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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the May issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* In this month's column, we look at recent product announcements and some important trends emerging in the Macintosh world of personal computing and the PC business in general. Our publication celebrates what we call the "personal computing experience." We encourage you to read this month's issue in its entirety. We bring you the latest news, views, and reviews in an easy-to-read monthly format. We begin this month's *Welcome* where we left off [in April](#).

Boot Camp

In last month's *Welcome* we alluded to Apple announcing Windows functionality on the Mac. While Mac OS X is known to be a superior, more secure operating system, the perceived comparative lack of applications for the Mac versus those available for users of Windows XP was considered a drawback for Mac owners.

In early April, Apple announced [Boot Camp](#). Boot Camp provides the means for installing Windows XP on a Macintosh computer and allows users to choose between Mac OS X and Windows XP at startup. Released now as a public beta, Boot Camp will be included as a commercial solution in the forthcoming upgrade to OS X called Leopard.

In addition to Boot Camp, solutions are coming to market allowing the installation of Windows on a Mac through "virtualization" or running Windows on Mac OS X. The principal benefit of this solution is the ability to run Mac OS X and Windows applications simultaneously and without the need to restart the computer.

Apple's migration to the Intel architecture will provide greater opportunities to install and run applications for other operating systems that have this architecture in common. Whether or not Apple will provide Mac users with its own virtualization solution is a matter of much speculation.

The 17" MacBook Pro

In late April, Apple debuted the new 17" MacBook Pro. Introduced in time for the NAB2006 media show, the new portable replaces the 17" G4 PowerBook while adding new features specifically designed for the needs of media pros such as FireWire 800 and a dual-layer SuperDrive.

Dell vs. Apple

Dell Computer is the undisputed leader in global PC unit sales. Apple Computer is considered the world's leader in PC design. Aside from acknowledged leadership in different aspects of the PC business, what might these two industry giants have in common? For one, the two companies have similar market values. At the end of April, Dell was valued on

Wall Street at \$60.44 billion while Apple was valued at \$59.77 billion, a difference of only \$670 million in value between the two companies.

Why is it that the world's leader in PC unit shipments, with revenue in its last fiscal year of about \$56 billion dollars, has similar market value to a company such as Apple with annual revenue in its last fiscal year of about \$14 billion?

The answer: research and development. Apple invests significantly more in the development of new products than Dell, and this investment provides the company with higher gross margins on each product sold.

In fact, to keep Dell's market value from dropping through the floor the company has used more than \$18 billion in cash to buy back its own shares. Reducing the number of shares outstanding is the only means the company has to keep earnings per share rising at a rate acceptable to shareholders. The company has now used \$5 billion more in cash than the aggregate net profits the company has earned since incorporation. In other words, Dell is cannibalizing itself in order to keep investors from fleeing the company.

The more of this story: Investment in innovation is often the better path to shareholder wealth. Dell pushed innovation in manufacturing and distribution during the 1990s, and this innovation led to Dell's market leadership and financial rewards for the company's shareholders. Absent meaningful investments in R&D, Dell's share price has remained relatively flat for the past few years.

Apple continues to grow in revenue and market influence due to award-winning products and a commitment to research and development. Watch for Apple's fortunes to continue to rise as the company completes its transition to the Intel architecture and releases new iPods and the next upgrade to Mac OS X in time to compete head-to-head with Microsoft's much-delayed Windows Vista.

Quarterly Results

For the quarterly period ended April 1, 2006 Apple reported its second highest three-month revenue total in the company's history with revenue of \$4.36 billion and net earnings of \$.47 per diluted share. Mac shipments increased four percent year-over-year to 1.112 million units. In the same period Apple shipped over 8.5 million iPods.

Buy a Mac, Give a PC Back

In late April, Apple announced a free computer recycling program beginning in June for US customers who purchase a new Mac through the online Apple store or at any of the company's retail store locations. The recycling program is intended to reduce the amount of hazardous waste created by the disposal of personal computers and consumer electronics. Environmentally conscious customers interested in a new computer may see this program as another reason to consider purchasing a Mac.

Our May issue includes:

Bloggable: Yes, Drill Sergeant!

Something's wrong: Apple's demeanor has turned so military-oriented lately. First, they went from hippie fruit-“flavored” computers to plain white and metal dress uniforms. Now, they're even calling their dual-booting software “Boot Camp.” Hey, Steve, while you're at it, resuscitate “Be All You Can Be,” and we'll be set, booting XP in our standard-issue white and silver dress code. . . . Or not, if this month is any indication. Consensus opinion is that Apple is actually subverting our monolithic corporate overlord, Microsoft. Either way, plus more blogosphere awards, Jason O'Grady, 20 years of Apple, and more in this month's *Bloggable*.

MacMuser: Data Composting

What on earth does one do with back copies of ATPM? Feed them through the shredder? Send them for recycling? Is there any use for digital detritus and electronic ephemera?

MacMuser: Fish Out of Water

You can talk to the trees but they won't listen to you, so try sea gulls instead. Their window on the world opens new vistas for Mac users worried that Boot Camp spells the end of Mac OS X.

Web Sites

ATPW returns with music from a hundred years ago, modern music you probably haven't heard, and the delicate sound of the Internal Revenue Code. You'll also find shortcuts through the labyrinth of telephone customer service and a game you can play while you're waiting for someone to pick up the phone.

FileMaking: Text Parsing With FileMaker

This month, *FileMaking* returns by looking at building functions for text parsing.

Outliners: Outlining Workflows and ConceptDraw

Ted Goranson looks at outliners in a work flow in this month's *ATPO*, with ConceptDraw Suite as an example.

Desktop Pictures: EAA AirVenture

Aircraft enthusiasts will enjoy this month's desktop pictures provided by Chris Lawson. The images feature planes being shown and flown at the 2005 Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture event.

Cortland

We learn Cortland is a James Brown fan, and there's a lot more to Brody than meets the eye—much more.

Review: Footlights Pro 2.1

After a recent How-To for performing video extraction, Sylvester Roque learns of another utility for the job and takes it for a spin.

Review: Hardsleeve

ATPM continues its long-running offerings of case reviews. This month, Frank Wu looks at Axio's hard exterior laptop sleeve—the Hardsleeve.

Review: iPod 5G

Apple's iPod juggernaut continues its revision cycle with arguably the best iPod yet.

Review: iTunes Catalog 2.0.1

iTunes Catalog provides handy access to your library from a remote location—even the ability to play music files. Though it was found to have a few rough edges and bugs, it's still a very cool way to access your music.

Review: SmartBoard USB5000

Is there an affordable ergonomic keyboard built for the Macintosh that will hold up under the worst a touch-typist can deliver? Datadesk may have built one.



E-Mail

SuperDuper

Yes, it's everything the man says.

—*Don Munro*



I also dropped Retrospect several years back when they went to Microsoft-like options and pricing and increasingly poor tech support (and when my tape drives no longer had sufficient volume). Most recently, I've been using SuperDuper and am very happy with it—simple to use and it works without hassle. It would be nice to see an archival feature for previous backups so you could get at data (or files changed) from several months back.

—*R Rayner*



SuperDuper is the *best* Mac back-up utility I've had the pleasure to use. Support (should you ever need it) for the application is top-notch too.

—*Krishna Sadasivam*



I have been using Carbon Copy Cloner for several years now and wonder if anyone out in the Mac sphere can comment on comparing Carbon Copy Cloner with SuperDuper.

—*Jack Barr*



I've written a few comparison comments on [MacUpdate](#) and [VersionTracker](#). Here's a post from Apple Discussions that I made last February (the original's long gone):

I was reasonably satisfied with CCC (which I paid for) before switching to SD so I have experience using both.

Some of SD's features/benefits:

- Nicer, “out-of-the-box friendly” user interface
- User interface is responsive during copying
- Better system resource management
- Superior documentation and support
- Smart Update is faster and more robust than the [psync](#) Perl script CCC uses
- Handles cases CCC that doesn’t (floating owner/on-the-fly verify)
- Doesn’t copy-then-delete items like virtual memory and temp files
- Updated fairly consistently, with optional automatic updating
- Copy scripts (not just top-level folder selection)
- Saved settings
- Safety Clone

Aside from cost (maybe), the only advantage I can think of that CCC currently offers is a built-in scheduler and that’s coming in the next major SD release.

While CCC works fine for many users there are valid reasons why some might prefer SD instead, or consider it worthwhile upgrade (as I did).

Of course that was written before version 2 was available.

Maybe they exist, but I’ve never seen convincing arguments why CCC is superior to SD.

—*sjk*

Performing a Video Extraction

Have you considered the much-less-time-consuming [analog-to-DV option](#)?

The article is a bit out of date now, but the information is basically the same. There are now a number of other models from Canopus from which to choose (high-end to low-end). Best of all, you would be cutting out most of the export, import, and translation steps by going this route. Also, your final video quality might not lose as much in the translation process. I don’t know this for sure, because I haven’t tried it yet.

I’ve been researching both options for over a year and have frequently thought about doing things exactly as you have done them (I may go both routes simultaneously, just to be safe; but prices will have to continue to drop before I do that); however, I suspect some quality is lost converting from VOB to DV. Am I wrong about that?

I like the idea of converting my many home videos directly to DVD, as you have done, without going through the bottleneck of my computer’s hard drive, but I also really want to be able to edit my home videos in iMovie, and I do not like the thought of all the extra steps involved in converting them from VOB to DV and the possibility of quality loss.

I have read a number of customer reviews of analog-to-DV converters at various sites, and most of them are quite positive. Are you in a position to get “loaner” analog-to-DV converters?

—*Mike Welfl*

I did consider some of those options briefly. At the time, I had a Blue and White G3 that had been upgraded to a G4. I wasn't sure it was going to be up to the task. The other nice thing about this method is that it should work for those folks that have combination video recorders/DVD burners as long as the unit produces standard DVDs.

I'm not in a position to borrow an analog-DV converter at the moment but may be able to do so soon. With the transfers that I have completed thus far there has not been any significant quality loss. The tapes that I have tried are not a good indication, though, because they started out in pretty bad condition. Any time things get converted from one format to another and then back again (MPEG-DV-MPEG) there is the potential for loss of quality—especially if the format/settings are not chosen correctly.

—*Sylvester Roque*



For a very straight-forward and simple solution for bringing your DVD projects into Quick-Time for editing or converting, try using [DVDxDV](#). I have used this application often and with great success.

The basic application is \$25, and the professional version is around \$80. Just a heads up—the trial version is free, but will put the words “TRIAL VERSION” across your imported video.

—*Bryan Walls*

DVDxDV is one of the applications that I experimented with while trying this project. I also tried a program called Cinematize from Miraizon.com. Given my current budget, MPEG Streamclip had an advantage. There are also a few other options available. I hope to do a comparison of these options in the near future.

—*Sylvester Roque*



After 25 years or so as a PC user, I just bought a new Intel Mac mini, primarily because I wanted to edit video that I had archived from my DVR to DVD. I struggled trying to figure out why iMovie did not recognize the VOB files. Out of desperation, I found this article a tremendous help. I followed the instructions step-by-step and succeeded at my

first editing/DVD creation without the usual efforts and confusion that usually accompany breaking new ground like this. I am enormously grateful for the instructions!

—*John Dean*

Thank you for the positive feedback. There are other hardware and software options available. Hardware-based options are out of my budget at the moment. I hope to test some of the other software options soon but many of them require purchasing full versions of software ranging from \$25 to \$90 each.

—*Sylvester Roque*

Making Calendars in iPhoto '06

Isn't there a way to print this at home?

—*Jason Madore*



I guess you can print it to PDF, as you can do with photo books, and then print the PDF file to paper.

The only thing missing will be the spiral. . .

—*Sergio Carmona*

TVMini HD

I've had this now for about two months, and it's nothing short of awesome. At home, I get all the basic channels. I noticed that I get them in Standard Definition, but if you go up in the higher numbers you get those same stations in high definition. In fact, all the major shows, news, and sports are in 1080i as well. I've recorded many of them even with the little antenna it comes with. I'm blown away at the quality. Here is what to remember if you are considering: You'll need a lot of space. CSI (Vegas) in HD was more than 8 GB. After I removed the commercials, another cool feature of this product and software, it was only 5 GB. It should be noted that when you schedule it to record, you can automatically set it to compress it down for the iPod video when it's done. Also, check to see what the DTV coverage is in your area. It's great at my house, but bad at my work. Hopefully they'll broadcast closer in the next few years. Otherwise, a medium to large HD antenna pointed in the right direction can make this product shine. I even use it while I'm a passenger in cars, but reception is somewhat limited based on driving direction. This, too, would change if a broadcast tower was put closer.

By the way, dark levels and color have a ton to do with file size. Here is an example: I recorded Gray's Anatomy (GA) and CSI Vegas on the same night. GA was 5.6 GB and

CSI was 7.2 GB after recording. I edited commercials from both, and GA was 3.6 GB while CSI was 5.2 GB. Each were 1080i signals and exactly 41 minutes long. The only difference was CSI has very heavy blacks and extremely rich colors. GA is light, due to the hospital scenes, and its colors are subtle. Both look stunning. By the way, sometimes in playback there will be some stuttering. I'm trying to figure out the best way to playback to avoid this—especially when it's hooked up to an HDTV screen.

—*Scott*



There is, as yet, no really good way to use this or any other such device with encrypted digital cable signals. . . maybe satellite too.

You *can* jury-rig it if you have a little spare cash and don't mind getting your hands dirty with some simple AppleScripts. I've been using a G4 mini with an EyeTV to record encrypted digital cable for more than two years now. I use the [iRed/IRtrans](#) software/hardware combo (I think this is the only extant OS X-compatible IR blaster) and a programmable remote like the Keyspan digital remote. Everything (Keyspan, iRed, EyeTV, iTunes, DVD Player, QuickTime, etc.) is scriptable, so it's easy to whip up some AppleScripts to make the operation seamless: i.e. pause iTunes, turn on the TV, start EyeTV, and go to fullscreen all with one button.

With some tweaking, this works very very well. The *only* problem is that you have no program guide and can't use the TitanTV service. I started to look into making a program guide with XCode and XMLTV, but it's beyond my abilities.

—*Silas*



The *only* problem is that you have no program guide, and can't use the TitanTV service.

Have you tried [MacProgramGuide](#)? It uses Zap2it instead of TitanTV.

—*sjk*

Copyleft, Right?

Software companies need to be realistic and make some distinctions between home users with multiple computers and businesses where multiple computers are actually being productive at the same time. Are individuals with a desktop and laptop supposed to feel morally

bound to buy multiple copies when they can only use one machine at a time? Even in family settings (ours anyway), the times when two computers are in use at once are rare, and even then the second user is probably a child doing homework. If you buy a boxed copy of the Mac OS it will install on any machine that's capable of running that version. You can install a box-specific copy on another model by using target disk mode and installing through the original box. I think it's commendable that Apple does not impose network restrictions, and it's also commendable of Adobe to allow a copy of Photoshop or CS2 to be installed on both desktop and laptop in their license. I think the Microsoft thing about the motherboard is hilarious—is that for real? Maybe they should just ask for donations.

—*Jimmy Gleason*

Path Finder

Cocoatech recently released version 4.1 of Path Finder with significant improvements and new features. The quirk of desktop filenames not word-wrapping when right-side label placement is enabled is still present, but as best I can tell, the bug of not remembering the View By setting (Name, Kind, Size, etc.) has been squashed. And the improved Go To Folder function is fantastic.

A [detailed list of new features and fixes](#) is on Cocoatech's Web site.

—*Lee Bennett*

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Yes, Drill Sergeant!

I don't know but I've been told,
Windows XP's very cold.

I don't know but it's been said,
Redmond's software's made of lead.

In 1997, Steve Jobs invited Bill Gates to speak at Macworld Boston, in which Gates and Jobs publicly agreed to collaborate on software. This elicited significant displeasure from the crowd, understandably, but guaranteed Apple that the Office suite would continue to be available for Macs. It's more than likely that this deal is what saved the Mac, first and foremost. But when Jobs said the following words, the audience groaned:

[A corporate relationship] has stood out as a relationship that hasn't been going so well, but has the potential, I think, to be great for both companies. And I'd like to announce one of our first partnerships today, a very meaningful one, and that is one with Microsoft.

They jeered Steve, in shock, when he announced that Internet Explorer would be shipping as the default Mac Web browser. Not to mention, when he brought up the satellite video feed of Gates on the projection screen... Well, you could hear the boos echoing off the rafters. Gates, to his credit, just shrugged it off.

Oh, how the Macintosh ecosystem has changed in the intervening nine years.

Almost a month ago now, Apple released a public beta of [Boot Camp](#), software that allows you to start your Intel Mac in Windows XP. This is unfortunate for those who chipped in to the \$13,000 prize I wrote about [last month](#), but Apple's solution is, for obvious reasons, somewhat less of a hack. This functionality will be built into 10.5, according to Apple.

