You have fewer advanced features, though. If you understand how OmniFocus works, you’ll understand Things in an instant, but the reverse is not necessarily the case; that explains the organization of this write-up.

The distinction between the two programs is apparent immediately from the screencasts: OmniFocus opens with the idea that you will sit down and write out all your actions at once, assigning them to projects and contexts; Things shows you the quick entry panel and how you can enter a task that has popped into your head—the narrator later shows *tags*, but emphasizes “what tags you add or don’t add is really up to you.”

Things has already been acclaimed. It is made by a German company, which does not seem to have any other offerings. It is lagging behind a bit in development, but, as with OmniFocus, users have been able to follow it through various iterations with their improvements.

The strength of Things is the interface. It is graphical and intuitive, though not entirely consistent with the Mac OS “look and feel.” You have a main window that shows all tasks, with a button at the bottom for the addition of new tasks and to edit. When you click on a task, it expands to show the details; when it is expanded and you press Return, it closes back to the description and only those tags you have set. A filter bar at the top allows you to select what you want. The sidebar shows an Inbox, Today, Next items, Scheduled items, Someday, and then a list of projects. Finally, it has a Logbook and a Trash icon.



Things showing a New Event entry box, expanded, and a couple of pending tasks in the main window, and the default categories and some projects in the sidebar.

Everything in Things works exactly as you would expect it to. You can start without watching the screencast or reading the instructions. For example, drag and drop allows you to set tasks to Today. If you want to take advantage of everything, it’s all easy enough. The Today and Next items views are especially useful: both Today and the Dock icon have a badge showing a count of the tasks for the day. You can schedule items, turn projects inactive, and show all next actions (the topmost item from a project and tasks without assigned projects). Each day, done tasks are sent to the Logbook.

Things allows easy entry of tags (which include but are not limited to contexts), including multiple tags, notes, and due date. It’s all clean and uncluttered, especially compared side-by-side with OmniFocus. Both projects and items also have a check box to the left, which allows them to be marked as completed. The designers have studied OmniFocus, and they implicitly take a jab at it when they note that to edit to-dos, you don’t have to “open up any complicated inspector windows.”

Things has added a concept, *area of responsibility*. They explain, “With an Area of Responsibility (or simply “Area”), you don’t ask yourself about the desired outcome, but what standards you would like to maintain. An Area corresponds to an ongoing activity. These could be, for example: job responsibilities, roles you have taken on in your family, or personal responsibilities like health.

Things Issues

Things does have shortcomings. It does not have the same powerful sorting features that OmniFocus does, so you have to arrange projects manually. I also discovered a bug. I wanted to make sure this was not user error, so I tried it thrice. I had a pre-existing item in Things on my Mac, without a due date. I changed the due date to Today, using my iPhone. It showed up fine under Today on my iPhone. Despite three syncs, which took care of everything else, it did not appear under Today in Things on my Mac. It’s there, but not under Today. I wrote to the developer to report the problem, but I did not receive a reply.

OmniFocus and Things on the iPhone

Both OmniFocus and Things offer iPhone integration. TaskPaper has no iPhone application. OmniFocus and Things are similar in several respects, dissimilar in others, in particular in their iPhone deployment. The ability to use the GTD system on the iPhone is a major benefit. It allows you to have constant access to your to-do list and to add to it. I find myself looking at it again and again. It’s also great for moments when you are just waiting in line or have a second that could be put to good use.

There is an immediate difference in launching the iPhone application. OmniFocus loads the database slowly as I watch the progress bar. I should say, however, that our expectations have become ridiculous in this regard. OmniFocus actually takes mere seconds, but that is long enough to be annoying. Things also has a momentary delay before anything pops up. It’s not instantaneous, but it is slightly faster than OmniFocus.

Another key difference between OmniFocus and Things is syncing. OmniFocus has multiple options. I selected MobileMe. I then need to click sync on my computer and sync on my iPhone separately. I don’t mind, and I sync often during the day. The iPhone client also syncs automatically. Things relies on a wireless connection. When I have Things open on both the computer and the iPhone, the sync is performed automatically, and it is speedy. If I have Things open on the computer and launch it on the iPhone, it syncs right away, which does take a moment. OmniFocus syncs fine across multiple Macs; Things has not yet added this feature; its FAQs show a workaround. I did not test iCal syncing.

