

# ATPM

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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](mailto:rleitao@atpm.com)

Welcome to the March issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We are nearing the end of a harsh, record-setting winter and approaching the optimism of spring. We begin this month's issue with an optimistic view of today's digital life and the new products and technologies that assist us in being more productive, more connected, and better informed about events that impact our lives.

## Verizon Gets the iPhone

The company that “didn't get” the iPhone and passed on an exclusive agreement with Apple before the landmark AT&T deal now gets the iPhone for sales to its customers. Much has changed in the four years since the first public announcement of the iPhone, and over that time AT&T has achieved virtual parity with Verizon in the number of wireless customers under contract. AT&T's wireless subscriber growth since the original iPhone launched in the summer of 2007 can be attributed to the popularity of Apple's smartphone product.

## iPhone v. Android

There's competition now between AT&T and Verizon to acquire and keep Apple iPhone customers. In the absence of the iPhone on Verizon's network, the cellular services provider foisted the Droid, a branded Android smartphone product manufactured by Motorola, on the public as an iPhone alternative for its customers. Verizon's continued pursuit of an iPhone agreement with Apple suggests there's no real replacement for the iPhone, no matter the competition.

Much has been made of an iPhone v. Android competition. Not to disparage Android handsets and the manufacturers of the smartphones using this open source software stack, but Apple's biggest competition may be its own race to expand production to meet global demand for the iPhone. While Android phones are selling in high numbers, the phones may have greater appeal to customers stepping up from so-called feature phones than creating real competition for the iPhone.

The emergence of Android-based handsets and the growing popularity of the iPhone may have been instrumental in Nokia's decision to partner with Microsoft by offering Windows Phone, Microsoft's smartphone operating system, on Nokia's smartphone products. Neither Nokia nor Microsoft has been effective in competing with Apple, RIM (maker of BlackBerry smartphones), and Android-based phones in the marketplace.

## The New MacBook Pros

In late February, Apple released updates to its full line of [MacBook Pro](#) personal computers. In addition to processor upgrades, all MacBook Pros now offer a Thunderbolt port for peripherals and FaceTime HD cameras.

In understanding Apple's approach to the market, one must consider the company's integrated, multi-product approach. For example, the new FaceTime HD camera is designed for video conversations between other Mac owners and owners of the iPhone 4, the latest iPod touch, and perhaps owners of the next-generation iPad, which may debut in just a few day's time.

## **The Mac App Store**

For all of the innovations and enhancements Apple is building into its newest Macs, one of the most overlooked enhancements for Mac users is the opening of the [Mac App Store](#). The App Store icon was installed on the user's dock in the Mac OS X 10.6.6 update released in January. The Mac App Store offers an impressive array of applications ranging from free and low-cost apps to more sophisticated design and productivity applications. The ability to immediately access, purchase, and install Mac OS X applications is yet another advantage for the platform.

## **The Future of Personal Computing**

There's much debate in the geek community as to whether or not the iPad is a PC. These discussions can range from the silly to the absurd. It's not the tech specs that determine how people use technology, and many smartphone buyers make use of their handheld devices in ways once reserved for the traditional desktop or laptop PC. The lines between devices and their uses have diminished even as digital devices have become smaller and more compact.

The editors of ATPM don't focus on the contrived barriers that are designed to classify technology products and their intended uses. We focus on how technology products are used to enhance what we call the "personal computing experience." Please join us this month and every month as we explore the latest technology products and celebrate the ways in which digital devices enhance today's digital lifestyle.

Our March issue includes:

### **Bloggable**

A monthly summary of Wes Meltzer's blogosphere news, originating from his Pinboard feed. This month: The Digital Future Is Now, Living In a Mobile World, iPad Is Still King of the Hill, Windows Phone 7, and Mobile Video.

### **MacMuser: Hasta la Vista, or Maybe Not**

Mark Tennent spends some time with Windows Vista.

### **MacMuser: Shock of the New**

Mark Tennent considers today's variety of tablet devices.

### **How To: Making Use of QuickTime X**

Sylvester Roque shares a detailed primer for QuickTime X, helping you discover how to make it work best for you.

## **Desktop Pictures: Disney**

Chris Turner shares some photos from Downtown Disney, Disney Studios, and the Magic Kingdom, taken in August 2010 while on vacation in Florida.

## **Out at Five**

Matt Johnson's new series, *Out at Five*, looks at the workplace and its boundaries from all angles, revolving around many of the same characters from his former series, *Cortland*.

## **Review: Caliander 1.0.2**

Frank H. Wu tries out this iCal alternative, nothing there's not much going for it beyond the very different user interface compared to iCal.

## **Review: Mahjong In Poculis 3.5**

A French company brings us another take on mahjong. But this time, those pesky tiles bring with them a headache.

## **Review: MasterWriter 2.0.0.41 (R21)**

You can potentially write the next Grammy-winning song.

## **Review: 13-inch MacBook Air**

Frank H. Wu is very impressed with his new MacBook Air.

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## What's Already on Your Mac

It is said that “although features in the Universal Access pane are generally targeted to Mac users with disabilities, non-disabled users may also find some of these features useful.” One such feature reads “Ignore built-in trackpad when mouse or wireless trackpad is present.”

Not all of us can accurately use the trackpad on a portable Mac, and we prefer to use a mouse as we always did. But we don't consider ourselves to be handicapped and we never investigate the Universal Access pane. But an errant hand or piece of clothing can easily activate the trackpad when we are typing, which is extremely annoying. How do we turn off the trackpad? One would logically expect it to be in the Trackpad preferences pane, but surprisingly there is nothing there. It is instead hidden in the Universal Access pane. Maybe it should be in both.

—*John P. Bethell*

## MacMuser: Here We Go Again

Take the hint!

It is way past time to go paperless. The forest critters will thank you.

—*PhillyG*



Glad to hear you're still using an 8500. I have one I bought second-hand, and, unlike yours, it's used for all the “grunt” work because of the low cost-per-page. The duplexer is dead, or at least, it unfailingly jams on first page; I have an unused Apple-branded toner cart that won't work just because some tiny bit of plastic has broken off inside. When this printer gives up the ghost I haven't the...er, ghost of an idea of what I'll replace it with.

—*Steve Rickaby*

## Next Actions: GTD for iOS/iPad

There is a new free cross-platform (Mac/Win/iOS) general task manager called [Wunderlist](#).

Feature-wise it is relatively spare (but has most all of what I need), and it features online synchronization, sharing, and has a well-designed interface. Their support site has been responsive, and the application is very stable for me (including iPhone sync.)

—*Steve Lang*

Thanks, Steve, for the tip. I'll be interested to look into this one.

—*Ed Eubanks Jr.*



You are performing a valuable service, Ed.

After much dithering, I have begun using the excellent Circus Ponies Notebook. Still trying to bend a couple of GTD templates to my will, but I may not have the discipline necessary to make me an effective acolyte of David Allen's principles. Nevertheless, it's a useful and flexible program.

—*anonymous*



Thanks for this series—always appreciated.

I have started working with Pagico, which so far works cross-platform nicely using Dropbox to sync. Their support was very responsive with a contact importing issue. They do not yet have an iOS application but are working on it.

—*Wade Staddon*

## **AccountEdge and FirstEdge**

Super helpful review for those of use trying to find a good, easy-to-use accounting solution, with payroll, and for Macs. Thank you!

—*Katie-Jay Scott*

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## The Digital Future Is Now

### **[Murdoch Finally Launches The Daily, Priced at 99¢ a Week](#)**

The media world's been waiting for Rupert Murdoch to finally announce *The Daily*, News Corp's 99¢-a-week iPad-only (so far) newspaper. Apple is unveiling a new subscription model that allows content to be purchased on a recurring basis. There are a lot of really interesting things in *The Daily* to comment on, but I think the most interesting is that the model itself is very magazine or tabloid newspaper. It's actually more magazine in some ways than *The Economist* application, which is actually a magazine! On the other hand, I wonder if short-form, highly opinionated, tabloid-style content really plays to the strengths of the tablet format. So far, the success of the Kindle, the iPad, Flipboard, Instapaper, inter alia, have seemed to demonstrate consumers' willingness to read longer works of journalism in the right format. Murdoch may not then be the man who *can* save journalism in America, as many speculated. Look at his print successes, tabloids all.

### **[A Contrary View on The Daily From BusinessInsider's Evan Britton](#)**

After what I just said about *The Daily*, Evan Britton writes in *BusinessInsider* that the iPad experience makes people more likely to pay for news. He thinks that pay walls for Web sites won't succeed, but that apps that are designed to change the delivery of news content would be worth paying for—and the first to try that is *The Daily*. Notably, he does *not* go so far as to suggest that *The Daily* itself will succeed; the headline is miscast. He's arguing that the category of paid news apps will succeed where pay walls won't.

### **[The Daily Is Yesterday's News?](#)**

*Macworld's* Joel Mathis noticed the same thing about *The Daily* that I did: it's not really very original. Mathis argues persuasively that in spite of all of the technical innovation behind *The Daily*, it's just a souped-up *New York Post* or *USA Today*. He says, "In its overall mix... *The Daily* most reminds me of two other attempts to save daily newspapers from hemorrhaging young readers: *Red Streak* and *RedEye*, two free tabloids that appeared in Chicago a decade ago, aimed at twentysomething commuters." Is that who the audience is? Why would I pay a buck for this instead of just pick up *RedEye*? It's hard to tell who the audience is from using *The Daily*, Mathis says; this is a high-end, technically sophisticated platform whose unfocused news content and lack of editorial vision is holding it back.

### **[Poynter Gets Eight Experts' Reactions on The Daily](#)**

Thursday morning, the guys at Poynter's Media Lab asked a panel of eight experts with a long history in the field (Roger Fidler, Ken Doctor) what they thought of *The Daily*. I think the reactions are fascinating. For instance, Fidler noted that the individual presentation and art direction of stories is much more labor-intensive than flowing content into identical

templates, but that the results are much richer. And Doctor wonders if readers will pay for general, rather than specialized, news. Worth reading.

### **Sony: Apple Is Changing Policy, Won't Allow Apps With Own Off-Device Stores Unless Content Can Also Be Purchased In-App**

In a story in the *New York Times*, Sony is saying that Apple is changing their guidelines on applications in a specific way that would harm, in particular, e-book-reader vendors. Amazon's Kindle, Barnes and Noble's Nook, and the so-far-rejected Sony Reader all rely on users buying their books from their computers or branded devices, and synchronizing them to the iPad. There is no in-app store; all purchases go through Amazon or B&N. Sony says Apple told them that wouldn't be allowed (or already had been disallowed, according to some accounts) even though Amazon and B&N both work that way. I'm of two minds here: the lack of integration of the Kindle Store is irritating, but there's a strong antitrust argument to be made that Apple shouldn't be able to take a 30% cut of Amazon's sales, thereby inflating Amazon's costs to publishers or cutting into its profits, when Apple has no such limits on its own contracts with ebook publishers.