This took just about everyone by surprise. My general feeling, and I'm sure I wrote about this but couldn't Spotlight it, was always that Apple wouldn't stop you from booting Windows but wouldn't go out of its way to support it. *Daring Fireball's* John Gruber just about nails it when he says, "after just a few hours, it now seems so...[obvious](#)."

Huh? I'm still getting used to the idea of buying a Mac that can boot Windows. On the one hand, it would mean I could finally sync my Windows Mobile 5.0 device with my computer. On the other hand, it would mean booting Windows.

I'm not the only one torn about booting Windows either. "The Joy of Tech," a Web comic, nailed my feelings exactly with a [hilarious strip](#) using the Boot Camp interface and another that ponders the existential question of *why* a Mac user would [want to use Windows](#). Codepoet [ponders the future](#) of Mac software, with easy dual-booting available (and concludes that it's safe), and Paul Stamatiou suspects Apple is going to [steal Windows users](#).

My fear is that this feels a little like that UPS commercial with the oracle you know, "Well, I can't compete with that." Thankfully, OSx86 Project's founder, Mashugly, disagrees with me. He thinks this is a way of resolving the conflict between Apple and Microsoft while [leaving the door open](#) for more market-share growth. And Jason Snell, blogging for *Macworld*, [takes down](#) *USA Today*'s Andrew Kantor for his column suggesting that Boot Camp might cause Apple to start losing OS X users to Windows by selling dual-booting machines. Andrew's point is that Apple is trying to steal Windows users by giving them a computer that can do both, not the other way around.

Oh, and *Slate*'s Paul Boutin all but cries at the thought of Windows XP on a Mac, since he would really prefer an OS X that [boots on grey-box PCs](#).

Boot Camp lets you buy the most expensive computer and load it with inferior software. Thanks, Apple. Thanks a lot.

But wait—what if Apple offered the opposite deal? Instead of a disk that allows you to boot Windows on a Mac, what about a disk that lets you boot OS X on any Intel-powered PC? I don't want Windows on a Mac. I want OS X on a PC. Dedicated hackers can already do it themselves. The only thing keeping everyone else from loading Apple's OS on a Vaio is a free disk—and Apple's blessing, of course.

I think it's safe to say Apple is never going to make the mistake of licensing its operating system again (see [this Gruber analysis](#)). Sorry, Paul.

The remaining open question is what Boot Camp will look like in 10.5. There's quite a lot of speculation right now that Apple wants to implement virtualization, so you don't have to reboot, especially after the release of [Parallels Workstation](#), which harnesses the Intel chip's virtualization support to do just that. *RealTechNews*'s Michael Santo thinks that's a [better strategy](#) than dual booting. And, somewhat unfortunately for the likelihood that this will happen, so does [Robert Cringely](#). Because Cringely is predicting it, I'm putting the odds at four to six—and coining a new award for this month: the *Cringely Award*, for speculative Apple development least likely to take place. (You may remember my last award, the *JFK Shot by LBJ Award*, [from March](#).) This month, that award is actually going to John Dvorak, *PC Magazine*'s venomous and invariably wrong columnist, for predicting that Apple will use Boot Camp to [become a Windows PC vendor](#).

And, for your monthly *schadenfreude*, I'd like to note that not all is perfect in Boot Camp land. This month's reason why you should stick with OS X: Apparently, there's a risk your

Mac [might not be able to](#) reboot back into your preferred operating system. Ouch. *The Unofficial Apple Weblog* says, “Being stuck with Windows is your punishment for installing Windows (that last one was a joke!)”

Fall Out!

- Many of you have noticed that John Gruber is probably my favorite Mac pundit. But we all have even more of a reason to support his excellent writing. As of April 20, he is no longer an employee of Joyent and is [supported solely](#) by his work on [Daring Fireball](#). Membership, which gets you a full-text XML feed and also XML of the Linked List, is only \$19 a year, or \$29 to get you a nifty T-shirt. I heartily encourage you to [join](#), especially if, like me, you rely heavily on the Linked List to keep you informed and entertained.
- In recognition of John Gruber’s entry into an entirely new class of Mac punditry altogether, in which he is no longer a technical amateur, I want to honor those who do a beautiful job of amateur Macintosh punditry in his tradition. So in this column I am awarding the inaugural *John Gruber Award*, for best amateur punditry, to Panic Software’s [Steven Frank](#). He wins for his entry about [tech complexity](#) and the way certain products may be getting *too* complex. Congratulations. And no, I am not giving him the award just because he’s a fellow Portlander.
- Jason O’Grady’s case, *Apple v. Does*, has been appealed to the California Supreme Court. The question, as outlined by the EFF’s [FAQ](#): Can Apple subpoena Jason O’Grady’s e-mail, through his ISP, in connection with the effort to find out who leaked what Apple claims are trade secrets? O’Grady has [his take](#) on the experience; and Gruber has [an analysis](#) of the situation, although I think he’s a bit too generous to Apple here. I’d be pissed if I were in O’Grady’s position.
- *Engadget* has a great feature from April Fool’s Day called “30 years in Apple products: [the good, the bad, and the ugly](#).” You’ll laugh, you’ll cry, and you’ll recognize lots of products that even you knew no one would buy when they were released. My favorite? The Portable, of course.
- Good news for my fellow student-age readers without summer jobs yet: Adium is now a [Google Summer of Code](#) mentoring project, according to the [Adium Blog](#), which means that you can get paid to make Adium a better application. Hint: I will love you forever if you get AIM A/V support working, so I can really have One AIM App to Rule Them All, etc.

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Data Composting

When we move home and office, we have always set up our new location in a larger space than we had before. Our first flat (apartment) had a tiny back yard sandwiched between the fire escapes surrounding it. Later, our homes grew in size with commensurably larger gardens. Our present house, the largest so far, has roughly an acre of land in an English seaside town center, the car parking area being larger than our last garden alone.

With the growth in garden size comes an increasing burden of unwanted garden material. As lawns get larger so does the pile of clippings from the mower's collecting box. Annual pruning of shrubs and trees creates heaps of woody material that has to be disposed of in some way, by burning, taking to the municipal tip, or composting. Since moving to our present home and office in 2003, I have bought and exhausted eight garden shredders, each heavier-duty than the previous one (we have a lot of trees). As a consequence we have seven compost bins and a wormery that are just about able to cope with the vegetative waste the garden generates. The black, earthy compost they produce gets spread around our gardens, making them more fertile and able to produce even more material to be composted. Plus we get the luscious crops of fruit and vegetables and the flowers my partner loves so much.

If only the same composting cycle could be used with digital data. My first "real" computer had twin 3" floppy drives. The CPM System was on one disk, the other loaded programs into the computer's RAM, and work was saved onto other disks. Although this little computer was in use every day, I doubt we had more than a few floppy disks containing everything we had done with our computer. This included a range of books that were output to "galleys," which were cut and pasted with real glue. In those days the artwork rapidly filled our storage area with large card mount-boards.

My next machine had a 20 MB hard disk, an unbelievable amount of storage space that I never managed to fill even though we had become "desktop publishers" and were combining text and graphics into magazines. A complete eight-page newsletter would still fit onto a 3.5" floppy, and data backup was onto the many hundreds of floppy disks we rapidly accumulated.

Then in 1989 we moved to Macs, one each because we had become "designers." These had 40 MB hard disks, which never seemed to be big enough. We struggled on using data compression techniques, early forms of [StuffIt](#), [DiskDoubler](#), and the like. Floppy disks were still our only form of back up until it became obvious that we needed bigger storage space, and so began the SCSI chains of external devices and hard drives. By then the files for a magazine would need so many floppy disks that we turned to a new type of removable hard disk called SyQuest. At one point we discovered that we had over £1,000 of 44 MB

SyQuest cartridges at printers, photo-setting bureaux, scanning houses, and with clients. This was not a happy situation to be in, and when the first CD burners became available we turned to them as our salvation. We even made a small living by burning other computer users' data onto CDs for them. At least we could dispose of the pile of paper and cardboard that used to be the artwork, as files were "run-out" as camera-ready bromides and film.

Nowadays, after ten years or more, we have hundreds of CDs containing all our work, applications, letters to the bank manager, and so on. Latterly we use DVD's to transport work, looking similar, but able to hold the same amount of information as half a dozen CDs. Our Macs have more RAM than the combined memory of all of the computers we have owned in the past. Their internal hard disks can store hundreds of gigabytes of files and, luckily, have some space left for more. Data backup is still a problem, solved only by having multiple hard disks mirroring each other, both internally and as FireWire drives cluttering up our desktops.

The combined total of our data is measured in terabytes (thousands of gigabytes), an amount growing at a terribly fast rate. The last jobs I did were two books for the Imperial War Museum in London. At nearly 200 pages each with three colored pictures per spread, they wouldn't fit onto even a couple of DVDs and had to be transported by hard disk. I did try to FTP one of the books; it took over ten hours to complete and was not without problems, so it needed watching for the entire process.

Like our gardens, the amount of waste material keeps growing, and we can see no end to it as multimedia takes the place of 2D graphics, and film and music replace static images. The really sad part to all this data we have stored is that shortly we will not be able to access a huge amount of it. We have already left behind floppy disks, thrown away SyQuest cartridges and Zip disks, and ancient hard drives have been erased and disposed of with no thought to what they contained. An enormous amount of our lives were spent creating the information, and it is now lost. Even when we retain the CDs and DVDs, the applications used to make the files are no longer viable. When Classic is finally abandoned, so too will be the CDs (not without some relief) because we will not be able to open the information saved on them.

This will be a great loss to future generations, not because it is our work that is lost but because the ephemera of this entire generation will be gone. We can look back in time to the last century and beyond because the technology of the era was simple and mechanical. As long as the film stock can be rescued, we can see exactly what life was like then, with sound and moving images, because we can easily recreate the machinery to view it on. Printed material, posters, books, and newspapers all preserve the life and times of the people living then.

Our generation uses increasingly sophisticated digital devices, which rely on specific computers running the right programs to access the files. For example: Film cameras have all but disappeared as digital photography has become the norm. At the same time, there has been a move away from printed images to showing them only on-screen. In generations to come there may be a huge gap in their knowledge of our times simply because we haven't

left anything for our successors to see. Where once an amateur photographer would save all his negatives and prints to be handed down, these will no longer exist, and it is highly unlikely that all the millions of digital images already taken will ever be printed or saved in any other format.

Similarly, we could well be seeing the end of printed magazines and newspapers as they move to online and digital formats such as this one you are reading now. ATPM was first created in a proprietary format called DOCMaker, which only runs under Mac Classic. In the next year or so those early editions will only be available to view on an increasingly small number of obsolete computers. In the UK, spending on advertising in print has shrunk at the same rate as it has grown on TV channels and online sites. As the number of cable, satellite, and digital terrestrial channels multiply, advertising becomes cheaper. Many TV advertisements are simple Flash movies requiring no actors or a director and film crew.

Where does one go to buy or sell a car? It used to be the classified ads of the local rag. eBay has made it cheaper, easier, and quicker to address a worldwide audience and has captured the small ads market, stealing the revenue used to run local papers. I used to buy a daily newspaper and Sunday broadsheet, a total of about £360 per year. Now I pick and choose articles from around the world that cost me nothing to read and give a far more balanced viewpoint.

With composting our garden waste, we at least get a new product as an end result that is beneficial to the garden as a whole, and that arguably continues the spirit of the garden by allowing its future generations to grow and multiply. Composting computer data just eradicates it for ever. Apart from the old CDs hanging above our spinach to deter the fat pigeons who live nearby, all the massive amount of time, money, and energy we have put into creating the data will be lost, never to be recovered.

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Fish Out of Water

I was talking with the herring gulls the other day—not talking like King George III did to trees, or our British heir apparent does to his plants. I mean real conversations about topics we both understand and contribute to. In the case of the gulls, their subjects are more restricted than the builders I’ve had working on my house recently. They limit it to “Give me food,” or, “I am eating, get out my face.” Come to think of it, that is about the extent of the builders’ chatter too.

When they first adopted us, this pair of gulls was barely a few months old, all fluffy and covered in juvenile spots. They fluttered their wings, tapped on the windows, and soon got me trained to cook extra food to fill their beaks. It took them only a goldfish or two from my pond before they learned they didn’t like the taste, and if they did eat my fish they got no food from me for a week. Or until their plaintive mewling and tapping on the window got to me.

Now that they are four-year-olds, have lost their spots, and look very handsome in their adult plumage, these birds and I can hold stilted conversations. They are hampered by their lack of vocal skills, and they’re usually limited to wanting food or expressing appreciation about having it. Obviously the gulls are well able to fend for themselves but choose to stay around my garden in our symbiotic relationship. I feed them, they give me pleasure, and they use up any food leftovers and stale biscuits—though spaghetti or roast potatoes are preferred.

On this particular day they alerted me to a goldfish they were standing guard over, left on the lawn by a crow that has taken a liking to the fish. The crow has been the scourge of the garden for two years, flying around with his magpie pal, bullying the other birds, searching among the rocks for frogs and eating my goldfish. OK, so the gull’s warning was a bit like Flipper’s whistling being interpreted as “The kid is stuck down the mine-shaft,” or was that Skippy the Bush Kangaroo? In any case, the fish was still alive, a bit battered, but having survived the experience.

Being a fish out of water just about sums up my experience with Windows. I have never owned a PC that uses Microsoft operating systems. Any use of Windows and its derivatives is limited to cash point machines and searching the local library’s catalogue. When I gave lessons in QuarkXPress and Photoshop on PCs using Windows, I wasn’t in the driving seat so didn’t have to get to grips with right clicking, start buttons, and goodness knows what else. It helped to know the keyboard shortcuts. My only other Windows experience was running early emulators on my Mac, and of course then I was really running a Mac program so it doesn’t count.

When Apple announced its move to Intel chips, my first thought was that it would mean dual booting Macs, getting the best of both worlds: rock solid Mac OS X and all those lovely games I can ask for as birthday presents. Then it was announced that the Intel Macs would not be able to run Windows natively. Whether this was a bit of [FUD](#) from Apple is debatable. Or did they just mean that Vista wouldn't run when/if it is finally released? In any case, it didn't take hackers long to prove Apple wrong, and suddenly Apple released their own software enabling Windows booting on the new Macs. Is this a good thing or not?

From my own point of view, when I saw how much a copy of Windows actually costs, I cannot see any need to buy it. In the UK, Windows XP is around £120 (though prices seem to vary from £58 to over £200). For £249, I could purchase a Dell laptop that comes with its own, pre-installed copy. Microsoft has pretty much bottled-up Windows piracy, but it might be legal to use that copy on my Mac and run Linux on the PC. Another laptop is always useful even if only to act as a Web browser and word processor.

If it is very easy to install Windows on the new Macs, what is to stop software companies such as Adobe from only making a Windows version of their products, possibly bundling it with a cut-down copy of Windows? Why should Mac-only developers limit themselves to a potential 5% of the world computer market rather than the whole? Of course, the 5% who bought Macs did so because of the operating system and not the computer it runs on, so they would have no wish to switch to Windows. Consequently Adobe, etc, will have to continue making native Mac software or lose that market. But if that did happen, what then for Mac OS X itself? Apple is, after all, a hardware company whose computer section is dwarfed by the emerging new technologies of iPods and who knows what else from their ultra-secretive design department.

On the other hand, bench-testing head-to-heads with Macs running Windows up against PCs designed to do that from the start, show the Macs are very quick machines. Jason Cross at [ExtremeTech](#) describes his long-term search for the perfect Windows notebook. He wanted a computer that will run Windows, with a fast CPU, plenty of RAM, optical drive, and good graphics processor. He has just found it, a MacBook Pro. Unsurprisingly, he has started to prefer Mac OS X over Windows XP, though like many Windows émigrés he is still wanting a multi-buttoned mouse—something I find strange because I have turned off all the buttons on my Mighty Mouse to make it a one-button mouse with scroll ball.

The new dual-core PowerBooks and iMacs seem as fast as our desktop twin-processor G5s. What price for those when the pro end of Apple's computer lineup moves to Intel? Usually I have a buyer or two waiting to purchase my old machines at about half the price I paid for them three or four years before. Maybe not so when extremely rapid Macs will be available, which means I won't be able to afford to upgrade. Colleagues who have got new Mac laptops tell me the Finder is running at the fast speed it had under Mac OS 8. A mixed blessing perhaps, as memories return of folders lost "somewhere" when accidentally dropped while moving them around, and duplicated duplicates when I miss the progress bar that remains on the screen for exactly eight nanoseconds.

Apple Macintosh computers have always been a slightly risky choice to make, being off from the mainstream and up against rivals including IBM and Microsoft. The company has weathered some hard times, with the introduction of the original Mac itself almost bringing the company to its knees because of its price, lack of RAM, expandability, and software. Now, Apple is making another about-turn as they change chips yet again. Could this be the change too far? Developers who have only just adapted to Mac OS X may have a big job ahead to make their software ready for MacIntels. If those computers are able to run Windows, what is the point of making two versions available for the same hardware?