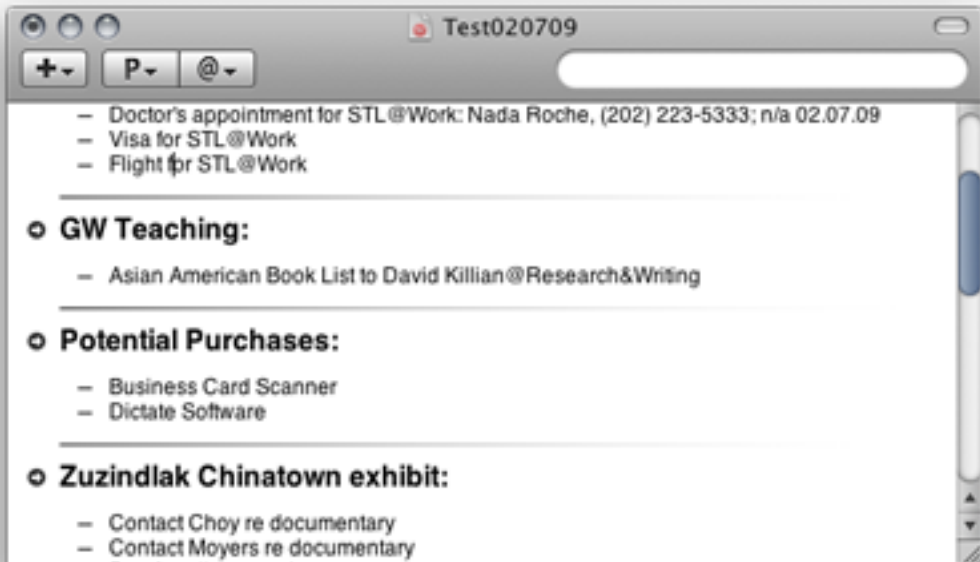
TaskPaper

TaskPaper is notable for its minimalism. If there were some ratio of how powerful a program is to how elaborate it is, TaskPaper would rank very high. The name also is perfect as a description of how it works.

There are only four concepts you need to grasp: *projects*, *tasks*, *tags*, and *notes*. They are all accessed through easy-to-learn keyboard combinations. Projects are groups of tasks.

Tags are the equivalent of contexts in OmniFocus and tags in Things; they are recurring classifications you would want to assign to multiple projects or tasks. Notes are everything else.

TaskPaper presents a blank sheet of paper. Actually, it gives you a set of instructions that explain TaskPaper itself, self-referentially formatted in TaskPaper. Projects end with colons; tasks start with dashes; and tags are preceded by the “@” symbol, and they can have a value at the end, in parentheses. Notes are unformatted text. That’s it. There is nothing else to learn. You just type what you want. TaskPaper does the rest.



TaskPaper showing several projects with multiple to-dos.

Thus, you use TaskPaper as if it were just a to-do list written in a text editor. The beauty of TaskPaper is that everything operates on the text. Clicking on a dash marks a task as done and adds the “@done” tag. Items can be dragged around. Copy and paste works as it would in Microsoft Word. Find and replace does, too. Simple outline hierarchies are recognized, so tasks can be nested. There are significant limitations. OmniFocus and Things enable you to create recurring to-dos; TaskPaper does not.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of TaskPaper, however, is that because everything is text, you can move material out of TaskPaper into Word, or vice versa. If you move material into TaskPaper, everything works just as if you had created it in TaskPaper as an initial matter.

It is possible to archive done tasks, and delete tasks. It is also possible to focus just by clicking on projects and tags. The toolbar allows you to select projects and tags, and it

has a search field that understands Boolean operators. You can open multiple tabs, as in a browser. Like OmniFocus and Things, TaskPaper also has a quick entry window that can be pulled up with a keyboard shortcut.

The screencast shows an Inbox and Archive, both of which users can create by doing nothing more elaborate than typing “Inbox:” and “Archive:”—most anything else that appears in OmniFocus and Things can be recreated in a similar manner. The preferences allow you to enable smart links, autocompletion of tags, auto-formatting of tasks, and the addition of dates to done tags. There also is an AppleScript available to filter next actions.