### **More Detail on the Size of Apple's Service Charges for In-App Book Purchases**

Jim Dovey, the lead Apple developer at Kobo, another e-book-reader vendor, points out that because of the way book contracts are negotiated, Amazon, Kobo, B&N, et al, only get to keep 30% of the list price of books. So if Apple insists on 30% as a transaction fee, the e-book vendor makes no money on the sales of books on the iPad or iPhone at all. Sounds pretty self-evidently an antitrust violation to me: in order to be on Apple's platform, competitors must agree to give up 100% of the profit of their sales through that platform. Amazon, B&N, Kobo, et al, will not be allowed to mark up their books 30% on their in-app stores vs. through the Web portals.

### **A Counterargument About (Some Parts of) the E-reader Controversy**

Some part of the controversy over the Sony Reader-Apple brouhaha hinges on Apple leaving some parts of its Terms of Service and developer agreements deliberately vague, which led to the rejection of Sony's Reader application on the grounds that it lacks functionality that Amazon's and B&N's (et al) all leave out. It's an interesting argument, but *CounterNotions* takes an interesting position and one that makes sense: these documents are written in very dense legalese in order to avoid lawsuits accusing the company of violating specific promises, and to make sure competitors don't know about future strategic moves before Apple is ready to make them. This argument, it's worth note, does not indemnify Apple against charges of antitrust violations. He attempts to defend Apple's move as well, but I don't really agree with the premise of the argument: if that's the case, Apple should just require that only apps paid at a certain price (say \$20) can operate an out-of-app store.

### **Interesting Take: Sony's App Uses Some Components of In-App Purchase Mechanisms**

Something I hadn't seen elsewhere, from Harry McCracken at *Technologizer*, on the subject of Sony's Reader application rejection by Apple: he says that his sources suggest the Sony application had an in-app purchasing mechanism, unlike the Kindle and B&N apps, which

take you to Safari to complete the purchase as a file download into the iOS filesystem. Now I'm a little less concerned: Sony, you can't have your cake and eat it too. If you want a truly in-app store, you have to give Apple their cut; and if not, you have to play by the same rules as the other vendors.

### **How Enterprise Business Customers Are Using the iPad**

*Network World* takes us on a series of case studies of big businesses using the iPad. I was really surprised how much big companies rely on Web applications, either in-house or hosted, and, frankly, how overpowered a typical laptop is to the tasks they describe. That's one thing the tech pundits didn't seem to get about the iPad or the tablet category in general: the absence of a hardware keyboard and mouse is actually a selling point, because most of the tasks the article describes either benefit from direct interaction with your hands or at minimum don't suffer any detriment.

## **We're Just Living in a Mobile World**

### **Verizon: Sold Out of iPhone 4 Pre-orders**

Verizon sold out of iPhone 4 pre-orders. But, you know, this is just another cell phone being released on Verizon. Right?

### **No Line at Verizon for iPhone? Not Necessarily a Problem**

Verizon may have sold out their pre-order inventory in a day, but there weren't lines (in general) at Verizon and Apple stores for the CDMA iPhone 4. Is this a problem? Analysts and Joel Mathis from *Macworld* don't think so; it's not a new product, so only people who are current Verizon customers who've been jonesing for an iPhone or *extremely* fed up with AT&T service are likely to wait in line for it. Analysts still expect Verizon to sell more than 11 million iPhones this year. Quite a statistic.

### **Marco Arment: Verizon Mostly Selling iPhones to Existing Owners?**

Instapaper developer Marco Arment takes a look at his sales statistics, and notices that even though Verizon is moving a lot of iPhone hardware, he's not seeing the usual sales bump he gets around holidays and when new devices are released. His conclusion: a lot of those Verizon iPhones are being sold either to users who already have an iPod touch or were using AT&T. He theorizes that people who buy an iPhone 4 on Verizon, even though it's been available on AT&T for eight months, are mostly the non-geek users who just happen to be buying one—that the slow and steady pace of sales will keep up, in short.

### **A Contrary Prediction: Users Prefer Dumb Phones**

We've been hearing a lot lately about a phenomenon Horace Dediu described aptly in December: "The bottom of the phone market is very vulnerable to becoming smart." Here's a contrary prediction from *Network World*, which says that some 65 percent of users want an ordinary "dumb" phone. Their principal concern was the cost of data service. I suspect the issue here is that right now, unless you use your cell phone a *lot*, minutes seem really cheap. But to get a data plan you almost always need at least 450 minutes. That and a data plan makes the iPhone \$70 or so a month, vs. say \$35 after taxes for a basic voice plan. Carriers

should really also stop double-charging data-plan users for SMS. There is one point where Horace Dediu and this survey agree: the single largest reason more smartphones aren't already being sold is price.

### ***Ouch: Windows Mobile 6 Beats Windows Phone 7 in Sales in 4Q2010***

In a fun twist of fate, NPD Group analysts are saying that Windows Mobile 6 actually beat Windows Phone 7 in sales in the first quarter that WP7 was available. That's generally bad news for a new platform, especially one with as much bombast as Windows Phone 7. To be fair, devices with the new OS are still only available on T-Mobile (increasingly a bit player) and AT&T (has iPhone), and being available on Verizon will probably make a difference. Still, not good news. Windows Phone 7 also underperformed WebOS and Android in their own first quarters.

### ***Speculation on the Street: Nokia Will Announce a Move to Windows Phone 7***

An open letter from an analyst at a German bank urging Nokia's CEO to form an alliance with Microsoft is now raising eyebrows around the tech world, because Nokia also has announced a February 11 address by the company's new CEO to investors. This executive, Stephen Elop, came to Nokia from Microsoft, so speculation was already high before this. If Nokia were to make this move, it would kill the company's long-awaited MeeGo platform, but also probably make Nokia suddenly relevant again in the smartphone world. They haven't had much to show over the years lately for Symbian, and have been overtaken by iOS and Android. In hitching their wagon to Microsoft, they could get a real marketing boost...they'd be far and away the biggest name selling Windows Phone 7 phones.

## **iPad, Still King of the Hill, and Other Tablet News**

### ***Wired: Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 a Plastic Toy with a Gorgeous Screen***

The guys at *Wired* got their hands on the 10.1-inch Samsung Galaxy Tab, which is the theoretical Android-based iPad-killer (also: possibly, the Motorola Xoom). They were not impressed. I heard a lot of good things about the 7-inch Galaxy Tab, which at least differentiates itself from the iPad on size. Not so much about the 10-inch model: Charlie Sorrel says it felt plasticky, was an odd size, and all in all felt rough around the edges. He also points out that Android Honeycomb is no panacea: it "feels like Linux on the desktop before Ubuntu came along." Oof.

### ***Engadget: Motorola Xoom is Pricey, But Honeycomb Feels More Desktop, Less Tablet***

The guys at *Engadget* seem to have liked the Motorola Xoom well enough, although they say the rear-facing camera feels a bit like holding up a picture frame with a camera on the back. They also complained about the niggling little details, polish or software or button issues, which cheapen the whole experience. It sounds like it's pretty well-polished—better than the Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1—but very expensive. Without a contract, it's \$800, or, with a contract, \$600 plus \$20 a month for at least two years. There's no pricing announced yet for the WiFi-only model.

## ***Andy Ihnatko Did Not Pass the Motorola Xoom on the [Why Would I Buy This Instead of](#)***

The *Sun-Times*' columnist of great repute got a Xoom to review as well. One thing he observed that I thought was really interesting is that the form factor makes it almost impossible to use vertically; even when you can, you don't really want to. Also, he thinks Honeycomb still lacks a lot of polish, and still needs a lot of work before it's really ready. Lastly, Ihnatko applies what he calls the "Why Would I Buy This Instead of an iPad" test, and the answer is, well, the pricing isn't better than Apple's, the device isn't obviously better, and you miss out on the iOS ecosystem. An interesting point.

## ***RIM: Put up or Shut up, [Ship the Playbook Already](#)***

Jim Dalrymple at *Loop Insight* noticed that RIM has now announced three PlayBook devices without actually shipping one yet. It looks a lot easier to build an iPad killer when you aren't actually building and releasing the devices, doesn't it?

## ***iPad Still Leaves Lots of Room for Competition***

Ben Kuchera of *Ars Technica* wants to see more companies enter the tablet marketplace, and to release devices that are worthy competitors to the iPad. He points out that the iPad's versatility is remarkable, but that Apple's publishing policies leave a lot of room for competition (who wants to pay 30 percent? See above.) and that so far, Apple is only selling one form factor. If someone can succeed with a 7-inch or even 9-inch tablet, while keeping resolution roughly the same or higher, that would open up a significant new realm for tablet innovation.

## ***Macworld's List of 11 Things They Want to See in an iPad***

Coming right before what we think will be the iPad 2 on March 2, right after this issue is released, is *Macworld's* list of the 11 things they'd like to see in the next iPad model. It's a solid list, from more cameras and more RAM to a better display and a gyroscope. Good reading, especially as we anticipate the next device.

## ***HP Plans to Integrate WebOS Into PCs***

In a fun twist on the announcements of new mobile phones and tablets, HP is now announcing that they are going to make PCs that run the same WebOS that will run on their new phones and tablets, plus the existing Palm Pre devices. I think that's the first time a major PC vendor not named "Apple" has stood up to Microsoft in a very, very long time. We don't know if HP is dropping Microsoft entirely or if they're going to continue to offer PCs with Windows. I'd bet on a BTO option on certain models, plus a surcharge. Remember OS/2? I think that was the last time a non-Apple PC vendor sold mainstream computers with an OS other than Windows.

## **Redmond, Windows Phone 7 Not Ready for Regular Updates Yet**

### ***[Paul Thurrott: Microsoft's Plan for Windows Phone 7 Updates Is Exactly How They Shouldn't Be Doing It](#)***

Microsoft super-blogger Paul Thurrott—he of Paul Thurrott's SuperSite for Windows—wrote a scathing review of Microsoft's plans for updating Windows Phone 7. As he points

out, during the initial three months after release, Apple released six major updates, including a major OS update (1.1), and in the six months after that, three additional point updates (1.1.2 and 1.1.3). Microsoft hadn't yet, in January, released any updates; and their first is a rolling train wreck (see below).

### ***Many Windows Phone 7 Phones Bricked by Software Update***

The headline on this piece from *Ars Technica's* Peter Bright really says it all: "Everything that can go wrong with Windows Phone 7 update does." I mean, let's get real, people. First off, Microsoft has been promising regular, universal Apple-style software updates, in part because the absence of that is one of the things people most intensely dislike about Android. But somehow, the update is failing on many devices, most notably Samsung phones; the lucky ones just hang midway through the process. The unlucky ones get bricked. He also notes that some carriers are blocking updates, something Microsoft promised they wouldn't allow.

### ***As Many As 10 Percent of Windows Phone 7 Phones May Fail on Updates***

John C. Dvorak—how long has it been since you saw *that* name in this column?—points out that reports suggest as many as 10 percent of Windows Phone 7 phones are failing on software updates. That's an astoundingly high rate of failure. If 10 percent of Windows updates failed, heads would be rolling in Redmond.