The answer is that users like the Mac OS X environment and the Mac-only applications that run in it. With Apple's switch to Intel processors, the best computer system in the world will be the Mac. It will be the only one designed to run both Mac and Windows software, especially as Apple is likely to keep one step ahead of hackers trying to run Mac OS X on non-Apple computers. I just hope that it stays that way or else I'll be a complete newbie and will have to learn a new computer system from scratch, something I will be reluctant to do.

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About This Particular Web Site

by Paul Fatula, pfatula@atpm.com

Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project

Once upon a time, before there were MP3s, people listened to music on CDs. Before that there were tapes. Before that there were LPs, and before *that* there were cylinders. While many people still have record players laying around, few of us can play cylinders, and even if we can they're not exactly easy to find. Fortunately, cylinder recordings are so incredibly old that even the long ears of the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act cannot keep them out of the public domain. UCSB offers a number of live feeds and MP3s from a century ago, making our musical history available to anyone who wants to listen.

gethuman

A few months ago my cable Internet stopped working. I'm so used to being able to google any information I need that it took me a while to find a piece of paper with my ISP's phone number on it. That phone number proved to be nothing but a door into a labyrinth of button-pressing. I began to wonder whether Mark Z. Danielewski was collecting royalties for every minute I stayed on the line. This Web site, if I'd had Web access, would have saved me both frustration and time: It lists phone numbers and navigation instructions to get to speak to a human as quickly as possible. Of course there's no guarantee the human you reach will be competent, but at least you can stop pressing buttons.

TaxPod

Personally, I don't understand the recent craze for spoken audio content. Speech is slow and it isn't searchable or scannable. Good old-fashioned text can be read quickly and searched easily, and it's not a problem to skip over a boring paragraph or two. But for those accountants who have been daydreaming of worthwhile audio content, Jack Bogdanski set out to read the complete Internal Revenue Code of 1986, one section per day. Looks like sec. 25A is as far as he got, but there may be more to come. We wish him well.

Samorost

If you're anything like me, your first reaction when you see the words "Flash game" will be to roll your eyes and stop paying attention; but really, this one is cool. The graphics and the the music combine to create an interesting and puzzling world. Fiddle your mouse about, find things to click on, see what happens, figure it out. When I first played this game some months ago, I wished there were a sequel. Now there is, and it's just as amusing as the original.

Said the Gramophone

Doesn't it seem bizarre that the music industry is taking such extreme steps as [suing dead people](#) in an attempt to keep consumers from discovering new music? Fortunately, there are lots of MP3 blogs out there, aimed at introducing people to good,

non-mainstream music. Not merely a list of downloadable MP3s, the blog links to a song and provides some discussion of why the writer likes it, with a link (when available) to purchase the music if you decide you like it, too. The trick to MP3 blogs is finding one written by someone whose music taste meshes well with yours; so if you don't like this one, go ahead and look around for others. For my own part, I will forever be grateful to Said the Gramophone for introducing me to Lajkó Félix's "Etno Camp" (which I only wish I could find on CD).

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Text Parsing With FileMaker

Pardon my extended absence from this column. Life just has a way of getting away from one at times, and the work load piles up. But hopefully I'm back to a normal schedule again.

As mentioned in the last column I wrote regarding the direction of this tutorial series, we'll now cover some basic text parsing functions. For beginning FileMakers, parsing text is one of the most useful skills to have as well as one of the first that questions are asked about.

What Is Text Parsing

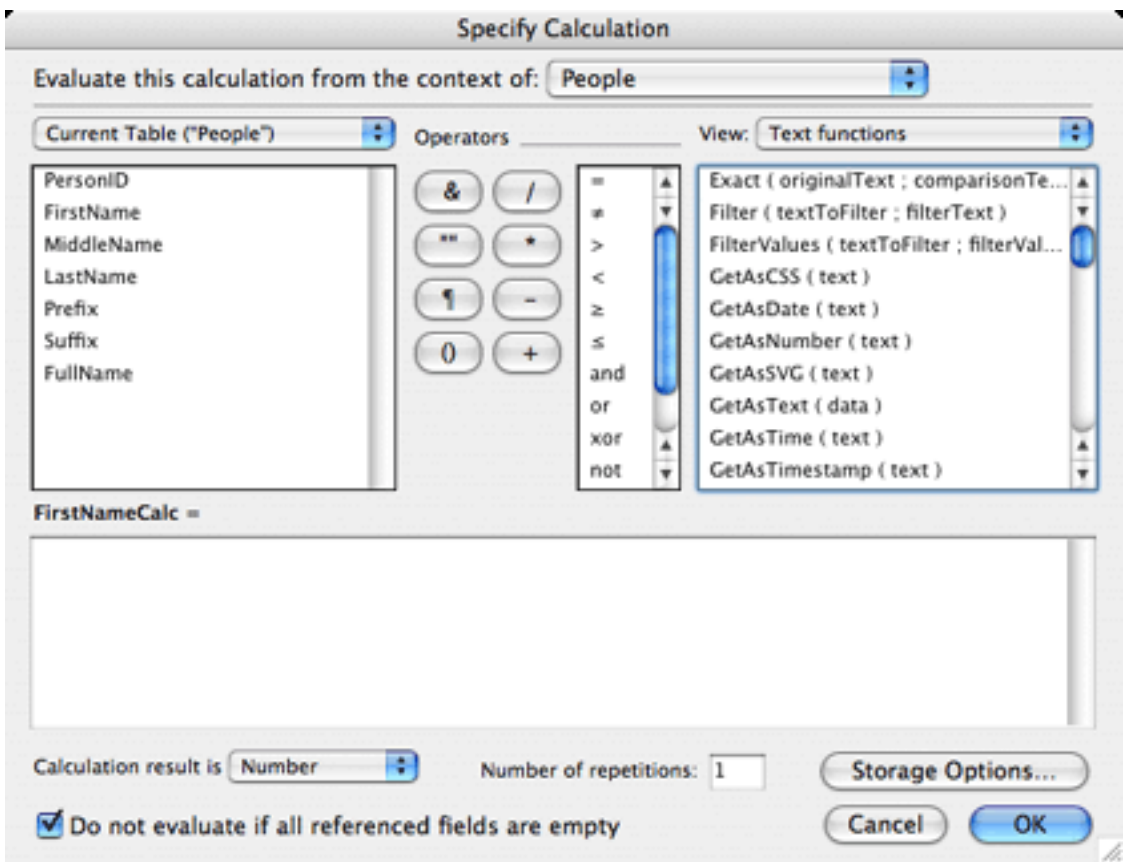
Text parsing is the process of applying a calculation to a string to pull out some other string within it that is useful or to determine if some condition is true regarding the string.

This comes up many times in FileMaker, or for that matter, any database application. I'm currently working on a project where data is received from an outside vendor as a text file, where each line is a record and each field in the record is a particular number of characters in the line (such as, characters 13 through 20 store the creation date of the record, 21 through 30 the product ID, etc.). This format is called a fixed format file because each field is stored in a fixed number of characters. Text parsing calculations allow me to extract the data into separate fields in my database.

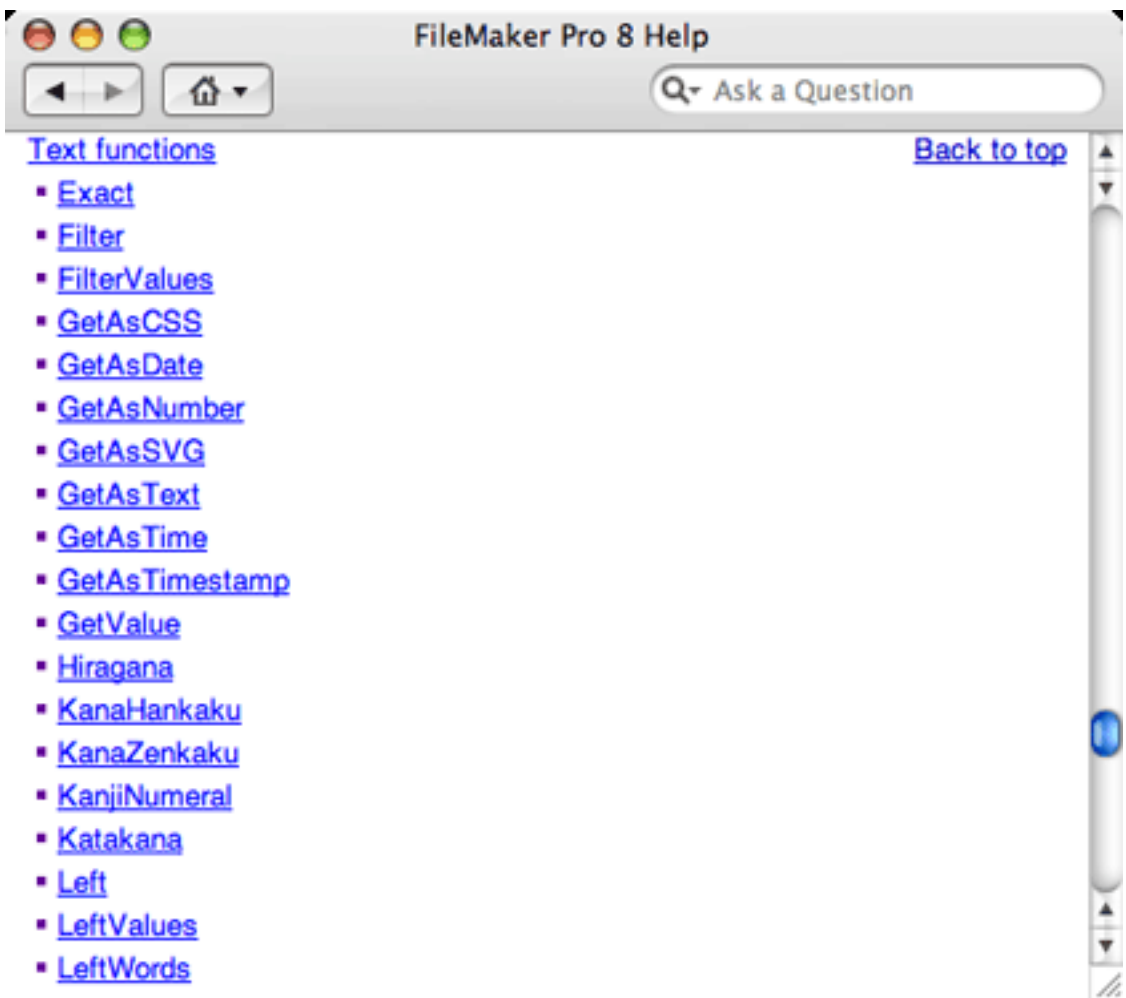
Name Extraction

For example, proper database design dictates that information about people should have their different names (first, middle, last, etc.) separated into different fields: **FirstName**, **MiddleName**, **LastName**. However, perhaps you need to import data from another system where all three of these pieces of information were placed in a single field and you want to break them out to their individual components.

FileMaker includes a wide range of text functions that can be used to help with such chores. You can view a list of these text functions by creating a calculation field and choosing "Text Functions" from the View menu.



However, a better way to become familiar with the available functions is to look through the online help documents that come with FileMaker. While in FileMaker, click Command-Shift-/ to bring up the help system, and then click on Contents in the top left of the window, followed by Function Reference Category List, and then Text Functions. Click the link for each of the available text functions to become familiar with them.



For text parsing, the most useful functions will be `Left()`, `Right()`, `Middle()`, `Length()`, `PatternCount`, and `Position()`.

So let's begin by establishing some rules on how one would extract individual names from a full name field. My own name is a good example of a simple full name, with a single word for each of the first, middle, and last names: "Charles Edward Ross." It is made up of a single word for each name (a word in FileMaker is a string of characters separated by whitespace, such as a space, return, or tab character). We will begin by extracting just the first name. In this case, the first name can be extracted by getting all of the characters before the first space. So the first thing we need to figure out is where the first space occurs, which is done with the `Position()` function.

```
Position( FullName; " "; 1; 1 )
```

Assuming we have a text field called `FullName`, the above will return the number of the character that has the first occurrence of a space. In the case of my name, this will be 8.

Now that we know where the first space occurs, we want to get all of the characters before it. For this we use the `Left()` function, which returns characters in a string beginning from the left side for the number we specify. The number of characters we want is 1 less than the position of that first space, so our calculation becomes:

```
Left( FullName; Position( FullName; " "; 1; 1 ) - 1 )
```

If `Charles Edward Ross` is in `FullName`, the above will return `Charles`. If `FullName` contains `Chuck Ed Ross`, the above will return `Chuck`.

Now, FileMaker does have more powerful functions available to us that we could use. For instance, I could do the above with the following as well:

```
LeftWords( FullName; 1 )
```

However, this tutorial is not only about how to do things in FileMaker, but also how to think about what you're trying to do. I want to show you how to think about the result, and using both `Left()` and `Position()` were more instructive toward this than using `LeftWords()`.

Debugging Our Name Extraction

As we have our `FirstName` calculation, it will work so long as the first name is the first word. But what if it isn't? What if the `FullName` field contains `Mr. Charles Edward Ross`? Our function will return `Mr.` instead of `Charles`. So let's next account for the possible, but not necessary, presence of a title before the first name.

First, let's consider which titles we want to account for. Off the top of my head, I can think of, `Mr.`, `Mrs.`, `Ms.`, `Miss`, `Dr.`, and `Rev.`. We want to check if the first word of `FullName` is any of these, and if so, get the second word. If it's not present, get the first word.

We'll begin by creating a variable to store the list of titles. Unfortunately, FileMaker doesn't have a built-in list or array construct, but we can fake one by using a return separated string.

```
Let(
  {
    Titles = "Mr.¶Mrs.¶Ms.¶Miss¶Dr.¶Rev.";
    FirstWord = LeftWords( FullName; 1 );
    SecondWord = MiddleWords( FullName; 2; 1 )
  };

  Case(
    Position( Titles; FirstWord; 1; 1 ) > 0;
    SecondWord;
    FirstWord
  )
)
```

We begin this calculation by setting a number of variables, including a list of the possible titles that a full name could begin with. For ease of readability, we also set the `FirstWord` and `SecondWord` variables.

Then we use a `Case()` function to determine which word, the first or the second, we should use. The `Position()` function will return a 0 if the search string (the first word) is not in our searched string (the list of titles). Take a close look at the parameters of the `Position()` function by checking the documentation. We are looking for the first word of the full name being in our list of titles.

We can simplify this calculation a bit. First of all, our test expression in the `Case()` function doesn't have to check for the value being greater than 0. FileMaker interprets any numerical value that is not 0 as being `True`, so the first thing to simplify the function is to remove the inequality expression:

```
Let(
  {
    Titles = "Mr.¶Mrs.¶Ms.¶Miss¶Dr.¶Rev.";
    FirstWord = LeftWords( FullName; 1 );
    SecondWord = MiddleWords( FullName; 2; 1 )
  };

  Case(
    Position( Titles; FirstWord; 1; 1 );
    SecondWord;
    FirstWord
  )
)
```

The second thing we can do is realize that using `Position` as a test for one string simply containing another string is probably going to be a common need. That implies that we could create a custom function for this purpose, called perhaps `Contains()`. We'll create this custom function to take two parameters, a text parameter and a `searchString` parameter (see the article on [creating custom functions](#)). Here's the definition of our custom function:

```
PatternCount( text; searchString; 1; 1)
```

After defining this, we have the following for our current `FirstName` calculation:

```
Let(
  {
    Titles = "Mr.¶Mrs.¶Ms.¶Miss¶Dr.¶Rev.";
```

```

    FirstWord = LeftWords( FullName; 1 );
    SecondWord = MiddleWords( FullName; 2; 1 )
};

Case(
    Contains( Titles; FirstWord );
    SecondWord;
    FirstWord
)
)

```

Parsing Out the Last Name

Now that we can extract the first name with some reliability, let's work on the last name. We'll begin with a calculation similar to that of the first name calculation, accounting for a possible suffix. In this case, we'll assume that any existing suffix appears after a comma, as in `Charles Edward Ross, Jr.` or `Charles Edward Ross, Ph.D.`. For the time being, we'll also assume that there can only be one suffix.

```

Let(
    {
        LastWord = RightWords( FullName; 1 );
        SecondToLastWord = MiddleWords( FullName; WordCount( FullName ) - 1; 1 )
    };

    Case(
        Contains( FullName; "," );
        LastWord;
        SecondToLastWord
    )
)

```

If `FullName` contains a comma, then the above will return the second to last word in `FullName`. If it does not have a comma, then the last word is returned.

Note the use of `WordCount()` to determine which word is the second-to-last word. As you would expect, `WordCount()` return the number of words in a string, so `WordCount("Charles Edward Ross, Jr.")` would return 4. Subtracting 1 from this gives us word 3, and using `MiddleWords()` to begin at word 3 and get 1 word returns "Ross".

Refining Last Name Extraction

Again, there's an exception to the rules we've covered for last names: Not all last names are a single word. Some last names are two words, as in `Mc Gowan` (my wife's maiden name) or `von Neumann`. Other last names might begin with `de` or `O` (without an apostrophe). Again,

off the top of my head, I can think of Mc, Mac, O, De, and Von. I'm sure there are others, but that will suffice for now.