The makers of TaskPaper make modest claims, but they surpass their advertising. The user guide explains how the developer, Jesse Grosjean, also created Mori, but he personally preferred to use simply text files for his own to-do lists. He actually advises users to try OmniFocus and Things if they wish to have more features; TaskPaper has a theme that imitates Things, if you just happen to like the look of that interface. Grosjean deserves to be commended. The concept of TaskPaper is cool. It is consistent with his philosophy. He also created WriteRoom, the highly regarded text editor that is nothing more than a full-screen text editor.

Sorting Them Out

When I was a practicing lawyer, I worked with two colleagues whose examples are relevant to this review.

The first was a fellow who left every night before I did, and his desk was always empty. I mean the entire surface was devoid of stuff—not a scrap of paper, nothing. I marveled at this phenomenon. To this day, I have not figured out if he was a hard-working genius, a slacker, or both. I mention him, however, because he set the unattainable standard for me. Only now it is not merely a physical desktop but also a virtual one with which I am concerned. I would like to have the mythical zero inbox in Apple Mail, to have everything in its place, and to feel Zen-like calm. My hope, no doubt futile, is that a GTD system will bring me closer to this place.

The second was a fellow from Alaska who had two brothers. Their parents had given them Super 8 film cameras so they would have something to do. For a number of years, the parents would have a film festival at which the three children would screen their short movies. Each sibling would be awarded a prize; there were different categories, and each individual always excelled in a specific category. Or so my associate thought. Only as an adult did he realize his parents ensured each of their progeny would be rewarded somehow, by creating categories that guaranteed such an outcome. That is my conclusion about OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things.

These three programs are all excellent. They seem on the surface to be designed for the same purpose. But they are sufficiently distinct that the most users are likely to have a strong personal preference. They have very different methods of achieving similar goals.

When I began writing this review, the rough draft said that I might use OmniFocus. If I were a better person, I certainly would turn to it. If I had an assistant again, I also would

ask her to use it. Like the hero in a Greek tragedy, its greatest strengths are its greatest weaknesses: it has so many features that it is too complicated for most purposes. Or to use another classical analogy, it is like the Corinthian column, the order with the fanciest capital (compared to the less fussy Ionic column of Things and the plain Doric column of TaskPaper).

As I revised this survey, I came to appreciate OmniFocus more and more. It takes time to learn. But it is more powerful than its rivals even without using its full potential. It could be improved: I'd prefer to violate GTD protocol and have the ability to assign multiple contexts (or tags) to an item, and I'd rather have checkboxes for folders and projects, not just individual action items. Ironically, each further refinement likely would exacerbate the problem with this program—it would be even more complex. I'd also like to be able to modify the column display, moving the actual name of the Action to the right of, rather than the left of, the description of project it belongs to.

Nonetheless, I appreciate OmniFocus. This is the most robust program, from which a professional with significant administrative responsibilities could operate. It lives up its billing as “professional grade,” and then some.

I will continue to use TaskPaper. It is clever, straightforward, and good for notetaking during meetings. It is executed well, for its more limited role. The lack of iPhone synchronization, though, takes it off the list for me for deployment as an all around GTD option. But I cannot overstate my enthusiasm for it. If it had an iPhone application, I'd adopt it in a second.

That leaves Things. At the outset of my testing, I made a decision by trial and error, not through careful deliberation. I used Things more than OmniFocus or TaskPaper, and only because of my desire to be a good tester did I turn to those other programs. Other than the obsessive compulsive, I'd wager most users who played with these programs also would be taken by Things. It is possible to be up and running with Things in under five minutes. It does not require any knowledge of the GTD system, much less a desire to become an expert in contexts and Tags.

The key factor is the graphical interface. Like the Mac operating system itself, Things is easy to use. That is what matters most: the task management system should vanish into the background. The point is, after all, to get things done—not to play around with GTD software.

So, for purposes of serving readers, I've tried to give an overview of strengths and weaknesses for each of these programs. These programs are not cheap. Based on the foregoing description, most users should be able to figure out what fits them best. For the most detail and power, chose OmniFocus; for the fastest and easiest introduction to these concepts, Things; for the best notes and the sheer elegance of it, TaskPaper. If you are disciplined, any of them will improve your life. If you are not disciplined, the programs at least will facilitate the development of good habits.