## **Mobile Video: the Next Battle**

### ***Microsoft Fires Next Salvo in H.264 Wars, Makes a Windows 7 Plug-in for Chrome***

After Google announced they were killing support in their Chrome Web browser to decode H.264 video for "openness" reasons, there was much *Sturm und Drang* about the impending death or lack thereof of H.264 video. (Of particular interest to iOS users, the hardware-decoding support for H.264 built into the iPhone, iPad, and a lot of other mobile devices makes H.264 video pretty key.) Microsoft is firing back by making Chrome and Firefox extensions to decode H.264, which I think means they're accepting the licensing cost. I wonder if Apple will do the same for Firefox and Chrome on Mac OS X, just to make sure that Web video *isn't* delivered exclusively in WebM. It wouldn't have any direct impact on either the Windows or Mac OS X experience, but Microsoft and Apple are probably both looking at the mobilesphere. I doubt if Windows Phone 7 has WebM support.

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## Hasta la Vista, or Maybe Not

A new member joined our retirement home for aging laptops. We now have an Acer Aspire complete with Vista.

This is our first time using Vista with it being so badly received by Windows users who preferred to stay with XP. We can see why they didn't bother to upgrade; on the surface, there seems little changed from a user's point of view.

Ours is the Vista Home edition without the translucent layers copied from Mac OS X of some years before. Also unseen in our initial poke-arounds are the many security features and the new shell, moving many commands to the toolbar, and so on. What we did note is the enormous number of updates needed to bring the laptop from mid-2007 to the present day.

This all had to be done over a wired network because Vista 2007 wouldn't connect to our Virgin Netgear hub. Rather than placed on the coffee table as we sat watching telly, or more likely, snoozing through the dire new series [Outcasts](#). For some reason, 22 people voted it as 9.3 at IMDB and they all had similar names to members of the crew and cast (probably).

In total, there were more than 100 updates. An initial 89 took an evening to download and install over our 50Mbps line. The next day followed with further updates to updates and installing a new anti-virus and, most important of all, new drivers for the wireless card. It all resulted in a reasonable laptop, which is no slouch, either, considering it is four years old.

However, our MacBook from the same year is just as fast and could run Vista as well as Mac OS X if we wanted it to. We checked to see how many updates it had undergone over the same time period. From the total of fewer than 20, a handful had been for iTunes adding new features and a few security updates, but by far they were for Microsoft programs.

Compared with Mac OS X Leopard, also released in 2007, is Vista any better? After all, it is now installed on just under 20% of Windows PCs, less than Windows 7, or both combined are less than Windows XP (Wikipedia 2010). Given the choice, we wouldn't run any version—and not just because we are Mac fans.

The problem we have with every Microsoft operating system is that they are a mess of multi-tabbed dialog boxes and helpful wizards that just aren't and leave you high and dry—plus, Microsoft's arse-about-face ways to do things. It's like wearing boxing gloves and trying to use chopsticks—you feel you're kept away from the good stuff. For example,

the Internet connection wizard could see the network but not get out onto the Internet. Its solution was to suggest to keep rebooting the router, which every other Mac, Hackintosh, and iPhone could use without a hitch.

Then there is the famed “user choice” Windows is supposed to give. In our experience, this is just a way to make life more difficult. Most of the time, the average Windows users we work with haven’t got the faintest idea about changing anything. They still haven’t grasped the concepts of drag and drop or having multiple windows open and visible. If their PC is “broken,” IT—100 miles away—has to fix it, even if it is simply just a case of user error.

This article [User Choice, Customization and Confusion](#) explores whether user customization is a good thing or not. It might have been written by a Mac programmer.

The author, Mike Gunderloy, is a US-based lead developer and author of 20 or more books on the subject. He comes down firmly in the camp of the default choice, which is to offer no choice within an application. Or maybe just a little, à la Apple. Enhancements and customizations can be done via special and often third-party applications. Apple has always maintained this stance—tweaks can be made via the Terminal or by little apps such as [TinkerTool](#) and [Onyx](#).

As Gunderloy says, “Many applications today expose dozens or even hundreds of customization options in this way; Microsoft Office applications are prime offenders in this regard.” We would add their operating systems, too.

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## Shock of the New

A sunny seaside Saturday, what else is there to do but stroll round the shops and browse? This time, in an emporium of electronics, where for the first time we see some of the many tablets on the market.

Without doubt, the gadget that surprised most is the Kindle. There is no getting around the fact that they are huge, so much so we wonder why people want them. They aren't low-cost, either.

After being devoted on-screen readers through the 1990s, reading books on an iPhone came as second nature. Once the thumb-flick to turn pages becomes an unconscious action, reading on the iPhone is as easy as a Kindle or a paperback. The Internet and iTunes store are full of free and low-cost books as well as various readers for proprietary formats, including Kindle books, although it does look as though Amazon and Apple are headed for a rumble.

Adjacent to the Kindle are the tablets. Our daughter works for Samsung, so we have played with their phones and tablets enough to gain some impressions. Firstly, when Samsung boffins saw the iPad they must have said it was too big and decided to make a smaller tablet. That was a bad move and simply the shock of the new. Apple's engineers have been right all along, a 7-inch screen is too small. Samsung's designers have also been having second thoughts, as it was announced that the Galaxy Tab 2 will feature a 10-inch screen.

A larger display is far better for doing real work, reading a newspaper, playing games, or watching a film. An Android 7-inch tablet feels uncomfortably like a brick, and with battery time a lot shorter than an iPad's. Coupled to that is a tiny virtual keyboard, which needs Samsung's special shortcuts to get the best from it. We would choose a netbook in preference and get a same sized package and screen with a real keyboard and software. Better still, make it a Hackintosh running Mac OS X.

When they devised the iPad, the engineers looked at the form-factor and asked themselves how easy they could make it to use. The iPad is still at version one and an unfinished piece of work. It needs a filing system, and the built-in apps tweaking to include a better office suite, but these will come. An iPad should also be able to link with an iPhone to use its modem and data download allocation, and does it really need a camera front and back? One on the front to have iChats, but is anyone really going to hold an iPad up to take mediocre photos when they have a cellphone in their pocket, which can take equally mediocre shots?

There has been much clamouring about how Google's Android OS has overtaken Apple's iOS, even though Apple is selling every iPhone and iPad they can make. They just can't churn them out any faster—something which can't be said for the numerous companies making cell phones and tablets using Android. Anyway, Apple has always aimed at a lucrative niche of a market rather than dominating it.

The largest cell phone operating system was Java in some format or other, installed on just about every phone for many years. Yet for all the millions of Java phones, third-party applications have been dreadful, for the most part, and the market didn't take off.

If Java's new owner Oracle is correct, Google allegedly copied Android from Java, so its future is clouded. Android doesn't even earn Google any money because they give it away for free only to see cell phones using rival search engines and Chinese Internet infrastructure. If Google thought Android devices would link in with their advertisements and cloud-based applications and search engine, they have been mistaken.

The final shock is the price of the other tablets and toys. The Kindle is over £150, and the Samsung tablets in some formats are the same price or even more expensive than the iPad. That must be a first for Apple.

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# How To

by Sylvester Roque, [sroque@atpm.com](mailto:sroque@atpm.com)

## Making Use of QuickTime X

As I was wrapping up this month's article, I got a call from my brother. The confirmed Windows user needs a couple of Windows Media Player video files converted to QuickTime movie files. I got the call because he doesn't do this often and isn't sure his Windows box has anything on it to take care of this problem. Initially, QuickTime converted the video portion of the files but left the audio behind, but an assist from [VLC media player](#) and [MPEGStreamclip](#) resulted in a workable set of files. Score one for the Mac.

The whole time I was working on this project, I thought about a project a few years ago where QuickTime files played better on the target 486 computers than the AVI files widely used on Windows at the time. After a week or so of adjusting settings on AVI files trying to get acceptable playback performance, I tried QuickTime's MOV format because I read that QuickTime would play acceptably on some hardware that would not play other formats. To make a long story short, it worked like a charm.

The good news is that you, too, can amaze your family and friends with QuickTime's abilities. If you don't know what QuickTime is capable of, it's time to find out, because almost everything you do with audio or video on a Mac relies on QuickTime.

### What Is QuickTime, and What Does It Do?

QuickTime made its initial appearance as an [optional installation](#) in System 6 and System 7. Several major OS revisions later, it has become an application (in the form of QuickTime Player); a framework of components critical for encoding, decoding, and transcoding multimedia files; and a means of adding support for additional file formats by adding additional codecs. The result is something that's an integral part of the Mac multimedia experience. Even if you have never launched QuickTime Player, if you have been playing audio or video on your Mac, chances are, the application you are using has been making use of its components.

Initially, QuickTime Player met most of my multimedia playback needs. I wasn't doing much audio or video editing at the time, so there wasn't much need to transcode files. Over time though, that changed. As QuickTime's capabilities improved, some of my friends became interested in its ability to convert audio and video, and came looking for help. QuickTime Player couldn't handle that, but for less than \$30 I could get a license for the Pro version. In exchange for a few of my hard earned dollars I got the ability to perform some basic audio and video editing. The most important thing for me, though, was the sudden ability to export files in other formats. It was almost like having the digital equivalent of a multi-tool. It was also possible to get a Pro license as part of Final Cut Studio or Logic Pro.

With the release of Snow Leopard came the release of QuickTime X. The Player window was revamped a bit and looks more like the player window in iTunes than previous versions. Saving and exporting video in QuickTime X appears to be significantly faster than it was under QuickTime Pro 7. In exchange for the increased speed, some features are reduced compared to QuickTime 7 Pro. The Cut, Copy, and Paste options are gone from QuickTime X, and exporting video is limited to four formats. There are also no discernible application preferences. The current version of the QuickTime Player lacks an upgrade path. There isn't a Pro version at this time.

The missing features and absence of an upgrade path are the bad news about QuickTime X. The good news is that if you are upgrading to Snow Leopard and already have QuickTime 7 installed, it will still be present when the upgrade is complete but it will have been moved to the Utilities folder. If you have the Pro version installed, your serial number is still recognized as valid, and no functionality is lost. It's also an optional install on the Snow Leopard disc should you decide to add it later.

## **Enough History. What Can I Do With QuickTime Player?**

Some functions may have been crippled a bit in the new version of QuickTime Player, but some things have been simplified. To see the difference in philosophy, all you have to do is look at the changes in the recording process. Under Quicktime 7 Pro, making an audio or video recording often meant tinkering with the preference settings to set the audio and video sources. There were also several general preferences affecting movie playback.

With QuickTime Player X, the recording preferences are gone. Starting a recording is as simple as going to the File menu and choosing to create a new movie (using the built in iSight camera), audio recording, or screen recording. Each of these options has a keyboard equivalent if you prefer to do things that way. Press Record when the player controls appear, and you've started the recording.

If you choose to create a screen recording, directions appear which tell you how to stop the recording. This is necessary because the window of player controls is not visible, to keep from taking up screen space. To stop a screen recording you have to either press the Stop button that appears in the menu bar or press Command, Control, and Escape simultaneously.