So here is our newly defined rule for last names. Assume that the full name has n words in it. If word n is not a listed suffix, and word $n-1$ is not a listed last name word, the last name is word n . If word $n-1$ is a listed last name word, the last name is words $n-1$ through n . If there is a suffix, shift the last name (and the tests for a separate last name word) to the left by one word.

Sounds complicated. Let's see what it looks like. First let's add a variable to hold the possible words that a last name can begin with:

```
Let(
  {
    LNamePrefixes = " Mc ¶ Mac ¶ O ¶ De ¶ Von ";
    LastWord = RightWords( FullName; 1 );
    SecondLastWord = MiddleWords( FullName; WordCount( FullName ) - 1; 1);
    ThirdLastWord = MiddleWords( FullName; WordCount( FullName ) - 2; 1 )
  };

Case(
  Contains( FullName; "," );
  Case(
    Contains( LNamePrefixes; ThirdLastWord );
    ThirdLastWord & " " & SecondLastWord;
    SecondLastWord
  );
  Case(
    Contains( LNamePrefixes; SecondLastWord );
    SecondLastWord & " " & LastWord;
    LastWord
  )
)
)
```

We've surrounded our last name prefixes with spaces because we only want to find them if they are separate words. We don't want to catch the word before the final last name if it's O'Grady, only if it's O Grady.

Note that this isn't a perfect extraction of first name and last name. There are many other exceptions we could account for, a suffix without a comma, or three-word last names (de la Hoya). But this should give you plenty to begin with for your own text parsing routines.

Email Verification

Text parsing isn't always pulling out a piece of a string. Sometimes you need to know if a string satisfies a condition. A classic example is if the string is a valid e-mail address.

You can't verify that it's valid in the sense that e-mail sent to the address will arrive at an e-mail server someplace, but you can verify that it looks like a valid address.

A valid e-mail address looks something like `xxx@xxx.xxx`. So, it has some characters, followed by an `@` symbol, followed by some more characters, a period, and two or three more (i.e., `.com` or `.uk`). There are some more restrictions, but these will suffice for our tutorial purposes.

First, an e-mail address is valid if it has the `@` character in it only once, and if it's not the first character.

```
( Position( EmailAddress, "@", 1, 1 ) > 1 )
  and ( PatternCount( EmailAddress, "@" ) = 1 )
```

For an e-mail address to be valid, the third-to-last or the fourth-to-last character must be a period. (For now, we'll ignore `.name` and other newer domains.)

```
( Position( EmailAddress; "@"; 1; 1 ) > 1 )
  and ( PatternCount( EmailAddress; "@" ) = 1 )
  and ( ( Middle( EmailAddress; Length( EmailAddress ) - 3 ) = "."; 1 )
        or ( Middle( EmailAddress; Length( EmailAddress ) - 2 ) = "."; 1 ) )
```

The first line checks that the first `@` symbol is not the first character. The second condition checks that there is only one `@` symbol in the string. Parentheses enclose a compound third condition made up of two separate conditions, one checking that the fourth-to-last character is a period and the other checking that the third-to-last character is a period. If either of these is true, the third (compound) condition returns true. So an e-mail like `chuck@chivalrysoftware.com` will validate, but `@chivalrysoftware.com`, `chuck@chivalry@software.com` and `check@chivalrysoftware.c` will not validate.

Again, this isn't a complete validation of e-mail addresses, but it should give you an idea of the thought process needed and the functions required to do a more complex validation.



I think that will do it for us this month. As an exercise in using the skills covered in this column, I would suggest writing the routine to extract the middle name from a full name, including the possibility that the middle name isn't provided (i.e., return an empty string when `FullName` contains `Charles Ross`). Until next month, happy FileMaking!

Copyright © 2006 Charles Ross, cross@atpm.com. Charles Ross is a Certified FileMaker 7 Developer and the Chief Technology Officer of [Chivalry Software, LLC](#), a company specializing in custom database,

web and automation software and publisher of [Function Helper](#), a FileMaker calculation debugging tool. He was a contributing writer and the technical editor for [The Book of FileMaker 6](#) and has contributed to [ISO FileMaker Magazine](#) and [Macworld](#) in addition to his [series on AppleScript](#) for ATPM.



About This Particular Outliner

by Ted Goranson, tgoranson@atpm.com

Outlining Workflows and ConceptDraw

In past *ATPO* columns, we've explored all sorts of ways of looking at outliners. The idea is to play with these in such a way that we raise choices about tools and how interactive imagination works. We assume that *ATPO* readers want to have some awareness about how they work and choose their tools accordingly.

So we don't review or recommend, but we do drag out as many applications as we can during the column's meander so that readers can have an idea what the choices are. This month, we'll look at workflows. I've stayed away from this in the past out of pure fear of inadequacy. Workflows are specific things. Each of us will have our own proclivities, and those among us who take what is dictated by the big developers without thinking—even those folks—connect tools up in personal ways and bend them to suit.

And it isn't just differences in combinations of applications, or even different goals (writing a book, keeping a diary, etc.). It's that people have minds that work differently from each other. Bending to the user's imagination is what it's all about, right?

So what I thought I'd do is start generically and talk about more abstract connections among tasks and urges. Maybe a framework of sorts will emerge. After we've beaten that to death, we'll look at the [ConceptDraw Suite](#), built around a mindmap concept. It isn't the only application that's gotten short shrift in *ATPO*. Many others deserve attention too. But this one may be the most unfamiliar, and it is built on a really novel idea—a whole workflow.

By workflow we mean all the steps you go through to do the things that form your life with your Mac. If you were in the newsletter business, you might have drawing programs, a photo manipulation one, perhaps a separate authoring or writing application, and finally one that does layout. You may then have some that make PDFs of, validate, compress, and e-mail the product.

Nearly everything we do on our computers spans different tasks. Probably they span different applications. Even more probably, you'll have several workflows, likely to overlap in some ways. And if you are an *ATPO* reader, you likely are unique.

Workflow Dimensions

In fact, *ATPO* readers will be so unique that we might create a map on which you can locate yourself before you think about tools.

Some dimensions of that map:

Waterfall vs. Spiral

You might have a set number of steps you go through. Once a step is complete, you do not revisit it normally. For instance, you might be someone who brainstorms using a mindmapper and uses [NovaMind](#) to brainstorm on the content and design the structure of a document. Perhaps you'd make some detailed notes. Then you might import into [OmniOutliner](#) to write the document and refine the structure a bit. Finally, you'd export to [Word](#) for layout and to deliver somewhere. Each of these these steps, once performed, would be irreversible. Often this is called the “waterfall” method. Water never flows up a waterfall, you see.

Or, perhaps you like to move back and forth between a styled outline and a mindmap. [Inspiration](#) can support tweaking and creating in each mode. [Tinderbox](#) has something like this, too. You may like the idea that you can see the thing in different ways and shift back and forth. People who like to name these methods call this the “spiral” model because you improve by going back through prior modes.

Dynamic vs. Static

A sister to the waterfall-spiral dimension is this one. At one end is a workflow that produces a result that once born stays the same, say a book. The content of the artifact is static.

The other end of this is an artifact that is dynamic, that you intend to change. A blog is a good example where new entries get added.

There might be different workflows in the same artifact. For instance, take ATPM. There was a recent workflow that produced a redesign of the site. It no doubt involved many steps and several applications. That's a relatively static result. There are parallel workflows that each ATPM contributor uses to produce content. In my case, I try to have it different each time, but each column is static: No changes occur after publication (except the adding of reader comments).

So the content of ATPM is dynamic, and any column is static as is the presentation of the thing.

This dimension is one that drove many *ATPO* readers to outliners in the first place because outliners allow you to tweak content and structure endlessly and publish episodically.

Local vs. Collaboratively Distributed

Many of us have projects that are ours alone. So even though we may be syncing among several machines, the work and workflow is a personal thing. In this case, nearly anything goes. We only have to be polite to ourselves.

But we may have projects that require sharing and collaboration.

Within that, you may have cross-platform needs, in which case Word's outliner, Inspiration, ConceptDraw, and [jEdit](#) files would be useful because those applications have Windows versions as well. Or you might use OPML sharing, which is supported on the Mac by [Circus Ponies NoteBook](#), [DEVONthink Pro](#), [Frontier](#), [hnb](#), [iTaskX](#), [Mori](#),

[NoteTaker](#), [NovaMind](#), OmniOutliner and [OmniOutliner Pro](#), [Process](#), [Pyramid/Incubator](#), [SuperNote-card](#), [TAO](#), and Tinderbox. (However, in the transfer you lose a tremendous amount—only the outline is preserved.)

([JOE](#), [MyMind](#), and [iLiner](#) export OPML.)

Some of the same methods apply if you are at one end of the “Many Applications versus One” dimension. You can go from outline to finished product in one application using Inspiration, [Mellel](#), and Word if your goal is a print document. Similarly, [Curio](#), NoteBook, NoteTaker, NovaMind, OmniOutliner, and Tinderbox can produce nice Web sites.

AquaMinds has just announced [NoteShare](#), a version of NoteTaker that supports full collaboration.

Top-down vs. Bottom-up

Some folks start with an outline of their project. By this I mean they determine all the parts, what goes where, and make some note about what goes “in” each part. Then it is just a question of filling out the parts and some tweaking by rearrangement. Let’s call that top-down work.

Others start with a mess of stuff, items collected from all over the place together with notes that they make. Over time, these folks gather these items or perhaps they digest the parts and create new ones always evolving. The evolution might be happening while new bits are flowing in.

Certain outliners are better at this bottom-up business, where a structured or organized document or collection emerges from its bits.

Tracking vs. Producing

Here’s a dimension *ATPO* has mentioned before.

Outliners of different types are useful for doing work, particularly if the work involves structuring or refining information.

Outliners are also good at managing work. So you might use your outliner for one, or the other, or for both.

I do this extensively. For instance, in writing this column I collected all sorts of bits that I thought about and collected over six weeks or so, and over time I used a bottom-up method to put together something that I hope makes sense.

About three weeks in, I superimposed on the outline of the column another outline of tasks that I wanted to do in creating the column. Some were to-do items, others annotations such as “rewrite this,” “check that,” or “get example screenshot.”

So this dimension isn’t quite a line with two ends. It’s more like a triangle.

Different outliners clearly are superior than others depending on which corner of this triangle you find yourself closer to.

DEVONthink Pro is good at starting with a mess and building an outline, even using AI to suggest structure.

Special Project Types

If you happen to fall into certain niches, new possibilities open up. For instance, if you are writing a screenplay (or a book that feels like a movie—which many novelists do), you might start with NovaMind’s [screenwriting addition](#), which exports to a special screenplay authoring application, [Final Draft](#), which in turn links to its [storyboarding sibling](#). And as a final step you can automatically register in a copyright database and display the storyboards in [Keynote](#).

Our next column will probably be on outlining in multimedia, of multimedia, and for multimedia creation. It might take a while, and I’d really like to hear from people in this area.

Clearly, some outliners go out of their way to support these project types, usually scripts, novels, and project reports.

Perhaps you’ll find this map of help in exploring how you structure your outliner-engaged workflow. You may have read this and already said to yourself that I missed a key dimension. Well, we are putting together a wiki site at www.outliners.org. It’s now accessible to an inner circle of readers who are working to produce a presentable first form. Soon, you’ll be able to extend it publicly. If you want to help with the setup, send me a [private message](#).

The ConceptDraw Suite

Well, I guess I’ll leave general consideration of stringing together a workflow, to introduce you to one suite that has a workflow built in.

We’ve mentioned [ConceptDraw MindMap](#) before, and briefly the associated project managers [ConceptDraw Project](#) and [LeadingProject](#). There are lots of sibling applications, so let me give you what I think is the big picture. The developer, Computer Systems Odessa is based in Ukraine.

I think the story is that they started with the diagramming application, which they claim was not only the first diagramming software on the Mac but also the first commercial application on Mac OS X.

Then they grew a sibling mindmapping application, and from thence the program management one and a couple others. This provenance is unique I think and pretty cool.

They recently took the project manager and cloned it, named the copy LeadingProject, and are building a suite around it based on a different demographic—though I understand this relationship poorly, even after several e-mails with them.

Our topic today will be the mindmapper-centric suite. You can now buy a cross-platform suite that has a good mindmapper (like NovaMind), a good charting program (like [OmniGraffle](#)), and a decent project manager (like, say, [xTime Project](#) or [Merlin](#)).

I gave the Mac equivalents above, not because of much feature similarity. I don't mean to imply that there is. But if you look at NovaMind, OmniGraffle, and xTime Project, you'll see delicious graphics with dropped shadows and Quartz transparency. And you'll also see Mac interfaces with intelligently designed modern features like collapsible inspectors. The bad news with the ConceptDraw folks is that they are a Windows/Mac shop. And when that happens you get the dreadful conventions of the Windows world.

Toolbars are squirted all over the place with inexplicable icons; medieval graphics, meaning the sharp, unshadowed, non-transparent images we left behind five years ago; ineffective handling of styles. That's the bad news (and pretty much all of it). There are a couple billion Windows users who don't seem to mind these transgressions, so let's just set them aside for now.

The integration of the ConceptDraw Suite can be somewhat emulated in an irreversible waterfall by NovaMind, which exports to Merlin and Keynote. Merlin can build a project Web site. Both Merlin and NovaMind import OmniOutliner's native format (directly, not through OPML).

Oh, I guess I should mention price (of the download versions).

The diagramming application's standard version is \$150. The Pro version adds basic scripting, more libraries, and the ability to export to more formats at \$300.

The mindmapping application is \$100 for the personal edition. At \$200, you add multipage documents and the ability to export in forms that support the workflows we mention here: into MS project, the ConceptDraw project manager, and Outlook (on Windows).

Looking at the project manager, there is only one version at \$200.

Buying the suite gets you all three at \$500 (otherwise \$700 individually). It's the suite we are talking about here. All of these are Carbon applications with no Universal versions yet (but the developers indicate the next major releases—in the fall—will be Universal).

Through their [LeadingProject affiliate](#) you can buy a bundle with just the mindmapper pro and project manager for \$250, which if I understand it right is a much better deal.

The presenter is \$200, the viewer free.

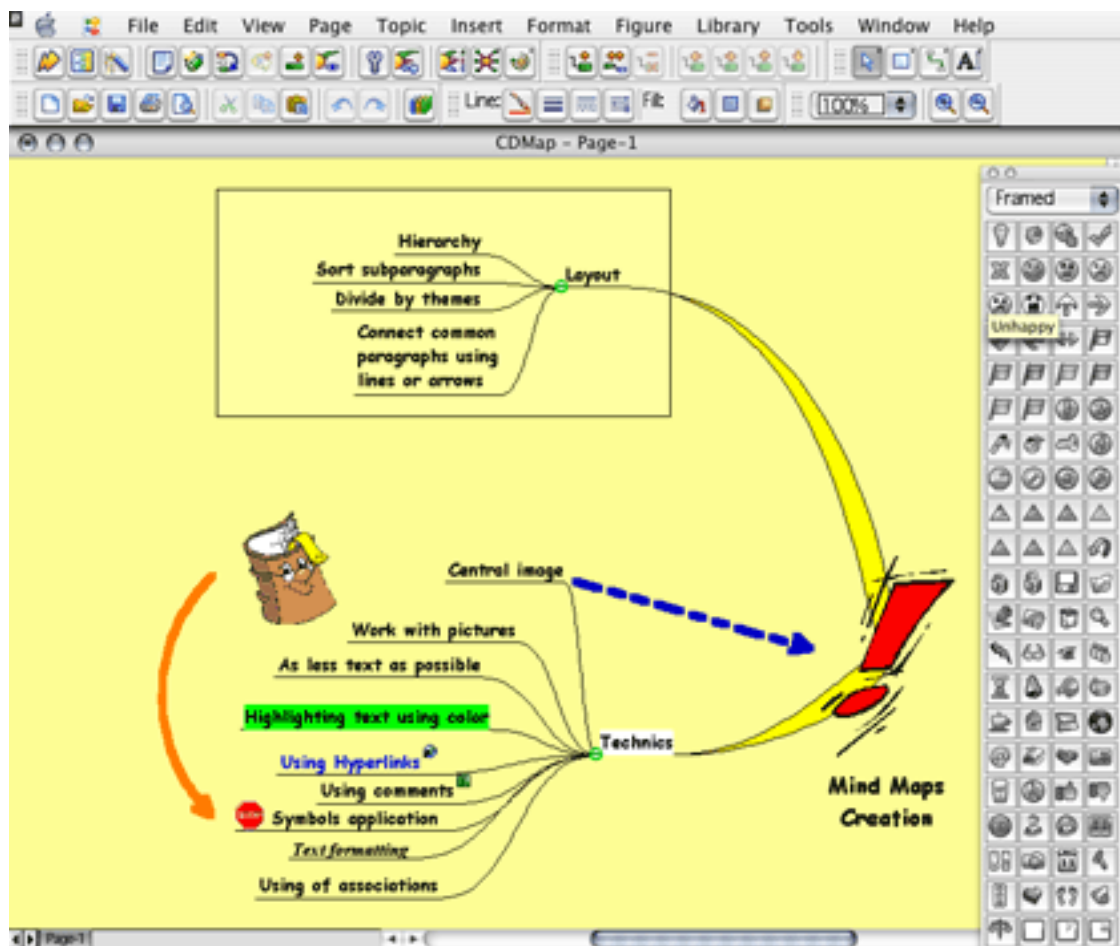
It's not at all fair to compare to other Mac programs because the features don't overlap much. But if you bought NovaMind (\$120), OmniGraffle Pro (\$150), and Merlin (about \$180), you'd be out \$450.