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Accessory Review

by Chris Lawson, <http://chrislawson.net>

Showcase for iPhone 3G

Developer: [Contour Design](#)

Price: \$35

Trial: None.



Hard cases, soft cases, metal cases, plastic cases, clear cases, colored cases...the iPhone case market exploded even faster than the iPod case market did. Everyone and his brother is marketing an iPhone case these days. Longtime Mac accessory maker Contour Design jumped into the fray with their Showcase, updated for the iPhone 3G. Let's take a look and see how it stacks up.

Contour has essentially done nothing more than update their relatively ancient Showcase design for a slightly different shape. Longtime iPod users may have even had one of the [prior showcase models](#), which have been around for at least five years now. The basic formula is still the same: clear plastic with rubber edges for easier grip.

The biggest design beef I have with the Showcase is the clear back. It doesn't really serve any useful purpose other than to show off the chrome Apple logo and "iPhone" label, and the clear polycarbonate scratches easily, making the case look used very quickly. For that matter, the clear portions of the front of the Showcase don't add anything to its functionality either—they merely serve to carry on the Showcase design language.

Those of you who prefer function to follow form will probably think I'm being too picky here, while readers who prefer that form follow function (and Apple has arguably done a brilliant job of making things, including the iPhone, attractive *and* functional in the Jonathan Ive era) will be nodding their heads and asking "Why?" It's not exactly jelly stripper heels, but it's not a pair of Tiffany cuff links either, and the Showcase certainly doesn't help the iPhone's overall appearance.



The Showcase presents an attractive enough face, though a screen protector would be greatly appreciated.

Getting the iPhone into the Showcase is easy enough—just open the clamshell, slide the phone in, and snap the clamshell shut. Getting it out, however, is another story. Why

remove it at all? Mostly to clean the screen, since the Showcase doesn't include any sort of screen protection. (In theory, it should be compatible with most screen protector products.) Opening the clamshell can be a real challenge and occasionally requires the assistance of a small screwdriver.



The headphone jack cutout is amply sized for even the largest headphone plugs.

The rest of the case is very functional and well-designed. The headphone jack cutout is plenty big enough to allow for even the largest headphone plugs, and the volume/silent button cutout allows for easy access to all three side buttons.



The cutout for the volume buttons and silent switch is plenty big enough to allow easy access for any size fingers.

There's no problem accessing the dock connector, either, although it's almost a certainty that flush-fitting accessories won't work with the Showcase—or any other rigid case, for that matter.



The Showcase allows for easy access to the Dock Connector but prevents flush-fitting accessories from working while the iPhone is in the case.

The rubber perimeter of the case isn't as grippy as many of the silicone "skin" cases, but it's certainly easier to grab onto than the phone itself. With the weather warming up lately here in Michigan, I've stopped wearing my ubiquitous winter fleece jacket at work, which means my phone lives in my shirt pocket or my jeans pocket most of the time. Silicone cases are so grippy that it's hard to remove the phone from a pocket, especially a pants pocket. The Showcase is just slippery enough not to have that problem.

Those of you who don't like carrying a phone in your pocket—or really enjoy looking like a nerdy, street-clothed Batman—will be happy to know that the Showcase comes with a belt holster for Old West-style iPhone street dueling. You can holster the phone in a vertical or horizontal position, with the screen facing in or out (Contour recommends facing the screen inwards for maximal protection).



This is Contour's recommended configuration for holstering the iPhone.



If you get bored with the horizontal configuration, you can also holster your phone vertically.

Unlike some of the competition, the Showcase's holster does not have the ability to double as a stand, and the clip feels a little flimsy where it attaches to the holster. Not being the holster type myself, I can't attest to the real-world durability of the clip or holster, but consider yourself forewarned.



You can also holster the iPhone with the screen facing out. No matter how you choose to do it, you look like a giant geek.

For \$35, the Showcase isn't a bad deal. There are similar cases out there for slightly less money, but there are a lot of things to like about the Showcase. It gives just the right amount of grip and protects the iPhone very well. With an included screen protector and a solid back, it would be just about perfect.

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