Once a recording is completed and you have pressed the Stop button it is time to save your work. Choosing Save As from the File menu brings up a dialog to choose where the file will be saved. The Format section of the Save As sheet contains several saved presets commonly used for the type of recording you've chosen. Choose the appropriate preset and choose Save. By default, recordings are saved in the Movies folder inside your home folder, but you can save them elsewhere.

There is also a "Save For Web" option available in QuickTime X. This option also produces an option to save your work, but there is an important difference here. This dialog saves the file as a "reference movie." The reference movie is a way to "negotiate" so that the version

of a movie which gets downloaded is of an appropriate size and quality for the device used to download the file.

## Editing Movies With QuickTime X

If you make enough recordings, eventually you will need to do some editing. There are a number of excellent audio and video editing programs available for the Mac ranging from relatively inexpensive to very expensive. You could edit your recording in another application such as iMovie, but what if you just need to trim away a mistake or two? QuickTime X can probably complete that edit in the time it takes to launch iMovie or Final Cut Express. Let's try it now to see how well things work.

If you didn't already try the recording function while reading the previous section, go to the QuickTime Player File menu and choose a type of recording. Make your recording relatively short since this is just for practice.

Now that we have a short recording, let's perform a quick edit to see how things work. Moving the mouse into the QuickTime Player window causes the playback controls to appear, but there are no apparent editing controls there. It took me a minute or two to figure this out so I'll tell you the secret: To see the editing controls choose Trim (Command-T) from the QuickTime Player Edit menu.

A miniature time line of your movie appears at the bottom of the player window where the controls normally appear. The time line is outlined in yellow with a handle at either end. Drag the left and right handles until the footage you want to keep is within the area enclosed by the yellow handles. You can hit the Play button to check to make sure that you have things as you want them. Once you have the edit like you want it choose Trim in the bottom right of the window.

If you make a mistake you can either undo the change from the edit menu or choose Cancel at the right of the time line. The Edit menu also has an option to select everything excluding silence. Once things are as you want them, choose an appropriate Save option. While you are experimenting with the player's options, don't forget to check the Share menu: options in this menu facilitate sharing files to iTunes, a MobileMe gallery, or YouTube.

## Do I Need QuickTime 7 Pro?

With the editing features provided by the new QuickTime Player X, do you still need QuickTime 7 Pro? The answer depends upon the type of editing you do. If you need more than basic trimming of footage, there will likely be times you need more editing capability than QuickTime Player X offers. I personally find editing with previous versions of the player a bit cumbersome, but I still do so from time to time. In deciding whether to upgrade version 7 of the player to the Pro version, you may want to launch version 7 and look at the menu items that are greyed out. This will give you an idea of what a Pro license enables. The [QuickTime 7 user guide](#) may also be helpful.

Since the two versions of QuickTime don't conflict with each other, there is another advantage to having both versions installed at the same time. QuickTime Player X can make use of any additional codecs that you may have already installed.

## What are Codecs?

As it is commonly used in multimedia, a [codec](#) is essentially a program capable of compressing and decompressing a stream of digital information. The term is most often used to discuss how computer systems handle a wide variety of digital information. Without getting bogged down in the details, codecs essentially tell the computer how to prepare a data stream for transmission or decode it for playback or editing.

For our purposes, it's that last bit of information that is important. When QuickTime encounters a type of media file that it cannot display properly, adding the appropriate codec may solve the problem. Adding new codecs is one way to extend QuickTime's ability to deal with unknown files. It's not the best analogy, but it may help you to think of adding codecs to QuickTime as similar to teaching it a new language.

As far as I know, there isn't a structure available for adding new codecs to the new version of QuickTime Player, but it will recognize codecs you have added to QuickTime 7. A friend and I discovered this shortly after I upgraded to Snow Leopard. His QuickTime Player X would not play some files I had no trouble playing. After a bit of trial and error we concluded that I had a codec installed that he did not have. There are a wide variety of codecs available for QuickTime.

## Which Codecs Do I Need, and Where Do I Get Them?

I have a rule of thumb about codecs that may not be the greatest but seems to work well for me. Unless I am consistently having trouble playing a certain type of file, I don't go in search of new codecs. Having said that, I find [Perian](#) incredibly helpful even though it doesn't open certain types of MPEG files. In order to open those files I added the [MPEG-2 Component](#). Perian doesn't open everything but takes a big step in that direction.

Since it's almost impossible to surf the Web without encountering something in Windows Media format, I've added [Windows Media Components for QuickTime](#). Some Mac forums still refer to this series of components simply as Flip4Mac. Even with this component installed, there are some Windows Media files that do not open properly on a Mac. These files are usually either copy protected or created with a version of Windows Media newer than this package is capable of translating.

## Final Thoughts

That's it for this month. Hopefully I have given you a glimpse of another marvelous free component that is found on your Mac. Try putting some of QuickTime's recording features to work. They're pretty basic, but you don't have to spend a lot of time being bogged down in choosing the right settings. The resulting files can usually be pulled into other software if additional editing is needed.





# Desktop Pictures

Christopher Turner, [cturner@atpm.com](mailto:cturner@atpm.com)

## Disney

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

### This Month's Desktop Pictures

Chris Turner shares some photos from Downtown Disney, Disney Studios, and the Magic Kingdom, taken in August 2010 while on vacation in Florida.



[View Pictures](#)

### Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, please send it to [editor@atpm.com](mailto:editor@atpm.com) and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue.

### 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.

**Safari** Create a workflow in Automator with these three actions:

1. Get Current Webpage from Safari.
2. Get Image URLs from Webpage. Get URLs of images linked from these webpages.
3. Download URLs.

**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.

## Placing Desktop Pictures

### **Mac OS X 10.3.x Through 10.6.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.

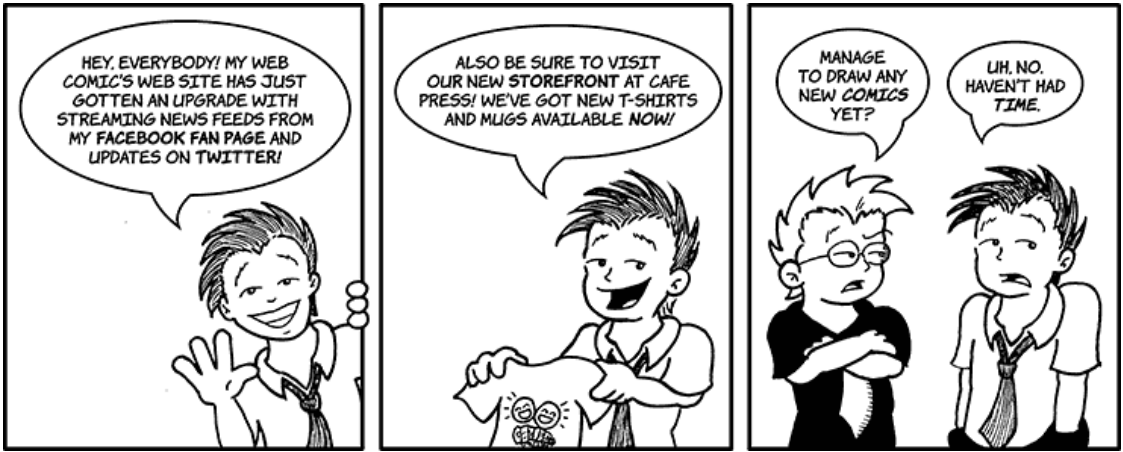
### **Mac OS X 10.0.x**

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.