The Mindmapper



The ConceptDraw MINDMAP Pro Icon

The mindmapper by itself is darn good. It comes with a ton of templates. The screenshot shows one of the templates before I started horsing around with it. You'll see about half of the available toolbars, plus a library of symbols that can annotate the map. Think of them as graphical metadata. I didn't show the library of shapes that can be assigned to nodes.



ConceptDraw MINDMAP Pro

I'm not a mindmapping expert, so I cannot tell you from long, deep use of it and others. But I have used it on a project and find all the features I expect with a mindmapper including collapsible nodes, internal links, and multiple pages. Talking to other mindmap users, primarily on Windows, it seems to stack up well with the mindmapper competition.

You can distribute your mindmaps as images, HTML, or PowerPoint files; as interactive read-only documents via ConceptDraw Viewer; or make presentations using ConceptDraw Presenter. Export though OPML preserves notes, URLs, and some other attributes. OPML is vague on these things in its specification, but linkage between the mindmapper and *ATPO* power outliners is better than average.

A version to be released by the time you read this will export maps and outlines to the iPod.

The Diagrammer

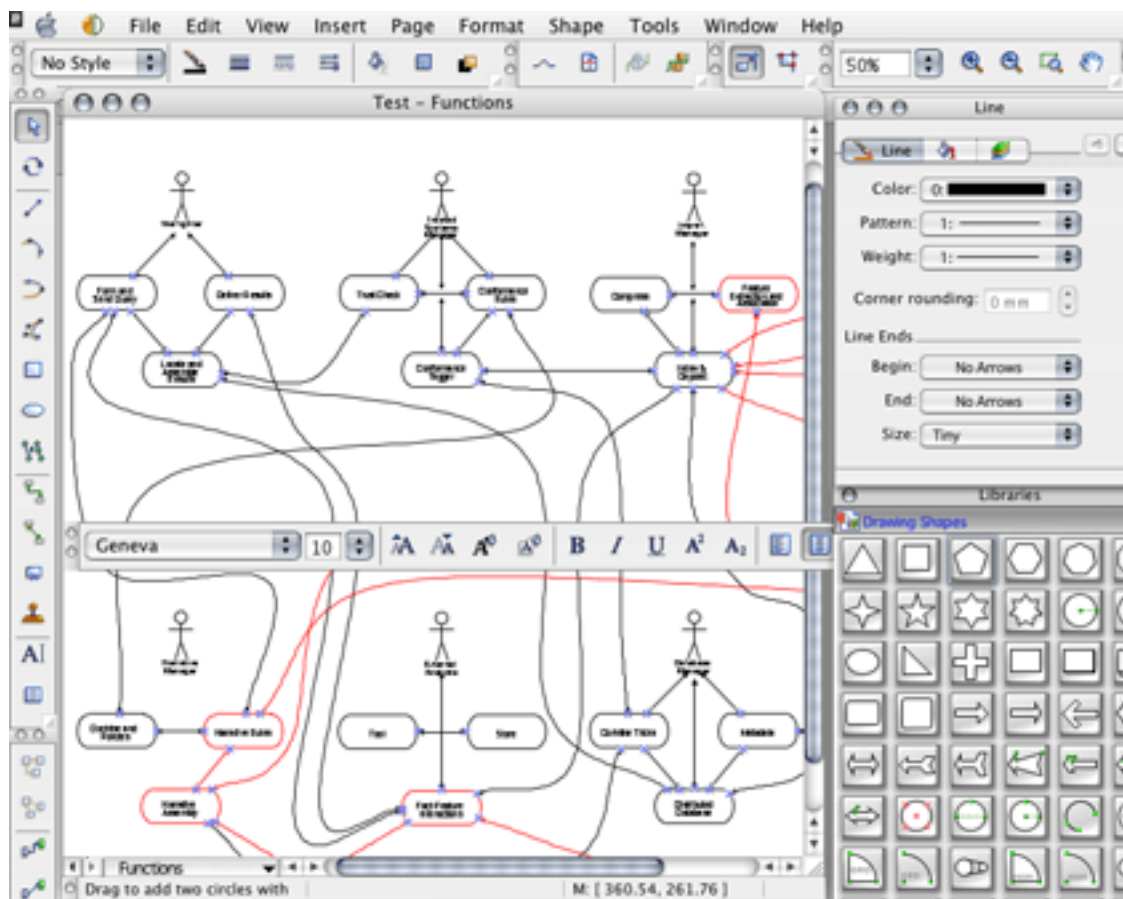


The ConceptDraw Pro V Icon

This is quite a powerful diagrammer. It doesn't make pretty shadows and transparencies like native Mac applications do. That's one of the costs of being cross-platform. Even PDFs of fancy graphics using these effects made on a Mac sometimes go awry when viewed on a Windows machine. (Transparency of fills was added in a version that appeared after I started this column. But it isn't obvious; to apply it you open the color palette, select Other, and a new palette appears that has a transparency slider on it.)

So the drawings won't be as pretty, but they'll be roughly as capable as you can make with OmniGraffle—or [Visio](#) if you are on Windows.

Here's a screenshot of ConceptDraw V with many of its palettes:



ConceptDraw Pro V

That's just so you can get an idea what it is like. I don't really want to focus on the features of the thing because it's the integration that is the focus of this column. But if you are comparing diagramming tools, this one has better bézier control than most, and the Pro version allows you to attach cross-platform BASIC scripts to objects, pages, and documents.

CS Odessa touts their rich set of libraries and thematic wizards and indeed they are impressive. You can buy versions of this application for the same price that are optimized for network diagramming and medical applications.



The ConceptDraw Project Icon

This is a rudimentary project manager as these things go and is patterned after the \$600 [Microsoft Project](#). It's more for task tracking than task management.

The primary elements are a list of tasks and subtasks in an outline with a few columns for time and cost attributes of the task. Associated with that outline is a Gantt chart. Attached to each task or subtask is a list of resources (worker or material) assigned to the task.

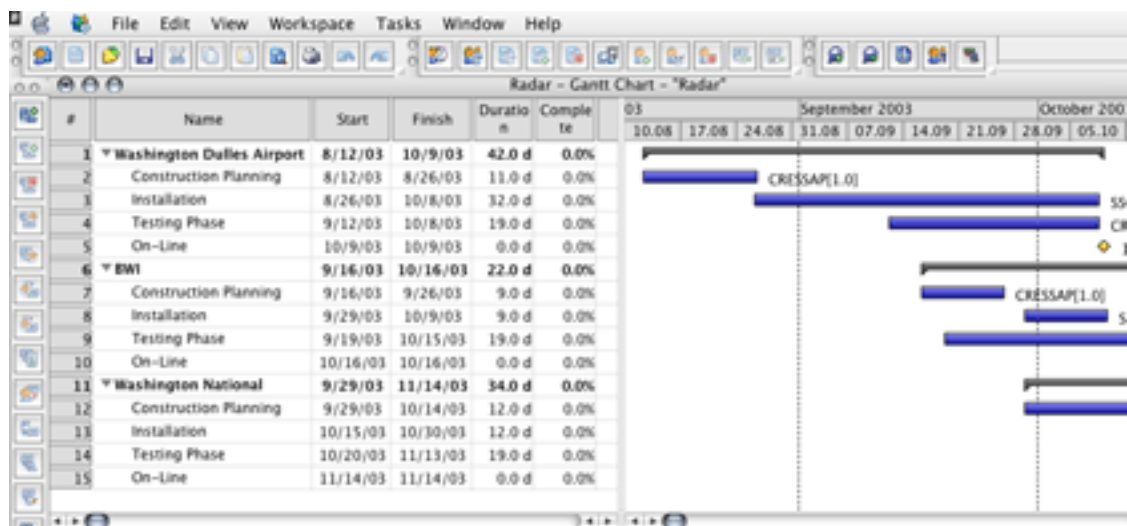
A key feature is that you can manage several projects with the same resource pool.

Mac users will be a bit unimpressed by this application in the suite, because we are used to integration with individuals and groups in the Mac Address Book and linking with iCal for some scheduling and alarms. Most of our project managers have a broader notion of resource as well. We can attach or associate all sorts of documents, e-mails, and such to a task.

Also, the Gantt chart drawing tools are remarkably rudimentary given the drawing tool background.

So unless you are looking at it as attractive because of the integration among elements, by itself it won't attract you. The version I used (2.01) was broken in a few minor ways: the HTML help wasn't connected to the help menu item and had to be requested separately; and the customization dialog pictured therein wasn't available (with the "Preferences" menu item grayed out).

Here's a screenshot of one of the examples that comes with it:



ConceptDraw Project

An Integrated Workflow

The ConceptDraw Suite case study needs more time than your reporter had this month. Look for it next time.

The ATPO Tracker

This part of *ATPO* was envisioned as a sort of newsletter on happenings in the Mac outlining community, with an emphasis on “tracking” the progress of what we call our herd of power outliners. It has been a while since the last tracker, so I thought we’d take a snapshot of where these are. Please be reminded of the *ATPO* stance: We don’t do reviews, and what follows is not a feature comparison. Instead, they are simply some notes on elements that we track. All of the products have generous trial periods.

I thought you would appreciate the time to be comprehensive, so this tracker summary has no screenshots. We’ll add them to the wiki. If you are a power user of one of these, perhaps you’ll help with comments, analysis, and screenshots.

Our *ATPO* power outliners are:

Curio
 \$129 Pro version (\$79 Home version, \$39 Basic version). Many users will be happy with the [Basic edition](#). Curio is a unique product. It is a two-pane outliner where the “note” is a freeform canvas that can be used for a spatial and/or graphical representation of information of a huge number of types. It is, if you will, a notebook for visual thinkers with a built-in Web search agent.

What’s been recently added (version 3.1.1): some real outliner capabilities (as lists, no collapsing for instance); hoisting; a strong presentation mode; [LinkBack](#); a host of “property” controls.

What *ATPO* likes: You can have outlines of canvases, and each canvas can have list-like outlines, and each of those outlines can have any object as a header. Objects can link to other objects, URLs, files, or AppleScripts. There are lots of style and property controls.

What it could use: Full scriptability would make this a killer. Clones of objects.

DEVONthink Pro

\$80 Pro version (\$40 Personal version without scripting and only a few other features, \$20 for [Note version](#).) DEVONthink's strong suit is collecting, categorizing, and searching information collected from others. A wide variety of file types can be "understood," and either fully imported or referenced. It has built-in pattern recognition software to help you find documents with similar "meaning." A partner application, [DEVONagent](#) uses the same technology to include Web searches.

What's been recently added (version 1.1.1): Actually the Pro version itself is new, adding full AppleScriptability and the ability to open multiple databases.

What *ATPO* likes: The wide variety of types that can be included is impressive. It uniquely provides suggestions on how to group files into groups. The association technology also gives better search results of its databases than Spotlight.

What it could use: The grouping of files in the outline adds a huge amount of meta information about the files. The AI association technology doesn't seem to take this added meta information seriously. It would be nice if DEVONthink integrated better with some of the power outliners to build an intimate workflow.

Inspiration

\$69. Inspiration is a cross-platform integrated mindmapping and outlining application. It is old and mature. Though it now exclusively targets secondary education, it is a strong writer's tool that allows switching back and forth between text and graphical structures.

What's been recently added (version 8): access to a large Web library of symbols for pasting. Improved rapid-fire brainstorming in mindmap mode. A built in thesaurus.

What *ATPO* likes: I has an un-Mac-like interface, but it is well constructed. It seems easy for writers to settle into, though it lacks the advanced manipulation commands of others on the list.

What it could use: It is an almost perfect system for the topic of this column, an integrated workflow where you can shift back and forth between brainstorming and polishing modes. But its export to Word is imperfect. It lacks document structure in named styles so none of that conveys on export, not even to Word's outline mode.

Mellel

\$49. Mellel is a strong, Mac-only word processor. It targets multilingual writers, technical and business writers, and others that need long, structured documents. It has a built-in outliner as an editable view in a separate pane.

What's been recently added (version 2.07): nothing so far as outlining. On the document side, columns and section styles.

What *ATPO* likes: the ability to work with structure and content simultaneously within a structure.

What it could use: better outline display and manipulation options. On the document side, there is a deep need for feature parity with the discontinued [FrameMaker](#). XML and SGML support.

Mori

\$28. Mori is a new outliner from the developer of Hog Bay Notebook, intended to have all of its features and a stronger architecture for future growth. It's a new product and not yet as feature-rich as its predecessor. Still, it is the only power outliner with the following: AppleScript, smart folders, clones, internal links, custom metadata columns. No other power outliner has even three of these. Mori is based on Tiger's new Core Data functionality and has an open source plug-in architecture.

What's been recently added (version 1.2): custom columns.

What *ATPO* likes: the clean interface, user assignable columns, links, clones, and smart folders. The ability to have two views of the same document and the way you can promote "lists" in notes to outlines and vice versa. Scriptability, database underpinnings. The open development methodology, which includes both an open source plug-in architecture and letting users determine and vote on features.

What it could use: agents like Tinderbox.

NoteBook

\$50. NoteBook is one of two on this list that use a literal notebook metaphor: pages are stacked on one another, have section dividers, a tables of contents, and a number of rich indexes based on different search criteria. It is strongest in "notebooking," for instance in taking class notes. Multimedia can be in outline "cells," and rudimentary metadata can be assigned.

What's been recently added (version 2.1 immanent): LinkBack; iCal syncing; PDF creation with links.

What *ATPO* likes: This is the best implementation of outlines of outlines. Each page contains an outline (or now, a "word processing" page) and all pages are organized in an outline. It has good persistent search facilities also.

What it could use: a better drag methodology all around for links and outline-to-outline rearranging.

NoteTaker

\$70. NoteTaker also uses the notebook metaphor of stacked pages of outlines with tables of contents and rich indexes. It seems to focus more on richer media types and features

and has many of both. Development is aggressive. Integration with a variety of Internet technologies is strong.

What's been recently added (version 1.9.10): The big news is that a partner application, NoteShare (\$150), has been released with all the capabilities of NoteTaker and which allows collaborative authoring. With the appearance of Tiger, NoteTaker added Automator, Spotlight, and Dashboard support.

What *ATPO* likes: It is fully AppleScriptable, has good XML support, and has an open plug-in architecture for cells. We like how it solved the drag problems with stacked outlines. Has a good clipping strategy for getting things in.

What it could use: It still has a less elegant user interface than others on this list, and it has no distinct equivalent to a "note" or paragraph entry so integration in a publishing workflow is stymied despite the XML and scripting support.

OmniOutliner

\$70 Pro edition (\$40 otherwise). OmniOutliner is probably the most widely used on this list, was the first OS X outliner, and has been bundled on new Macs. It is elegant and mature, a conventional outliner in many ways. Its strengths are in how it fully supports columns and styles. It has an extremely polished and well considered user interface. It has strong AppleScript and XML support.

What's been recently added (version 3.5): 3.5 added LinkBack support, version 3 added Spotlight and Automator support.

What *ATPO* likes: This just flows with the Zen of the Mac interface and in many ways seems more Mac-like than Apple's own applications. The way it is designed, it can be used in many ways: as a writing tool, as a collector's notebook, as a task or list manager, as a lightweight spreadsheet. Its flexibility is apparent in the free and very useful "getting things done" add-on scripts by [Ethan J. A. Schoonover](#).

What it could use: It lacks key features *ATPO* trumpets, namely internal links, smart folders, and clones. Its support for live Web viewing and some media types is underwhelming.

Process2

\$39. Process2 is one of those applications that flows well. It seems simple but is highly leverageable. *ATPO* thinks of it best as an outliner built as a project manager with project development tools integrated. *ATPO* talks a lot about this strength of outliners: the ability to work at two levels. One level makes stuff, the other tracks the making of the stuff. It simply has an outline of tasks and allows you to make notes or attach and view a variety of associated files.

What's been recently added (version 2): iCal sync, Bonjour collaboration, Spotlight, and custom columns.

What *ATPO* likes: It uses Tiger's Core Data so it is scalable, fast, and clean. It isn't complicated. It does a few things and well, one of them being our valued manage-while-you-work.

What it could use: It has a three-pane setup in its main view where one pane has the header in outline mode and another has the “note” associated with that header. In this pane, you can create notes or view attachments, one at a time. A neat badge at the top of this pane shows the file type and name. The problem is in assembling your project from your attached sources. Process needs a well-designed drag strategy.

TAO

\$30. TAO is something of a phenomenon. It is designed to replicate and improve on the venerated MORE. If you think of it as a writer’s tool instead of a notebook, it has a relentless list of features which we won’t list here. There’s an update every few days!

What’s been recently added (version 1.1): Spotlight and multimedia support. Growing support for named, CSS-type styles.

What *ATPO* likes: TAO values many things we do: clones, links, header manipulation/merging/splitting, and split editing. It has a high-level view that shows the document schematically. TAO has growing, apparently intelligent, support for named styles and user-definable columns.

What it could use: It’s so rich in some ways and deficient in others. The main problem—how can we say this—is that the user interface isn’t as competent as the soul of the thing. It’s a mess compared to the others on this list, almost proudly un-Mac-like. Featurewise, the biggest need is AppleScript support.

Tinderbox

\$192 initially (\$90/year thereafter for upgrades). Tinderbox is the most capable of the power outliners in most respects. It has remarkable smart agent capabilities, clones, and links. It can shift between outline view and several graphical views, most notably a “map” view where headers are boxes that “contain” other boxes. Since its appearance, it has always been the king in terms of most features plus its internal scripting language.

What’s been recently added (version 3.06): Improved support for images. The ability to have scripts act on notes without needing to collect them as clones.

What *ATPO* likes: We think this has the best user interface conventions for the things that matter: dragging, cloning, linking. The map view is the most Mac-like spatial thing we’ve ever seen, in terms of the original spatial-Finder metaphor. Tinderbox’s internal scripting language is the most advanced and powerful of anything on the list. It’s native format is XML.

What it could use: AppleScript. Continued improvement in the internal scripting language, particularly advanced control over text manipulation in notes (which would be simple if AppleScript were callable). It has a weak multimedia, clipping, and import strategy. Manually editing attributes is clumsy. Linking with the file system is poor compared to almost any other on this list.



In addition *ATPO* tracks some mindmappers (in addition to Inspiration, mentioned above):

Incubator

\$49. Incubator is the successor to Pyramid. Its not clear whether Pyramid (\$33) will continue to be offered.

What's been recently added (version 2.1.2): The whole incarnation as Incubator is new. New features are nicer curved connection lines; relocatable branch locations with nice alignment and distribution controls; collapsible branches; and an outline view. Plus links, internal and external.

What *ATPO* likes: It supports multiple canvases (pages). Beyond that, *ATPO* likes the mere fact that these guys exist. Featurewise, this has been the underdog compared to its competitors. Now it is pretty darn good. We often like to work with generated text only. Incubator doesn't allow images as nodes and all that, so if you want to stick with plain old fashioned words, you might find this clean and useful as it fits the outlining paradigm more than the mindmapping dogma.

What it could use: You can view the outline in a drawer, but not edit it. If you could edit the outline, or at least edit notes, it would be a good alternative for text-oriented mindmapping because you could see and tinker with the outline and map in one view.

NovaMind

\$99 (Screenwriter Edition \$119). NovaMind has a reputation as the most feature-rich mindmapper on the Mac. Because the Mac has such superior graphics and user interface conventions, some cross platform users claim it is the best overall.

What's been recently added (version 3.0.19): NovaMind is now also available on Windows. The user interface now employs collapsible inspectors. An editable outline view is available. Lots of branch attributes have been added to support the screenwriting and project management/Merlin modes.

What *ATPO* likes: This makes beautiful mindmaps, and the features are cool, especially the rapid-fire ones. We particularly like the screenwriter and project management attributes and the inspector interface. The editable outline view is welcome. Import from OmniOutliner is one-way only, but very nice. The Web site export has cool code to hide/show branches.

What it could use: You can only have one canvas per mindmap. (You can open as many individual files as you wish, of course.) You can attach text to branches just as you can graphics. But these are not handled as notes in the export or outline. As a result, the outline view is extremely rudimentary, virtually useless for power outlining. It would be nice to round trip to and from OmniOutliner. The screenwriting version could be stretched for all sorts of writing projects using a template system.

ConceptDraw Mindmap

\$200 (a \$100 version lacks multiple pages and some integration features). In the first part of this column you were introduced to this capable, cross-platform mindmapper. The Pro version has project management features.

What's been recently added (version 4.2): Better support for integration with the ConceptDraw and Microsoft project managers. OPML export and import.

What *ATPO* likes: We like this for the reason we displayed in the column: a workflow within a suite, such as it is. What we didn't mention was its good integration with Microsoft Word. You can round trip to and from Word's outliner and retain the structure and text.

What it could use: The whole line of ConceptDraw products is worth considering, but the Windows user interface seems clunky when set beside real Mac applications. If the user interface were re-engineered, the integration with its own and Microsoft's suites would be compelling.



ATPO also tracks some outline-savvy project managers:

iTaskX

\$84. *iTaskX* is a robust project manager with several graphical views anchored by a task outline.

What's been recently added (version 2.1): Spotlight support.

What *ATPO* likes: It has user controls over how the charts are drawn, and the results can be lovely.

What it could use: User definable columns. You can now attach one document per task. The outline should be expandable to accommodate any number of evolving documents.

Merlin

145 Euros (about \$179 dollars). *Merlin* is a strong project manager built around several views in one window. It integrates with *iCal*, *Mail* and *Address Book*, and allows more attributes and reports than others.

What's been recently added (version 1.3.9): *Spotlight* and *NovaMind* integration. Gantt chart shadows.

What *ATPO* likes: The *NovaMind* integration, obviously. It's very cool to make a map and have a complete project. *Merlin* also imports *OmniOutliner 2* outlines. (The current version is 3.5.)

What it could use: Round trip among *OmniOutliner*, *NovaMind*, and *Merlin*. The ability to attach files as resources. Scriptability (like the competitor, [Schedule](#)) and attaching of scripts to events. Also, the graphical views have no display options. Again, matching *Schedule* in this regard would be nice.

ProjectX

\$199. ProjectX is much like the other two we track. It appears to have strong chart support, Web publishing, and has nifty Dashboard widgets to display task progress. It also integrates with all the core Mac applications.

What's been recently added: This is a new application, still officially in beta it seems. It won best of show in last January's Macworld Expo.

What *ATPO* likes: *ATPO* hasn't gotten its filthy mitts on a copy of this yet.



And finally the tracker reports random news:

- You'll recall our [appreciation](#) of the classic outliner Acta, which first developed some of the interface conventions we still use. It is available for free. With the loss of Classic on the new Intel Macs (boo!), all these classic outliners will be unavailable. So the original author of Acta, [David Dunham](#), is writing a Cocoa version. Stay tuned.
- We announced with great flourish that Frontier was being made open source. Well, I guess it was too late because virtually no one has jumped on the bandwagon. In that [same column](#), we discussed [activeRenderer](#) that was expected to grow to general linkage with outliners. It has languished.
- In a few *ATPO* columns, we mentioned the project manager Daylite (sometimes misspelling it as DayLight). Its version 3 is out now and it has moved away from the outline view of tasks. It's an illustrative case against outlining for some purposes. [Yojimbo](#) a new information manager from a solid developer, aggressively avoids outlining. We'll explore the ideas behind these decisions in the next column.
- [Jer's Novel Writer](#) is a new word processor, obviously tailored for novelists. It features a built-in outliner. Interesting. It's still in beta with no documentation. The expected cost is unknown.
- [SmartIdeas](#) is a new cross-platform \$59 mindmapper for school kids. *ATPO* hasn't worked with it yet, but it seems to have a unique feature: the ability to create elements that zoom into new mindmap pages.
- At \$35, [MacJournal](#) is now at version 4. We mentioned the previous version in our [last column](#). Among other new features, this version now allows nested "journals," which would look like folders in an ordinary outliner.
- In our [very first column](#), we mentioned outlining in [Emacs](#), a feature-rich but Mac-unfriendly editor. Now you can get [an extremely Mac-friendly version](#). It's free!

- *ATPO* usually doesn't highlight any entry in an outliner category. But if you want to use the outliner paradigm with your contacts, this is your only choice. Where Apple's Address Book allows you to collect contacts into groups, with [OD4Contact](#) you can have nested groups. Way cool. It is a full PIM, but it stores its data in the Address Book, so you can use it to just organize your contacts and use another PIM if you wish (one that allows outlining in task lists!), so long as that also pulls out of the Address Book. OD4Contact is \$55.
- We've still been looking for ways to use the Finder as part of a flexible outliner system. If you are on this quest, consider [Spotlight metatags](#) as part of your solution. Or perhaps in Mail, a [similar](#) strategy.



Our next column will be on what it means to be a child. Send ideas and insights if you have them. Be clever and creative until next time.

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EAA AirVenture

This Month's Desktop Pictures

These photos were taken by Chris Lawson at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) AirVenture 2005 event held in Oshkosh, WI. He used a Canon Digital Rebel XT and Canon 100-300mm zoom lens. A couple of the nose art photos may have been taken with a Canon 18-55mm lens.

- A-1 Skyraider: single-seat attack bomber of the 1950s–1970s that saw a great deal of service in Korea and Vietnam.
- Aeroshell Diamond Climb: the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team does a climb in the classic “diamond” formation pioneered by the Blue Angels in 1946.
- Aeroshell Diamond Dive: the Aeroshell team dives through on the back side of a loop. In the background are the four smoke trails from the climbing portion of the loop.
- Aeroshell Diamond Fly-By: the Aeroshell team makes a high-speed pass across the show line.
- Aeroshell Loop: the Aeroshell team finishes the top of the loop as the flight lead starts his descent.
- Aluminum Overcast: the Experimental Aircraft Association’s B-17, “Aluminum Overcast” shows off her nose art.
- AT-11Kansan Front: frontal shot of an AT-11Kansan, a military version of the classic Beech 18 twin-radial transport that was used for training thousands of bombardiers and navigators in World War II.
- AT-11 Left Engine: this is a close-up of the gorgeous Pratt and Whitney R-985 radial engine and Hamilton Standard propeller. Also visible is the bombsight in the nose.
- AT-11 Left Rear: the AT-11 faces west, overlooking the outskirts of the Warbirds display area at Oshkosh.
- Beech 18: the civilian transport version of the AT-11, the Beechcraft Model 18. Note the seaplane taking off in the background (just over the cockpit of the 18).
- Campbell Pitts S-1S: Scott Campbell’s Pitts S-1S aerobatic biplane.

- DC-3 Nose: looking up at the nose of another classic, the Douglas [DC-3](#). If you haven't seen one of these in person, or if you've seen one next to a modern airliner, you don't really have any concept of how big the DC-3 is. They're quite large, and the nose sits a good 12–15 feet above the ground.
- Devil Dog: the [Commemorative Air Force's B-25](#) “Devil Dog” nose art.
- Diamond Lil (B-24) Nose Art: one of only a very few (two?) [B-24 Liberators](#) still flying, “Diamond Lil” is another Commemorative Air Force 'bird. Nice nose art!
- Douglas DC-3: a wider view of the aforementioned Douglas DC-3.
- F-16: a USAF [F-16 Fighting Falcon](#) landing after the Heritage Flight.
- F-4 Phantom: a retired USAF [F-4 Phantom II](#) landing after the Heritage Flight.
- F-4 Taxiing: the above aircraft taxis past show center after the Heritage Flight.
- F4U Corsair: a US Marines [Corsair](#) (probably a [Chance Vought](#) F4U) on static display. The F4U was the first US single-engine production aircraft capable of 400 MPH in level flight.
- F8F Bearcat 2: the Grumman [F8F Bearcat](#) was the United States' carrier-based answer to the [FW-190](#), but didn't enter military service until after World War II ended. It was the last piston-powered fighter that Grumman built.
- F8F Bearcat: another shot of a Bearcat in slightly different paint.
- Fairchild PT-23 Front: the [Fairchild PT-23](#) was one of several very similar aircraft (the major differences among them being the engine) used as primary trainers by both the Army Air Corps and RAF during World War II.
- Fairchild PT-23 Profile: the same PT-23 as above, viewed from the side.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

iCab and Interarchy can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once. Use the “Web ▾ Download Entire Site” command in the File menu, giving it the URL to the pictures page above. In iCab, use the Download command to download “Get all files in same path.”

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, feel free to send it to editor@atpm.com and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue. Have a

regular print but no scanner? Don't worry. E-mail us, and we tell you where to send it so we can scan it for you. Note that we cannot return the original print, so send us a copy.

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x and 10.4.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

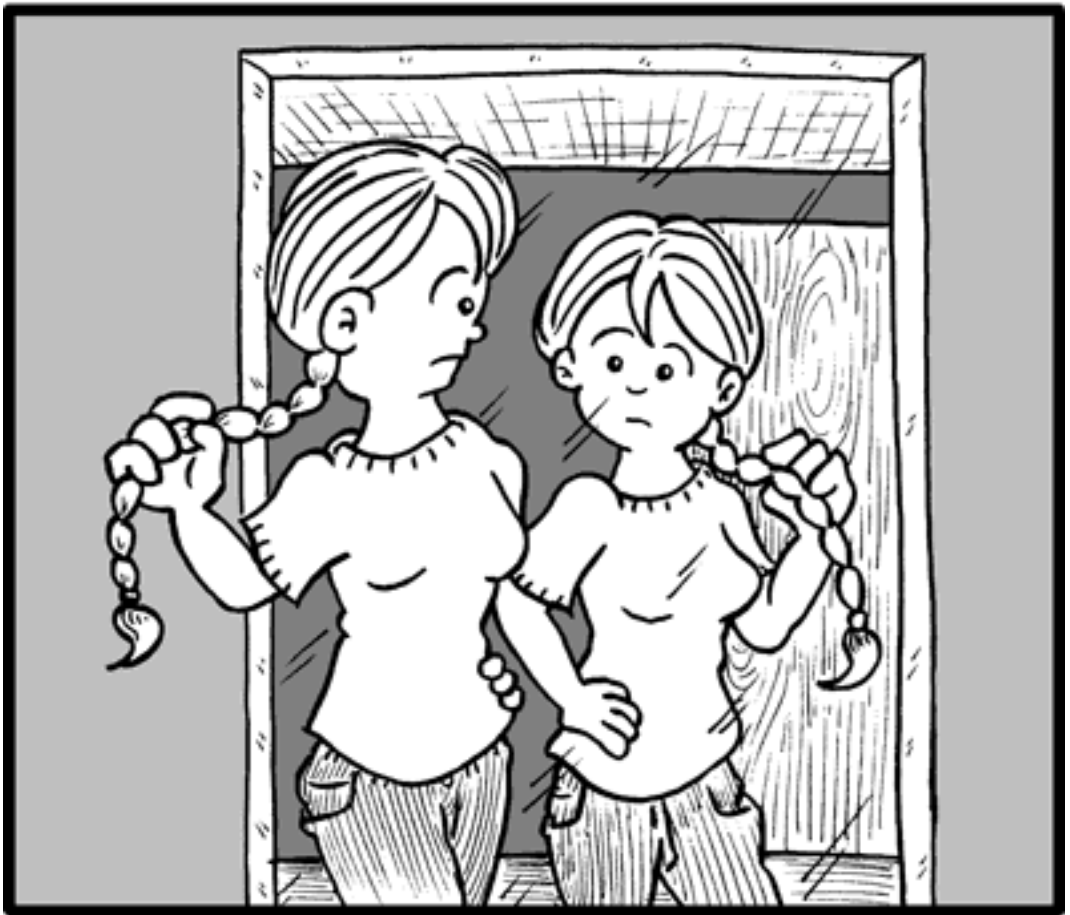
Switch to the Finder. Choose "Preferences..." from the "Finder" menu. Click on the "Select Picture..." button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the "Finder Preferences" window when you are done.