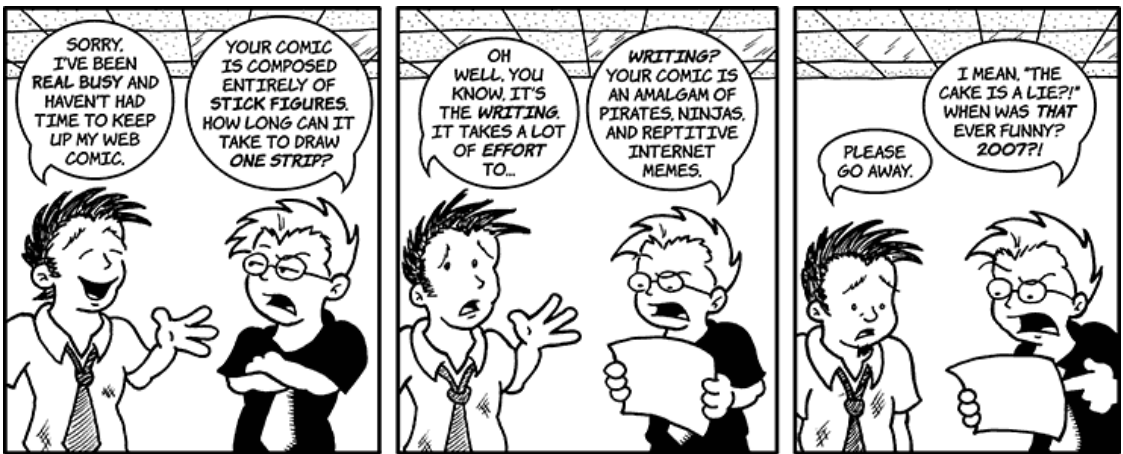




# Web Comic Updates



# Updating Is Hard

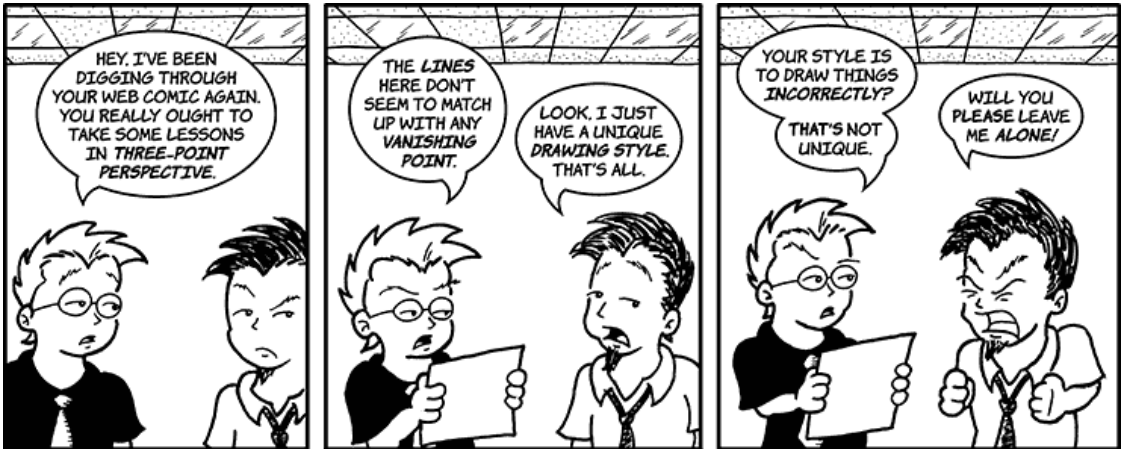


## Prints and Posters

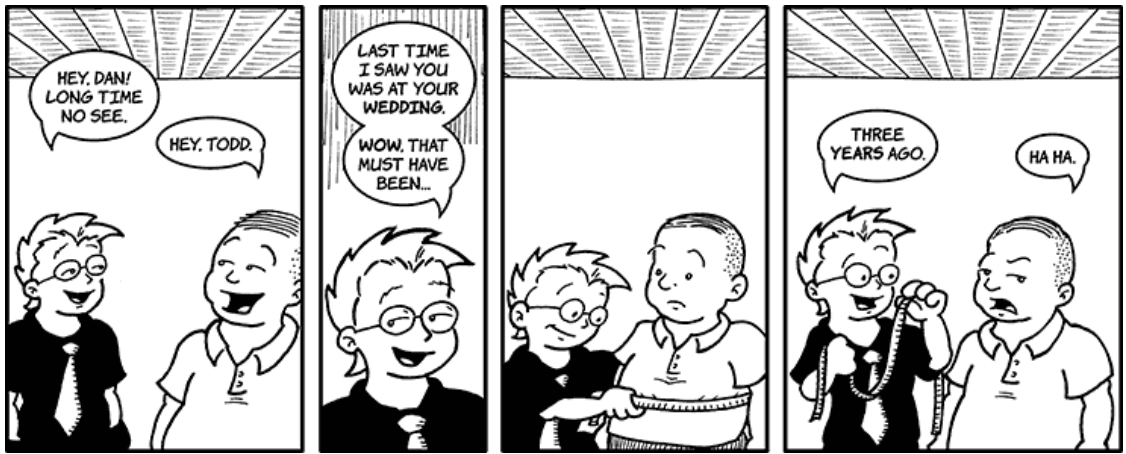


I took this description from an actual "print" a guy was selling online for \$30.

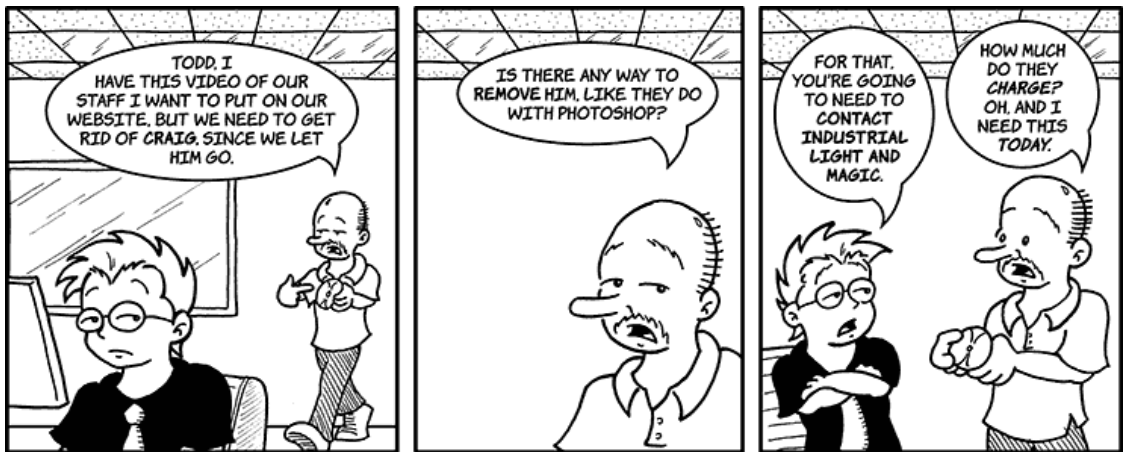
## It's My Style



# Measuring Time



# Digital Video



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# Software Review

by Frank H. Wu, [fwu@atpm.com](mailto:fwu@atpm.com)

## Caliander 1.0.2

**Function:** iCal replacement with linear timeline display.

**Developer:** [Little Maruader](#)

**Price:** \$19

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.6.

**Trial:** Fully-featured (30 days)



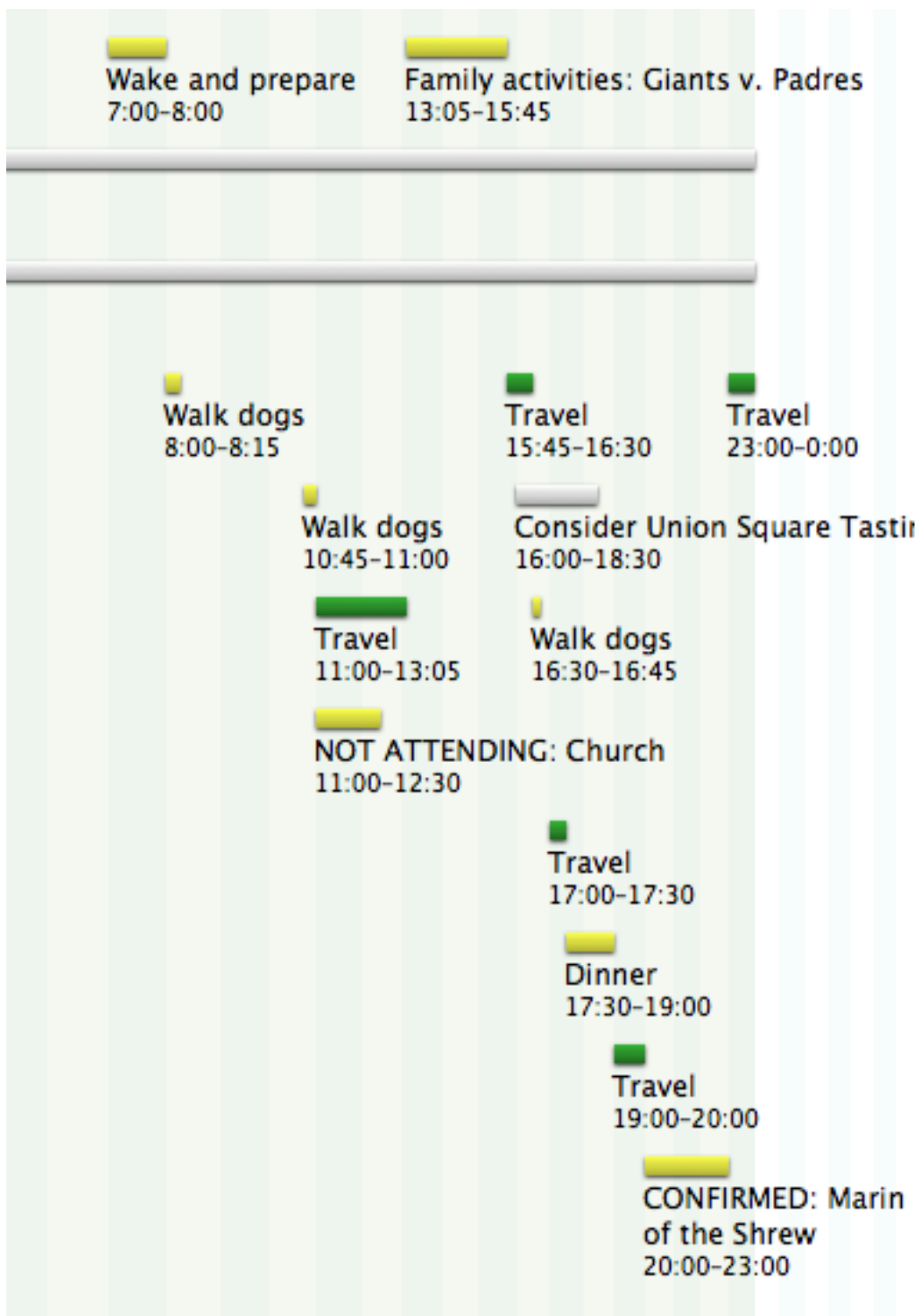
I was intrigued by the calendar program Caliander. I wanted to try it. Now that I have done so, I confess I don't understand it. Nonetheless, it might be for you if you find its unique user interface helpful.

Caliander offers a different means for visualizing information. Basically, it rotates iCal 90 degrees. iCal presents information vertically: the lower an item is, the later it is. Caliander presents it horizontally: the further right an item is, the later it is.

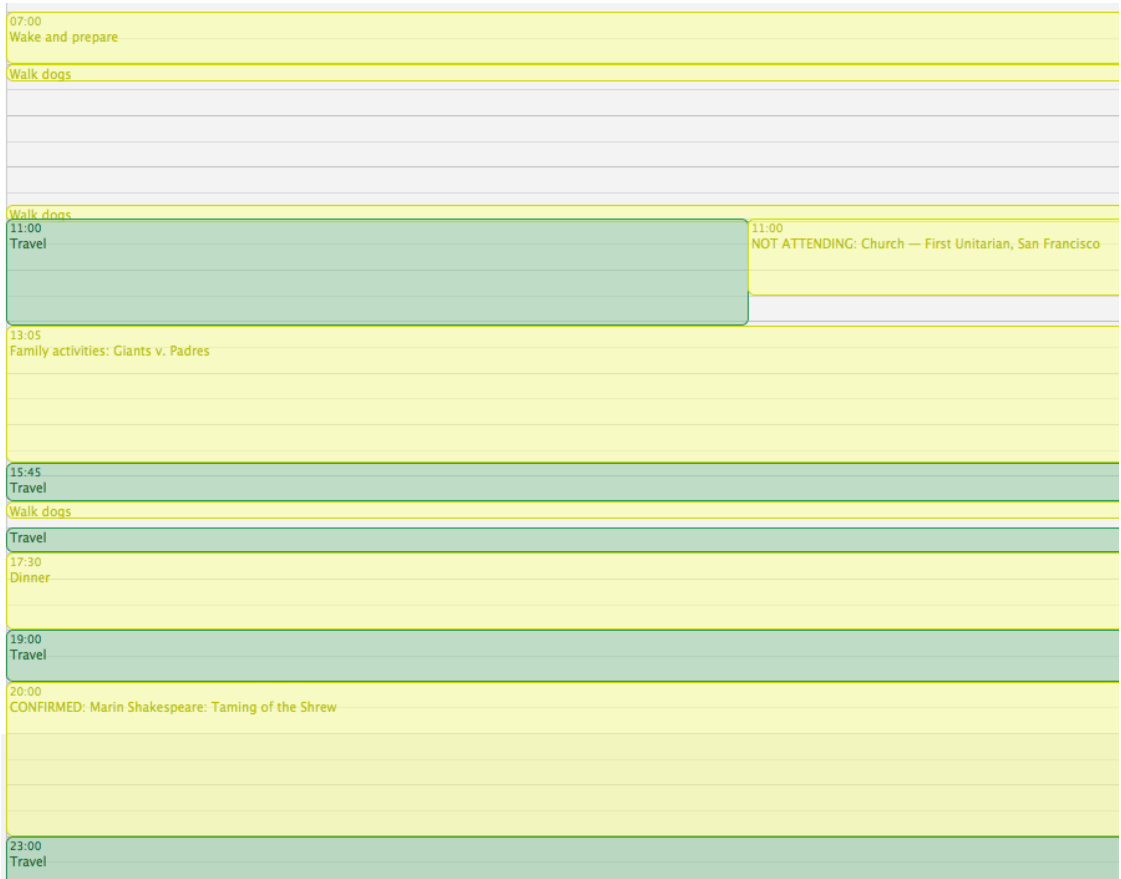
But Caliander also stratifies the information vertically. The reason is apparent. If the time line it used just ran from left to right, earlier to later, it would stretch out too long for even the largest monitor. So entries are bars running left to right through time, and then top to bottom. An individual item has a length correlating to the time amount of time allotted to it (note the compression feature that is available), and groups of items appear top to bottom. So more items can be displayed at once than would be the case if everything were strung out along a single dimension.