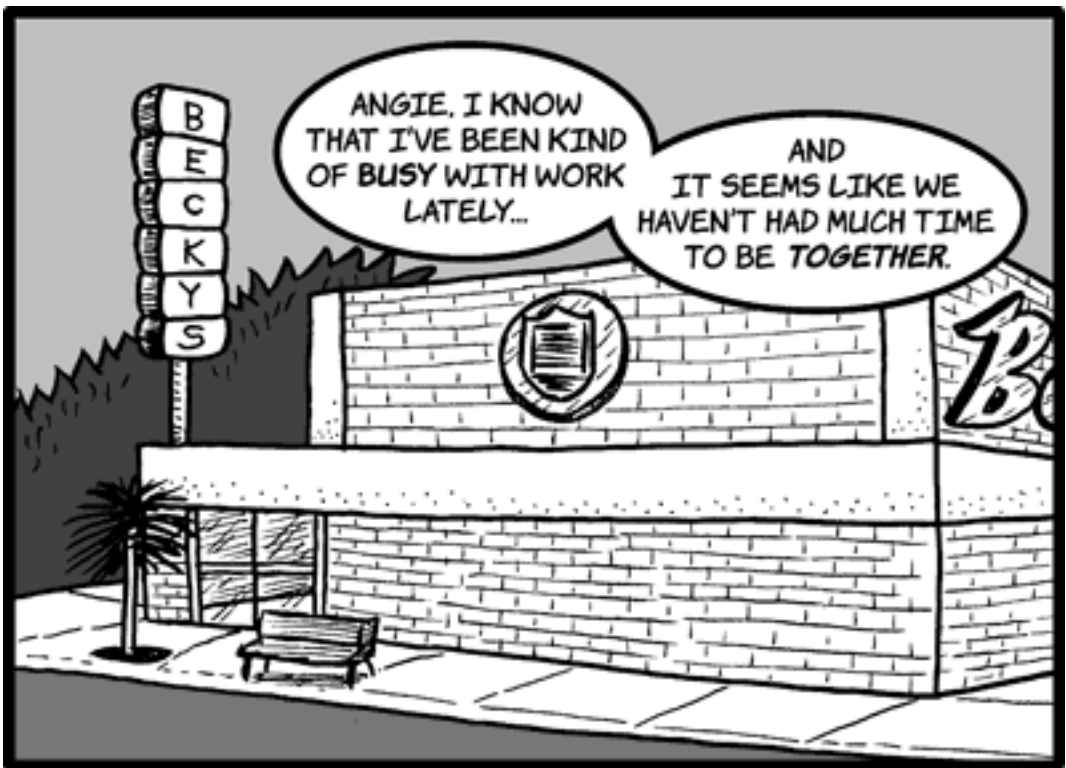
Cortland

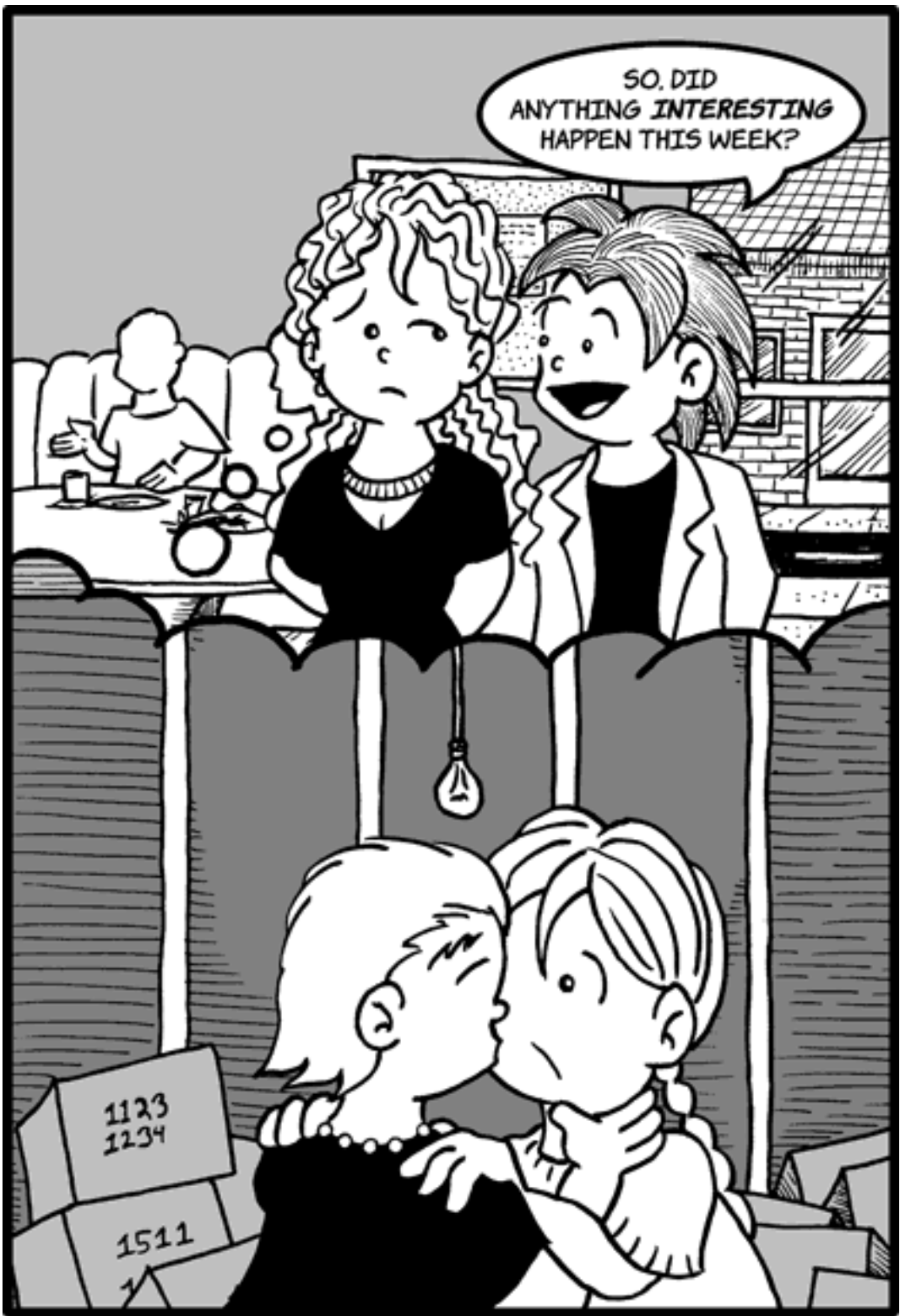
by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com













TODD, THAT WAS
WRONG. THAT WAS
SO WRONG.

I LIKE YOU,
TODD, BUT CORTLAND
AND I LOVE EACH
OTHER



THERE'S A
SPECIAL BOND
WE SHARE...



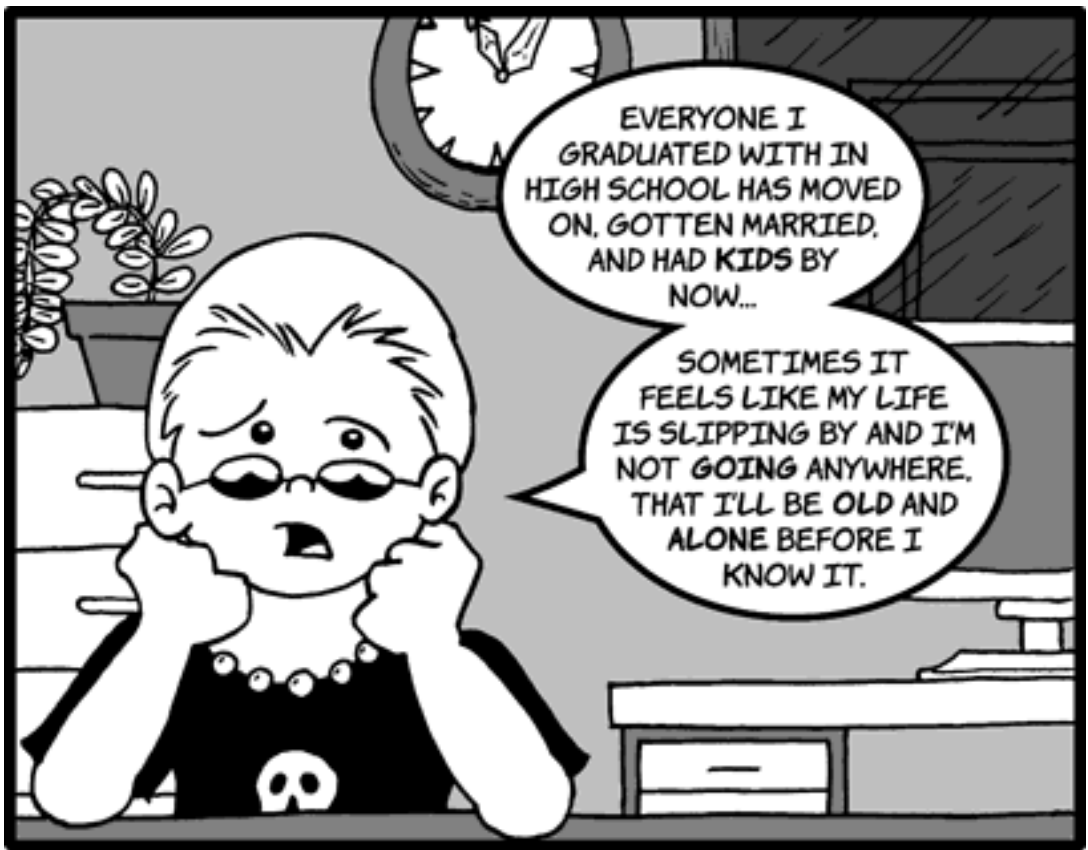
...AND
NOTHING'S GOING
TO CHANGE THAT.



















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Software Review

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Footlights Pro 2.1

Developer: [RadicalBreeze Software](#)

Price: \$15

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3. Not [Universal](#).

Trial: Feature-limited (free non-Pro version lacks movie exporting)



When Footlights came up for review in this month's issue I was intrigued. Part of my excitement stems from the fact that I am a digital pack rat. I mean, so what if I have several utilities that perform almost the same task? I was also intrigued by the possibility that the Pro version of Footlights program might replace MPEG Streamclip in the [video extraction process](#) that I outlined in a previous issue.

So, What Is Footlights?

Apple's dictionary included in the current release of OS X defines footlights as "a row of spotlights along the front of a stage at the level of the actors' feet." Now, the folks at RadicalBreeze Software, makers of such programs as [DiscBlaze](#) and [RadicalPhoto](#) bring us Footlights 2.1. Footlights is available for free but unlocking the video conversion features will cost you \$15 to purchase a serial number.

So, how well does Footlights work? Is it worth the time, effort, and money? Let's open the lab, fire up the Mac, and take a look. Keep in mind as we test everything that my current test Mac is a dual-processor 2 GHz G5 with 512 MB of RAM. In addition to the stock 150 GB internal hard drive, I have a 150 GB external hard drive attached.

Installing Footlights

Before we begin installing software, let's look at the system requirements. The RadicalBreeze Web site doesn't provide much information in this regard other than to say that the program requires Mac OS X 10.3 and higher. No mention is made of minimum suggested hardware, but their support team tells me that any Mac that supports 10.3 should work fine.

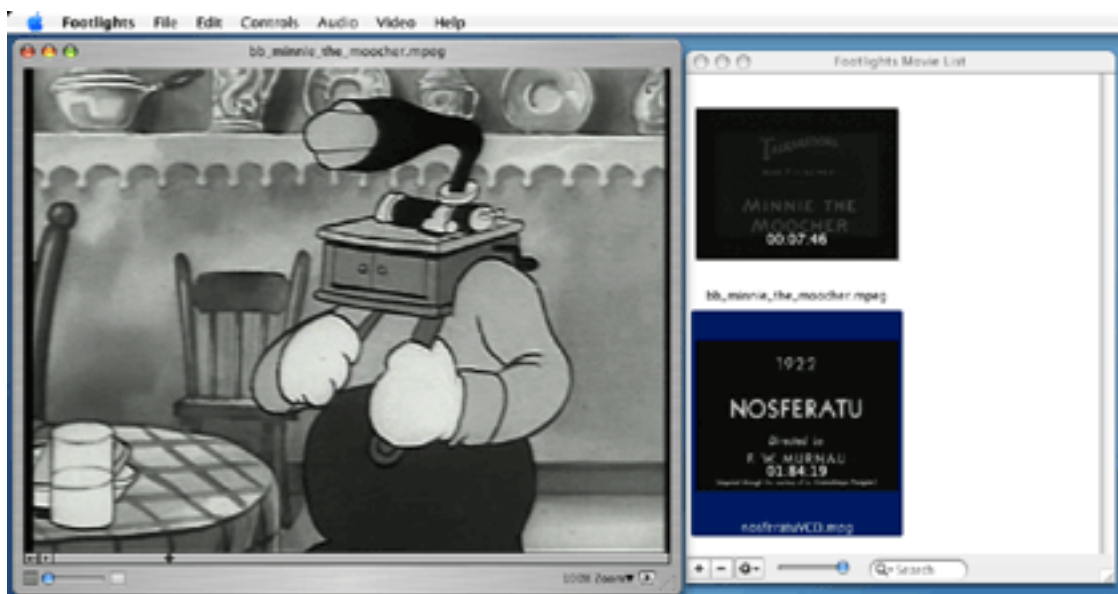
One of the other things I found out by contacting the Footlights support team is that the playback and conversion options available to you depend upon which QuickTime codecs you have installed on your system. Like many other conversion programs, Footlights relies on the QuickTime framework to perform its magic. You can, for example, playback Windows Media files if you have [Flip4Mac Windows Media component](#) installed.

One of the things I have come to expect since migrating to OS X is easy software installation. Footlights doesn't disappoint in this regard. The Footlights disk image weighs in at a paltry 2.6 MB. Whether you are on a dial-up or broadband Internet connection you won't be spending forever waiting for software to download.

Once you have the disk image downloaded, a quick double-click will mount it on your desktop. Part way through the disk mounting process you will be asked to agree to the license agreement. Once that's done, double-click the disk icon and drag the Footlights application to your hard drive. I placed it in the Applications folder, but it also runs from the Desktop and should run from anywhere on your hard drive.

The Video Playback Experience

Launch Footlights, and you are greeted by the video playback window. It's pretty minimalist in design. The first thing I noticed is that, unlike the QuickTime Player, Footlights has no buttons for such functions as play, rewind, and fast forward. These functions, like most others in Footlights, are accessed either by menus or keyboard commands. The only functions lacking keyboard commands are Clear, Select All, Looping, Volume Up, and Volume Down. Even though the volume controls do not have direct keyboard equivalents in Footlights, the program responds correctly to the volume keys on my stock Apple keyboard. RadicalBreeze has chosen to use keyboard commands that are pretty standard and easy to remember. The one keyboard command that threw me for a bit is the use of Command-P for Play. Since I spend much of my time word processing, I associate that command with printing. I discovered, quite by accident, that pressing the spacebar would also start and stop playback.



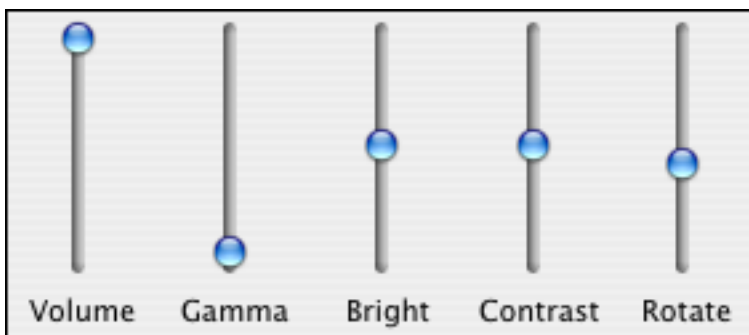
Playback Window and Movie List

The real fun with Footlights begins once you have chosen the video that you want to play. In my tests, I opened and played video clips ranging from a few seconds up to about 1 hour and 15 minutes. All of the videos loaded quickly. Video playback was smooth even in Fullscreen mode. With my 64 MB video card redrawing the window to fullscreen mode took a second or two, but once that was done playback was smooth. The one thing I did notice is that video playback stops if you hold the mouse button down a bit too long when choosing a menu command but picks up right where it left off once you release the mouse. Video playback also stops if you shrink the window into the Dock. The audio keeps playing, and when you re-enlarge the window it immediately moves to the right picture so that audio and video are not out of synch.

I've never been a big fan of QuickTime Player's Open Recent command. Don't get me wrong, it works fine I just can't remember what videos are there without clicking on the list. Footlights solves this problem with a separate window. Drag a video clip into this window and you see a thumbnail of that video. You can also use the + and - buttons in the window to add new videos and adjust the size of the video thumbnails with a slider.

I had a little fun experimenting with some of the effects that are available while playing videos. Did you ever want to play a video with the image turned upside down or rotate the image to an unusual angle? Well Footlights can do that. If you click on the small button at the far bottom left of the window, a pop-up menu will let you to use sliders to adjust the base Volume for the movie as well as Gamma, Brightness, Contrast, and Rotation. If you have a video that just doesn't look quite right during playback, these controls may help. I used adjustments in the gamma setting for a video that was just too dark. The adjustments show up in real time, so feel free to experiment.

At the bottom of the window are three other features of interest. The blue button that somewhat resembles a blob is a slider that sets the transparency of the playback screen. With the slider set all the way to the left, the window is not transparent. As you move the slider farther to the right, the window becomes more transparent and your underlying desktop starts to become visible. The last control on the right side of the screen controls the zoom. Click the zoom triangle, and you can choose window sizes ranging from 25% to Fill Screen. If none of those sizes meets your needs, grab the bottom right corner of the window and drag it to the size that you need.



Special Effects

Converting Video With Footlights Pro

If you have already downloaded and installed Footlights, upgrading to Footlights Pro will cost you \$15 for the license key. Enter it by launching the program, going to the Footlights menu and choosing Upgrade to Footlights Pro. Enter your name and license key and you're ready to go. Now the Export Movie command becomes available. Choose that, and a dialog appears allowing you to set the type of movie that you want to create and then click Options to set the quality settings for the final movie. The available file formats and quality settings will depend upon which codecs are installed on your system. If you are going to save Windows Media files, you will need the paid version of the Flip4Mac Windows Media component.