As might be expected, it is easier to comprehend visually than verbally. A glance will show the differences, especially if placed adjacent to iCal; the trouble is a glance isn't sufficient to take in what the data actually shows in all its detail.





This is a moderately busy day when my nephew was visiting town: the main events were a Giants baseball game and Shakespeare’s Taming of the Shrew at the Marin Theatre.



This is the same day in a conventional iCal Day view.

8/15/10	07:00	08:00	Wake and prepare
8/15/10	08:00	08:15	Walk dogs
8/15/10	10:45	11:00	Walk dogs
8/15/10	11:00	13:05	Travel
8/15/10	11:00	12:30	NOT ATTENDING: Church
8/15/10	13:05	15:45	Family activities: Giants v. Padres
8/15/10	15:45	16:30	Travel
8/15/10	16:00	18:30	Consider Union Square Tasting Tent
8/15/10	16:30	16:45	Walk dogs
8/15/10	17:00	17:30	Travel
8/15/10	17:30	19:00	Dinner
8/15/10	19:00	20:00	Travel
8/15/10	20:00	23:00	CONFIRMED: Marin Shakespeare: Taming of the Shrew

This is the same day in BusyCal List View.

It has one other “trick” (the developer’s word, not mine). The perceptual log mode, which is optional, compresses the future. According to the product Web site, “This means you’ll

see today's schedule in great detail, but still be reminded of all the things coming up in the next couple of days.”

The program does what it claims to do. But my reaction is that I don't need that thing done. As I tried to use Caliander, I concluded I could not adapt. Perhaps it's me, not the program.

Here is background. I use BusyCal and iCal. I use BusyCal to sync with Google Calendar, and I use iCal set to a different time zone when I am on the road. I have about a dozen different calendars in active use, all color-coded, so I am able to distinguish between work, professional activities that are not part of my day job, my personal life, social occasions (meaning my wife is involved as well), and so on. More than a dozen people have read-only access to these calendars, two people aside from me have write access, and my wife needs to see everything but wants to be able to switch off those items she is not participating in. In a typical day, I have a dozen appointments, and there is often travel time between them, meaning it is not abnormal for a 24-hour period to contain as many as two dozen entries. Beyond that, I keep track of a number of events that I am not attending but need to know about, both because they relate to my responsibilities (e.g., a presentation I'd like to appear at, in order to greet the speaker, if a moment frees up) and also out of interest (e.g., my college friend's puppet show is in town). All this means my calendar is packed, and it fills up weeks in advance.

Accordingly, when I consult BusyCal or iCal or Google Calendar, I am trying to do one of two things. It's pretty simple. Either on the one hand I need to know what I am supposed to be doing at X o'clock or I am trying to find blank space representing free time in order to slot in Y event. Occasionally, I am playing with the calendar just for the aesthetic recreation; that happens rarely and, anyway, there is only so much pleasure to be had from moving around virtual blocks to form a pretty pattern.

My conclusion is that Caliander did not work well for either use. I could not read it without effort to see what I was supposed to be doing at X o'clock. I also could not see the blank space representing free time in order to slot in Y event.

To be fair, I tried for only two business days before reverting to BusyCal and iCal. I believe the reasons it was difficult were the two-dimensionality of the calendar, such that I had to read left to right and top to bottom simultaneously; and the intrusion of the words themselves, which meant that sometimes I was looking at a little speck of an event (15 minutes of travel) with explanatory text that took up much more real estate.

As I experimented with Caliander, I wondered what design experts would have to say about its look. Someone such as Edward Tufte, who wrote [The Visual Display of Quantitative Information](#) likely would not be enamored of this format. The reason is it requires too much concentration to decipher. There is a reason that calendars look as they do. Clarity is a great virtue.

Caliander reminds me of the novelty clocks that you see now and then, the ones that display the time in base-two or with a series of colors. I never understood them, literally. I would

have to look and ponder, and it's not worth the effort when the simple goal is to determine when to leave the house.

I was also reminded of Gantt charts. If you've ever done project management, chances are you have seen a Gantt chart. It shows a project as separate tasks, running as bars left to right through time just as Caliander does. The relationships between tasks, whether they are sequential or parallel, can be depicted. Unlike a Gantt chart, however, Caliander shows only that time has been blocked out, and it doesn't show how items interact with each other. Even if it could, it's difficult to imagine a life that required such complexity for a daily task list. (If I were trying to devise a new means of showing a day, for the sake of originality, I'd do it using a pie chart corresponding to a clock. That would match another means we have of depicting time, namely using a circle. There's an idea, for free, for some developer to try out!)

Caliander does have more to it. It allows the creation of new items using a shortcut and a natural English description. The syntax matters. It appears to put the item into the right place (meaning the right time) only if the date and time are specified at the beginning of the description, rather than the end. The shortcut also works without Caliander being open and the frontmost application.

I found that Caliander and iCal synced seamlessly. If you entered new events to one, they appeared in the other just about instantly, and edits were made with the same immediacy. Thus, you could use Caliander and iCal together.

Finally, I feel obligated to note that when I was playing around with the program, I found that trying to display dates several months in the past brought on the spinning beach ball of non-responsiveness. In general, the program appeared to be stable, but it has not reached the stage of development of BusyCal.

In conclusion, this is a piece of software that benefits from the demo mode. My advice is to download it, try it out for a bit, and see if you like the graphical user interface. The reason to buy it is the display. If it works for you, terrific. If it doesn't, then there isn't much of a point.

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# Software Review

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, [eritterskamp@atpm.com](mailto:eritterskamp@atpm.com)

## Mahjong In Poculis 3.5

**Function:** Tile memorization and matching game.

**Developer:** [In Poculis](#)

**Price:** free (donations accepted)

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).



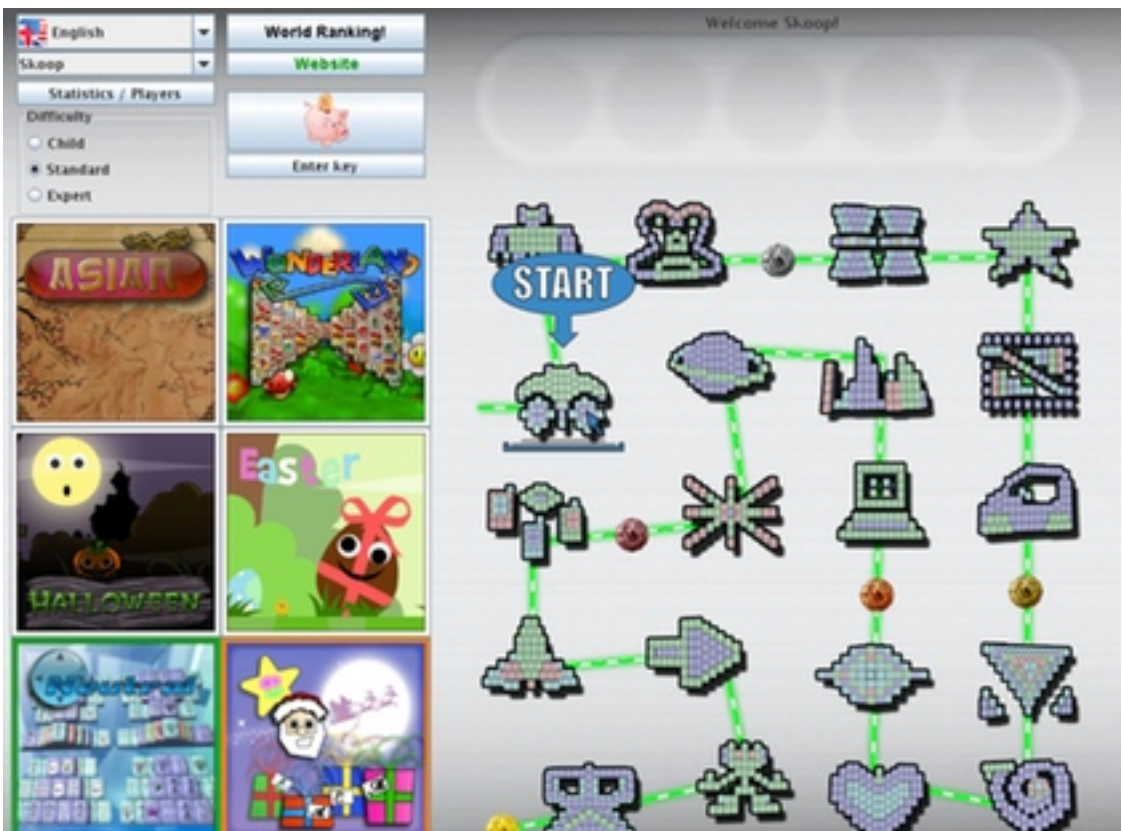
For those of us who love solving things, mahjong games are high on the list. It's easy enough to match up same-looking tiles, but to win the game, you must match up similar-but-not-exactly-the-same tiles. Plus, you must plan ahead.

I wanted to love Mahjong In Poculis, and it started off charmingly enough, but then it gave me a headache.

I tried again on another day with different settings, and again it bugged me.

I will presume that it's something about the lighting or the music that triggers a problem for me and that everyone else will like it just fine. With that in mind, here's the rundown.

We open with a choice of six tile sets and a layout path of a couple of dozen layouts. The sixth tile set (Santa) is locked for a while, until you earn it.



The layouts are predetermined in the path on the right.

There are six tile sets of varying cuteness. The Asian tile set is the most difficult and challenging to work with, as the pen strokes create relatively subtle differences.



The Asian set is the most challenging.

I loved the Halloween set, but the music associated with it got old quickly. It was a little harder to see which tiles were on top of others than in the Asian set.



The patterns are large and colorful and easy to distinguish.

I loved the endings for all three sets I played, which included animals or other items created from fire.





This way-cool Halloween pumpkin was a nice reward for finishing the game.

For a free game, I think the graphics and music on this are acceptable, but it's not a game I want to play again. It's hard to explain, but somehow, the colors got in the way. As if my brain or eyes were busy sorting out lots of visual cues instead of being able to concentrate on the problem. I also found myself hating all of the musical scores and turning them off after a couple of minutes.

Quite possibly, this game will appeal to children or to people with a different kind of attention span than mine. I prefer peace, and this game was not so much a peaceful experience. I would very much recommend the Wonderland tile set on the child setting as a way to introduce kids to problem-solving. Unless it also gives them a headache.



The large, clear symbols are easy to read.

This In Poculis game has been around for a little while and has potential in future releases. I would return to it on two conditions:

1. I'd like to have the music be a little less distracting.
2. I'd like to be able to see more easily which tiles are on the second and third levels. There is a 2nd/3rd level button that shifts the playing field, but it distorts it in a painful way.

Solving those two issues would make me be willing to pay for the game. As it stands, we're getting a little bit more than we paid for.

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# Software Review

by Linus Ly, [lly@atpm.com](mailto:lly@atpm.com)

## MasterWriter for Songwriters and Poets 2.0.0.41 (R21)

**Function:** All-in-one reference for creative writers.

**Developer:** [MasterWriter, Inc.](#)

**Price:** \$10/month; \$100/year; or \$200 one-time purchase

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).

**Trial:** Fully-featured (10 days).



Have you ever fancied yourself the author of a series of Grammy-winning songs? You may not be on the stage of “American Idol,” but maybe you will be invited to “Wait Wait...Don’t Tell Me” to play “Not My Job.” Fame and fortune, many desire them, and with MasterWriter 2.0 at your disposal, the goal is not so elusive. Or is it?

### Installation

MasterWriter 2 uses Apple’s installer, whereby you have to agree to some license agreement. If you wish, you can state your affiliation to performance-rights organizations, such as ASCAP. It is understandable as you can potentially produce the next great song and may get into legal battles. If you already have a band, an agent, and a lawyer, be sure to scrutinize the MasterWriter license agreement.

MasterWriter has three buying options. You can subscribe for \$10 per month or \$100 per year, with free updates, I suppose, during the subscription. Alternatively, you can buy it for \$200 but get no updates whatsoever. A trial version is available, fully-function for ten days. You still need to provide an e-mail address to get the activation code for the demo.

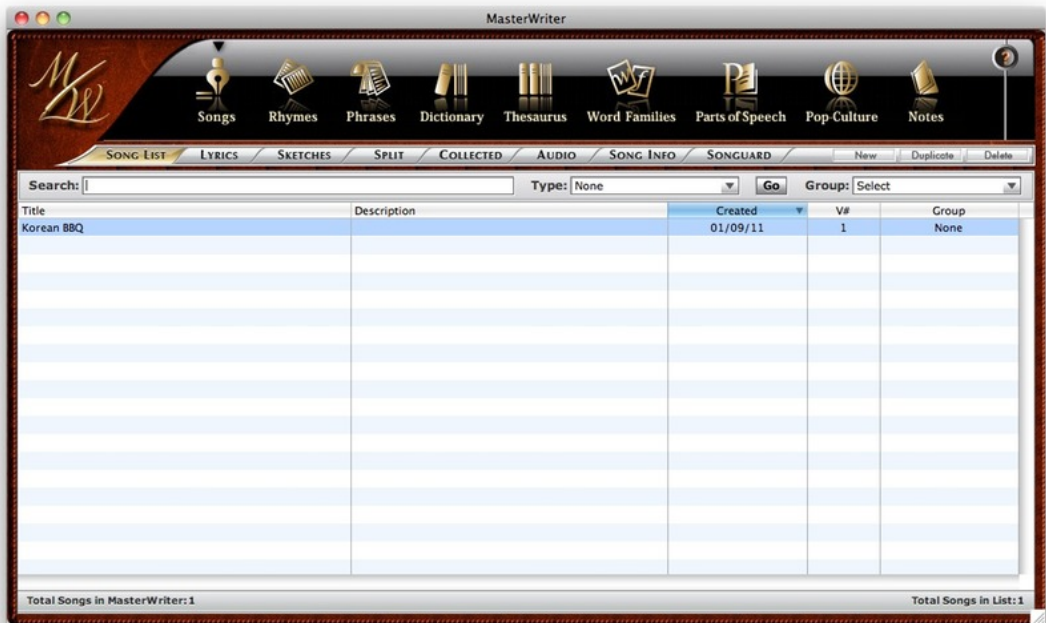
### Tools of the Trade

Years ago, when I was a new immigrant to the United States, I decided to improve my English by playing the crossword puzzles. Nothing difficult like the *New York Times*’—just *TV Guide*’s—but it was challenging enough for me. I would spend hours among a pile of reference books, including an English-Vietnamese dictionary, an English dictionary, some dictionary of American idioms, an almanac or two, and some version of Bartlett’s Book of Quotations. I would save completed puzzles for future reference, as well as the Fall Preview issues of TV Guide, because the special issues cover the new shows, spin-offs, and revamped shows, with the names of the actors and actresses. From time to time, I would make a list of things to research about and make the regular trips to the local public library. It was all very time-consuming, but I was a high school kid with plenty of time.

Fast-forward to today. I no longer do *TV Guide* crosswords but occasionally write a limerick or haiku. I also do not have stacks of books with me when writing poetry, but the process really did not change that much. I may use the American Heritage Dictionary on the iPad or visit Wikipedia or some rhymes Web site. Instead of various sources of paper reference, I now use different electronic sources of reference. It gets the job done, albeit not elegantly. This is where a centralized tool like MasterWriter makes a big difference.

## One-Stop Shop

MasterWriter is a collection of tools to help you produce songs or poems. The interface is a bit unusual in that you don't do much with the top pull-down menus. Instead, most of the interaction is done through the two rows of buttons. Your work is collected in the Songs big button; then, to its right, are the various reference dictionaries like Dictionary and Rhymes. The second row of buttons pertains to the works themselves. For example, you can play with some MIDI drum loops to get an idea of how your song will work or register with SongGuard to establish the creation time of your handiwork, in case you need to have the info for some courtroom.



The MasterWriter interface, with your work under the Songs button.

Poets and songwriters should head straight for the rhyming dictionary. You get more than just the exact rhymes, as there is also sound-alikes, e.g. “move” and “mousse.” For the sound-alikes, you get to choose between Wider or X-Wide, as well as to show the perfect rhymes along with the less-than-perfect ones. The number of syllables can make or break a song, so MasterWriter conveniently includes the option to see all the rhyming words or

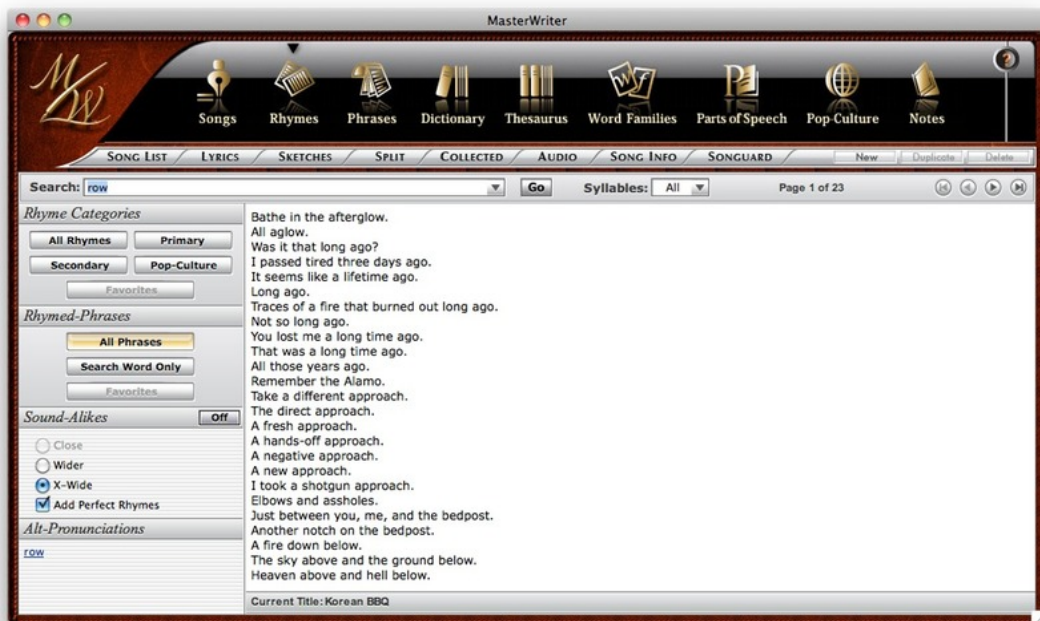
only those that have a certain number of syllables. For the life of me, I cannot understand meters and feet in poetry, but for those forms of poetry that specify a certain syllable length per line, MasterWriter can greatly help me.

English is an interesting language. There are words called heteronyms that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations as well as different meanings. MasterWriter is aware of this twist in the language and refers to heteronyms as Alt-Pronunciations. In the screenshot, the word is “row” (to propel a boat, rhymes with “blow”), and its heteronym (a quarrel, rhymes with “cow”) is shown in the lower left corner.



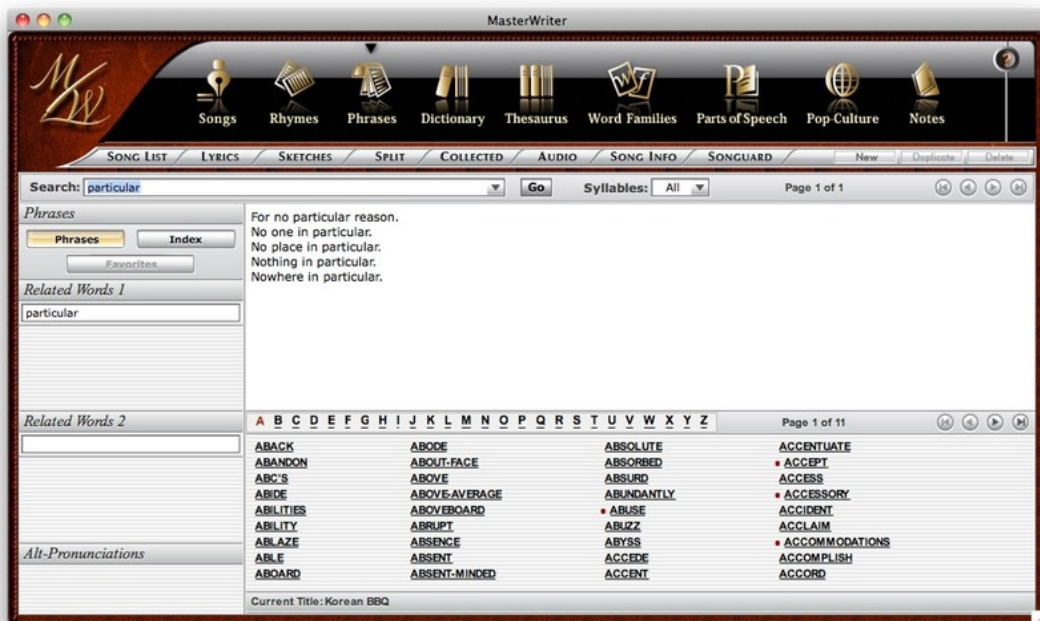
Exact rhymes, approximate rhymes, syllables break-down, alternate pronunciation, everything for your rhyming needs.

If rhyming words is not enough for you, you can opt for rhyming phrases. You have all choices with syllables, closeness, and alternate pronunciations. Something extra is that you can search for all phrases that rhyme, such as “Stuck in the eighties” to rhyme with “baby,” or limit the phrase search to only those phrases that end with the exact word, e.g. “Sleep like a baby.”



If having all the rhyming words still does not get your creative juices flowing, switch to rhyming phrases.

The rhyming phrases are not to be confused with the phrases reference dictionary. With phrases, you enter a word and MasterWriter would fetch for you a set of phrases that have that word in them. Alternatively, you can browse the index to see the many phrases available for a given word. Common similes, idioms, expressions, etc.—you most likely will find them here. I expected to find famous quotations or popular movie quotes here, but that is not the case. I guess MasterWriter does not want to guide you toward plagiarism.



Looking for an idiom or common simile? Click Phrases.

The dictionary and thesaurus reference dictionaries do what their names suggest, but the word families reference dictionary's functions are not so obvious. At first glance, you would think it duplicates the work of the thesaurus, since you may notice some words that are synonyms for the word you entered. It is much more than that. Given a word, MasterWriter would list for you many words related to the word, not just adjective or verb, but all the different parts of speech. For verbs, if applicable, you also get past tense words (“-ed”), singular words (“-s”), and progressive words (“-ing”), in addition to the base verb. For certain words, like “pretty,” you have the option of seeing words of varying intensity. For example, with “pretty” you can go from “cute” to “gorgeous.” The words are all there for you to browse.





Think of a word and MasterWriter can help you branch out from that one word.

If you have a severe case of writer's block, check out the parts of speech reference dictionary. Unlike the reference dictionaries we looked at so far, in parts of speech you do not have to enter a word to search for. For starters, you have the four parts of speech, i.e. adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs, to browse through. You can use word filters to see positive or negative words, like "famous" or "notorious," or moderate or intense words, such as "fair" or "fantastic." Lastly, you can see words that are in a certain alliteration group only. In case you don't know, an alliteration is a sentence that has repetition of sounds in the first syllables of the words, such as "She sells seashells on the seashore."



Check out the alliteration group. Maybe you can come up with something better than William Safire's "Nattering nabobs of negativism."

Lastly, there is my favorite reference dictionary, Pop Culture. The English language constantly evolves, with new words introduced each year. Slang words gain general acceptance, acronyms are spelled with lowercase and become words in their own right, and foreign words get assimilated. Trademark words become verbs, names of fictional characters become entwined with a human trait, and modern technologies, like "texting" and "the Internet," spawn new words sometimes out of nowhere. The problem is that traditional dictionaries take a long time to include new words. With MasterWriter's Pop Culture, you get the latest buzzwords and don't have to wait years for the words to seep into the old dictionaries.

Pop Culture is divided into five major categories: The World, The Famous, Food and Drink, Products, and The Bible. Between the five categories, MasterWriter covers words and names in history, geography, current events, trademarks, Biblical quotes, and more. As you drill down into each item, you can read more about the item courtesy of Wikipedia via MasterWriter's built-in browser. You can use Wikipedia's hyperlinks to jump around to get even more info on the topic at hand, or even leave Wikipedia altogether for the general Web.



Pop Culture's five main categories provide plenty of fuel to get your creative juices flowing.



The Bee Gees sang about a mining accident; Sting wrote about the Cold War. What will you write about?



From within MasterWriter, you can visit Wikipedia to research the subject at hand.

## Minor Imperfections

While using MasterWriter, I often think of the old song “Too Much Information” by The Police, in a good way, that is. Yet there are two categories of words that MasterWriter should cover. One is puns and the other is eye-rhymes.

Puns are words that sound somewhat alike or exactly the same but have different meanings. Without pairs of words like “orange/aren’t” and “police/please,” knock-knock jokes would never be made. Not everyone likes puns, but they are used in many headlines and play a major role in the punch lines of jokes. I think whatever tagging or cross-referencing technology used for the rhyme words could be used for puns. Puns should have their own reference dictionary in MasterWriter.

Eye-rhymes are words that appear to rhyme, but only to the eyes. Like “slaughter” and “laughter,” they are spelled almost the same and should rhyme but they don’t. Some pairs of eye-rhymes are results of changes in the words’ pronunciation over the years. Others come about through Americanizing British English words, while others are simply assimilation of foreign words into the English language, such as “cannoli” and “hello.” There may not be enough eye-rhyme words to get their own module in MasterWriter, but I think they can be bunched into a section of the rhymes reference dictionary.

## Conclusion

If you are serious about writing songs or poems, MasterWrite 2.0 is a powerful reference tool to have. You get much more than a rhyming dictionary. The many reference dictionaries provide many ways for you to find words related to your words. Words can be found by the number of syllables, how closely they rhyme, intensity, and even in phrases. The wise inclusion of pop culture words help keep your creation up-to-date and not stuck in some archaic mode. Right within MasterWriter, you can read up on the pop culture entry thanks to Wikipedia. The inclusion of puns and eye-rhymes, in my opinion, would make MasterWrite a perfect product.

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# Hardware Review

by Frank H. Wu, [fwu@atpm.com](mailto:fwu@atpm.com)

## 13-inch MacBook Air

**Function:** Subnotebook computer.

**Developer:** [Apple](#)

**Price:** \$1,599 (256 GB SSD)

**Requirements:** None

**Trial:** None



I once worked with an older person who was contemptuous of younger people. In particular, she thought they didn't understand the concept of choice: life is about compromises, and you cannot have everything. That describes perfectly the issue with the 13-inch MacBook Air. I ended up with one, not entirely intentionally, because my 17-inch MacBook Pro suffered a failure of the disk controller. I bought a new MacBook Air, intending to sell it to my niece after I received my repaired MacBook Pro.

I realized that there is another device I use daily that presents a similar dilemma. I ride a motorcycle, not merely for fun but for regular commuting. I own two bikes: a Honda Hawk GT 650 and a BMW K1200RS. A cult classic, the Honda is a light V-Twin. Superior in every respect except one, the BMW goes faster thanks to three times the horsepower, stops more securely with ABS, and has a full fairing plus heated handgrips. Yet I prefer the Honda in the city. The BMW is just too much: its deficiency is its bulk—I don't need the benefits it offers, unless I am traveling a long distance, it's raining, or it's cold.

So, too, it turns out, the MacBook Air is much better than a skeptic might have thought. I was not tempted by the first generation MacBook Air. It just looked as if lacked the full features I took for granted with my MacBook Pro. I'm glad I waited. The trade-off is simple. You gain speed and portability. You lose storage space and screen size.



MacBook Air and MacBook Pro

The bootup is so ridiculously fast that you don't even know the computer has restarted. To continue vehicular analogies, it reminds me of the first time I drove a real luxury car (not mine; I was merely a guest). I had started it, but the engine was so quiet that I accidentally turned the ignition again. I was astonished initially, but I become accustomed to how quick the machine is. In reality, it isn't much of a savings, because with a reliable system you end up not shutting down anyway and I routinely leave my Macs running for a week at a time.



MacBook Air in Leather Portfolio

The slender size allows you to slip the unit into a portfolio. Until you are holding a MacBook Air in your hand, you can't comprehend the famous Steve Jobs introduction of the product, slipping it out of the inter-office mail envelope. The battery life also is so good that I don't carry around the charger, unless I am traveling. This cuts down on weight even further, of course.

Social scientists tell us much that is useful, if only we were rational in our decision-making. Their research offers responses to the two problems of the MacBook Air.

First, I was worried about losing my media, or not having access to it: music, movies, very large files for research. But as far as choice is concerned, you can have too much. While it indulges our materialism, carrying around your entire library of CDs you have ripped is



not actually worthwhile. I have found I use Pandora most of the time, and then if I turn to iTunes I tend to listen to the same tracks rather predictably.

Thus there is no real-world advantage to having the whole library in my backpack. I also could just buy an external drive if I really wanted the option. I have done just that for the occasional flight or extended time out of the office. I also have started using cloud computing. I keep a Virgin MiFi mobile device to allow me to access the Internet.



MacBook Air and MacBook Pro

Second, I was sure the smaller screen size would disappoint me. Yet just about everyone adjusts to the circumstances. A person who is put into the best of all worlds is happier, but only momentarily. The converse is true as well: a person who is forced into miserable conditions eventually reverts to her baseline emotional profile. When you use a 13-inch screen, it is a luxury to suddenly be in front of a 17-inch screen. Whichever you use day in, day out, it pretty much becomes the norm.

It is true, though, that the smaller screen makes you less productive. You cannot see as much material, so you end up switching back and forth more often between windows. A launcher program (LaunchBar, Butler, Quicksilver) becomes a must.

The other drawbacks are not significant. There is no optical drive, and there are no FireWire ports. So I have the external DVD drive to rip media; it's not needed for playback, if you plan. Every now and then, somebody hands you physical media you cannot access right away; it's not a huge loss for me. I do have a tremendous amount of data on external drives, but they all have USB in addition to FireWire.

The real comparison, it seems to me, is not the MacBook Pro and MacBook Air, but instead an iPad and the MacBook Air. I find that I use them differently. They are not interchangeable.



MacBook Air and iPad

The main reason is the available software. The word processing and other productivity apps for the iPad are a generation away from becoming full-fledged programs for business usage.

Another reason is the form factor. The iPad is a painting; the MacBook Air a sculpture. If you are standing in line at the airport, out comes the iPad (or an iPhone). Even a light

laptop is too precarious to balance, and the keyboard becomes useless. Perhaps there will be convergence: if iOS were just slightly more capable, then you could pair it with a Bluetooth keyboard, and it would compete with the MacBook Air. There is a dedicated iPad keyboard dock. I bought one in the exuberance of wanting every option, and I have used it literally once. It's too bulky to cart around compared to the flatter Bluetooth keyboard, and once you prop the iPad up on it you've built yourself a subnotebook, defeating the advantage of the iPad's two-dimensionality.

For me there is no doubt now that the MacBook Air can be my main computer, my "daily driver." It won't feel like a downgrade, either, unless you are performing the heavy-duty tasks best suited for a desktop. (I have to say, based on spending a few minutes playing with one at the Apple Store, I remain skeptical of the 11-inch MacBook Air. Whatever incremental gain in portability it offers is likely offset by the screen size.)

In conclusion, my opinion is that a reviewer of products should provoke discussion, offer a few insights, and provide a basis for a reader to make up her own mind. The bottom line here is that the MacBook Air is more capable than you might have thought, but it is not perfect. My niece decided she'd rather have my hand-me-down MacBook Pro. I'm keeping the MacBook Air. I'm fine with that.

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# FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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

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Macintosh artist and interested in preparing a cover for ATPM, please e-mail us. The way the process works is pretty simple. As soon as we have a topic or theme for the upcoming issue we let you know about it. Then, it's up to you. We do not pay for cover art but we are an international publication with a broad readership and we give appropriate credit alongside your work. There's space for an e-mail address and a Web page URL, too. Write to [editor@atpm.com](mailto:editor@atpm.com) for more information.

## How Can I Send a Letter to the Editor?

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### ***Hardware and Software Reviews***

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## What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

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