Once you have chosen appropriate quality settings, choose the location to save the resulting movie. Make sure that you have enough drive space. Some file formats use more drive space than others. A 148 MB MPEG2 file, for example, takes up over 850 MB of space as a DV file. This is not a flaw in the program; it's a function of the file formats and their chosen methods of compression. Conversions take about as much time with Footlights Pro as they have with other software I've used recently: Converting 75 minutes of MPEG2 video to DV format took about 36 minutes.

I didn't notice any loss in picture quality when videos were converted with Footlights. In fact, I converted one black-and-white MPEG clip to a QuickTime .mov file and put the windows side-by-side on the computer. When I showed the two clips to my wife, she thought the converted file looked better than the original. Experiment with the various quality settings to find the right balance between file size and picture quality.

Quirks Bugs and Annoyances

During testing, I did discover a few quirks. If, for example, you choose the Open Movie command but then choose Cancel from the dialog box, an error of -108 is generated. This is on the list of fixes for a future release. If you try opening video object files from a DVD, the program will either generate a -2048 error code or open the video with no sound. Footlights does not currently support .vob files, but this feature may be added in a future release. These errors do not crash the program, but it would be nice if they were in some language other than geek speak. On two occasions I did get a different error message that forces Footlights to shut down, but it never crashed other programs or caused any other havoc with my system.

There isn't much in the way of support information on the current Web site. In fact, Safari never found the support page indicated that I received from our reviews editor. The e-mail address for support did work, though. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised by how quickly my e-mails were answered. In an extreme instance, I sent an e-mail at about 1:45 AM on a Sunday morning. Less than nine hours later I had answers to my questions.

The only other problem I experienced is that for some reason sound was lost when I converted video clips. Initially I suspected that Footlights might be the cause, so I sent an e-mail to the support team. They aren't experiencing these issues, so I did some additional

testing. Whatever is causing the problem is also affecting video conversions attempted with QuickTime Pro, but not conversions attempted with MPEG Streamclip so it's likely that this is an issue with my system rather with Footlights, but I thought you should be aware of this.

When you make changes such as transparency, gamma, or rotation, these changes are not saved with the movie. On the one hand, you can't accidentally ruin the video, but it would be nice to save these changes. Some changes, like rotating video, may not be that important, but it would be nice to save things like gamma changes.

Final Thoughts

Overall this is a nice program. It's not quite as full-featured as QuickTime Pro but, then again it is less expensive. You can also do some things like create transparent windows or rotate the video clip to any angle. The effect is interesting although perhaps not very practical. I particularly like the Movie List Window. Were it not for the geek speak dialogs and a few problems playing movies that QuickTime Player handles with no problems, I'd probably like it even more. Overall I give it a rating of Good since I suspect that the sound problems are a function of something on my system.

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Accessory Review

by Frank H. Wu, frankhwu@starpower.net

Hardsleeve

Developer: [Axio](#)

Price: \$130 (large); \$90 (small)

Requirements: iBook or PowerBook; soon available for MacBook Pro

Trial: None



The Axio Hardsleeve is unique. Its name describes it well: it is hard, and it is a sleeve. It is similar to the Axio line of [backpacks](#) popular with motorcyclists, using a combination of rigid polycarbonate plastic with fabric.



In this case, the exterior is glossy plastic, in either black with a faux carbon-fiber checker-board pattern, or in pearl white, except for strip of cloth in the middle that allows a zipper to be used as the closure mechanism. The interior is lined with felt that has a very nice “hand” and has the Axio logo subtly imprinted.

High-density foam is used for a form-fitting padding system. An inner strip of foam can be carefully pulled out to make room for the larger models. It has been lightly pre-cut to the precise dimensions needed, and the job is easily finished with a sharp knife. Semi-circular cutouts in the foam facilitate removal of the machine.



There is a guitar-style strap that clips onto two metal studs. A pouch can be attached in turn to the strap to hold a power adapter, though it just barely fits and then not even the cord portion.

What makes this product attractive is its size. It adds as little bulk to the contents as possible, and it offers enough protection that it can be carried alone instead of being inserted into another bag—it actually would be a belt-and-suspenders approach to put the Hardsleeve into a briefcase. The Hardsleeve beats any of the other sleeves on the market in terms of protection. The only competitor to the Hardsleeve might be a Pelican briefcase. But the Hardsleeve looks far better and the Pelican is considerably larger.



So the Hardsleeve enforces the discipline of traveling light. You have to be a minimalist to appreciate the aesthetic. You could take your PowerBook (or MacBook Pro once the new model of Hardsleeve is introduced) to the library to do research, but you could not take anything else: no accessories, no files, not even a magazine.

The real negative with the Hardsleeve, however, is that because the interior has a much tighter fit than most carrying cases, when the case is opened up the PowerBook tends to be pulled open too. This may be exacerbated by a weak latch on the PowerBook tested, but it's enough to pose a concern. Furthermore, the dual zipper doesn't operate as well as it would if it were pulling together only textiles. If the tabs are pulled without care, they easily miss teeth. Finally, the metal studs on the exterior (for the carrying strap) protrude and could easily damage a surface the Hardsleeve rests on. If you set it down on a dining room table made of wood, for example, you could mar it without even being too reckless.

Nonetheless, the Hardsleeve is a great combination of style and sturdiness. It combines great looks with exceptional protection.

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Accessory Review

by Lee Bennett and Chris Lawson

iPod 5G

Developer: [Apple Computer](#)

Price: \$299 (30 GB); \$399 (60 GB)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9, USB port

Trial: None



The media reception given to Apple's original iPod was, to put it kindly, rather cool. Five years later, the mainstream media is as rabid for iPod rumors as the Mac rumor sites were for Mac news in their late-1990s/early-2000s heyday.

While Apple's fifth-generation iPod didn't introduce any radical new features, it did bring long-anticipated video capability to the platform. Many people—this reviewer included—wondered aloud as to the point of watching video on a 2" screen, although this doesn't seem to have stopped countless cell phones from being introduced with similar features. The video features of the iPod work surprisingly well, and the brilliant color screen plays no small part in this. The aspect ratio was revised for video viewing with the screen pushed almost all the way out to the edges of the new iPod. Video plays crisply and without skips, although I still don't understand why anyone would want to watch more than a couple minutes of video at a time on such a tiny screen.



Viewing MacBreak's first podcast from the Macworld Expo in San Francisco. No, the scroll wheel isn't really that light in color compared to the rest of the surface. The camera flash exaggerated its color.

Fortunately, this is the perfect scenario for the vast number of video podcasts that are accessible from a similarly vast number of sources. Even though full-length television shows and more are becoming available in iPod-friendly format, the ability to view videos on the iPod is far better-suited for the phenomenon of podcasting.

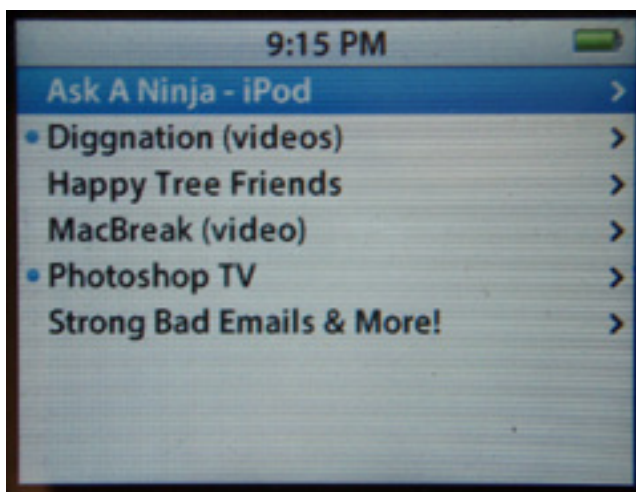


The 60 GB model is thicker than the 30 GB model, yet it is substantially thinner than a 30 GB third-generation iPod. Note that even at this extreme angle, the video display is quite visible. This angle also shows a truer representation of the scroll wheel's color.

Playing the podcast videos is the good side. On the ever-so-slightly tarnished side, podcast management and access could use a bit of help. A longstanding gripe with iTunes is that some preferences are needlessly buried. For several days, I was stymied as to why some videos weren't being copied to my iPod until I finally discovered that the option to copy videos was off—apparently a default. Making matters worse is that this option, like all

the other iPod-specific preferences, aren't even available to see or adjust unless an iPod is attached.

On the iPod itself, there's a quirk (I'm not willing to call it a bug) that might have you believing something is wrong with video playback. The iPod's main menu normally displays entries for both Podcasts and Videos. If you navigate into Podcasts, you will find a listing of all the podcasts to which you've subscribed—audio and video alike. But if you select and play a video podcast, only the audio is played. To listen *and watch* the podcast, you must instead go into the Videos menu, then one more level into the Video Podcasts menu, in which you are shown only the podcasts that include video. Since I'd rather be able to stay in a single Podcasts menu item for all my podcasts, it would be nice to instead have a preference setting to play only the audio track of a video podcast.



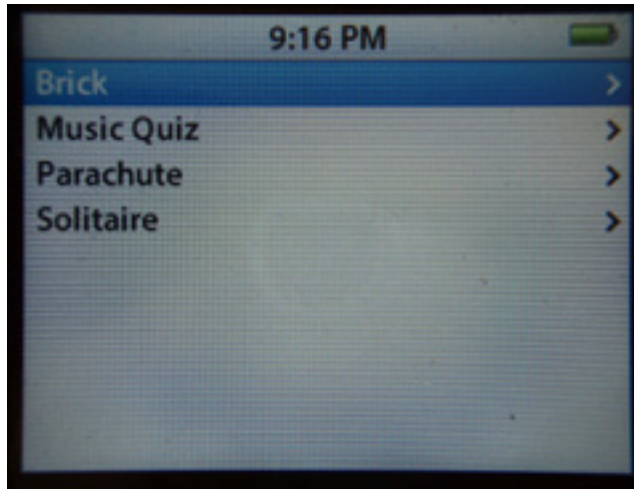
Only video podcasts are seen in the Videos > Video Podcasts menu. The main Podcasts menu displays all podcasts—audio and video alike—but only plays the audio.

But aside from these access and management gripes, catching up on a bit of [Photoshop TV](#) or [MacBreak](#), or having a little fun with [Ask a Ninja](#), [Strongbad E-mails](#), or [Ze Frank](#), is a great way to spend your lunch hour or public transportation commute.

Audio playback seems smoother, with fewer hangs than the first-generation unit it replaced here at headquarters. The new iPod is also substantially quieter, a benefit of a much newer (and thinner) hard disk mechanism. Battery life is now claimed to be 20 hours with the 60 GB version (which has a larger battery; the 30 GB model claims a 14-hour battery life). Extensive use on the daily commute (about an hour each day) barely makes a dent in battery life after three or four consecutive days without a charge, so this claim seems believable.

Also fixed is an old firmware bug (present, as far as I know, only in first-generation models) that would cause a song to continue “playing” all the way to the 1:57 mark when the iPod was paused immediately after selecting a playlist. Unfortunately, the new firmware takes a

step backward in the games department; the new iPod is less useful for killing time waiting for the bus unless you're a huge fan of Parachute. C'mon, Apple, my cell phone has more games than this, and it's not like any phone has 60 GB of internal storage. I think you could spare the space.



Apple only provides four paltry games on the iPod. For more, a Google search for "ipod games" will turn up plenty of options.

If video playback is a must-have feature, the 5G iPod is a must-have upgrade, bringing the great iPod interface that you know and love to video playback. If you don't plan on using the video features, the color screen and immense battery life still make for a very compelling package. Apple has thrown down the gauntlet once again, and the competition has yet to answer.

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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

iTunes Catalog 2.0.1

Developer: [KavaSoft](#)

Price: \$25

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9, iTunes 4.5. [Universal](#).

Trial: Feature-limited (only artists beginning with letters A-E are displayed).



In my ongoing quest to seek out methods of accessing my iTunes library from a remote location, I came across iTunes Catalog. In this age of software commonly being given names that bears little or no witness as to the function of the software, iTunes Catalog has not joined that ship. I initially made the error of seeing the application as providing full remote access to my iTunes library. In reality, it truly is a Web-based catalog of an iTunes library—one that comes with several neat tricks.



The iTunes Catalog browser is a surprisingly well-done simulation of the actual iTunes application browsing the Music Store.

The primary function of iTunes Catalog is to display an iTunes-esque interface of your library within a Web browser. Playlists are displayed on the left just as you'd expect in iTunes. There is a genre/artist/album browser at the top and an iTunes Music Store-style interface in the main window. This main section includes boxes showing random albums, recently added albums, recently played albums and songs, top rated albums, and more. There's also an iPod browser—more on that later.

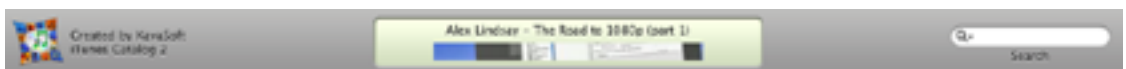
But iTunes Catalog goes beyond simply providing remote access to information and lists of your library. If you enable the option, you can play your songs on the remote computer. Even the protected Music Store purchases can be played, but only if the remote computer is one of the five machines allowed to be authenticated to your account at any given time.

Almost as if it were icing on the cake, iTunes Catalog offers an additional method for browsing and playing files in your library—a simulation of an iPod. And not just any iPod; you can select either the full-size or Nano versions in either black or white, as well as a fourth generation iPod photo.

For many people, this could be the end of the review. The functions I've described above worked with no difficulty. The setup application was stable and, with only one exception concerning album artwork that I'll describe below, it was very straightforward in its operation. There are built-in helpers to be sure your computer's Web Sharing and PHP are properly enabled, and easily accessible toolbar buttons allow you to publish an updated catalog either locally or via FTP. There are also great tools to retrieve and manage album artwork and lyrics, look up the year an album was released, and interact with [Musicmobs](#).

However, for its price tag, a few changes and fixes are needed before I'd consider it a value.

Topping the bug side of the list is video playback. When I first began using iTunes Catalog it was at version 2.0, and every video in my library that I attempted to play resulted in a server error. I should have made note of the exact error, but failed to do so. I've since updated to version 2.0.1, but the video problem is only partially fixed. They now will play, but only a thin horizontal strip is visible—an area equal to the space normally occupied by the QuickTime slider/controller normally seen via the Web browser plug-in. I would have expected a pop-up window to display the video but instead only get the thin strip in the upper portion of the catalog browser.



Video playback leaves a lot to be desired. Specifically desired is being able to see *all* of the video!



The iPod browser exhibits the same video playback problem.

Also on my bug list is that music playback occasionally skipped if I switched to another Safari tab and started browsing. I fault iTunes Catalog for this and not my processor because I have many times loaded an audio file into Safari that was either on my local computer or accessed from my server and then switched to another tab to browse while the audio file was playing, skip-free.

An oddity that I can't be certain whether or not is a bug is how songs and albums are tallied for things like the "Recently Added" and "Recently Played" sections. As things turned out, the most recent album I ripped at this writing was volume 21 of the "Now That's What I Call Music!" compilation. For the record, I do not use iTunes' compilation setting in the tag editor and always turn it off if a ripped album has enabled it. Yet something about this Now 21 album made it always appear in at least two of the four "Recently Added Albums" spots (each with a different song label beneath). Often, three or even all four spots show this album.

Also of confusion to me is why several albums keep showing up in the "Recently Played" spot that I actually have not played in quite some time. Worst of all is that the "Recently

Played Songs” box is completely full of songs from a playlist I only use rarely, and even then I only use it on my iPod—never directly from iTunes.

Suffice to say, I’ve had to largely ignore the Music Store-like representation and simply browse artists and albums in the upper portion, or directly access one of my playlists shown in the left-side pane.

Rounding out the list of problems are a few functionality features I’d love to see addressed. Most of all, iTunes Catalog is not designed to play a series of songs. I realize that, as a library catalog, previewing a single song should be very acceptable functionality. However, iTunes Catalog would be vastly more valuable to me (and immediately worth more than its current price) if it would play an album or playlist in succession without having to click on each song one at a time to play it.

Somewhat related to the successive playback capability is protection. iTunes Catalog works best when it is published to a Web server accessible from anywhere via the Internet so you can browse and preview your library no matter where you are. (Most people would have little need for such a catalog at home since their iTunes library is already right there and they can browse the actual iTunes application.) Preventing the world from potentially finding your catalog and also possibly even being able to copy and save any of your music that didn’t come from the iTunes Music Store should be on the to-do list. A published iTunes Catalog Web site is already PHP-driven. I may not know much about PHP, but I don’t imagine it would be difficult to require a login to access the Web-based catalog.

In the setup application, there is a column that indicates the status of artwork for each album. It works, but is not intuitive. It simply consists of two green, yellow, or red Aqua-style dots. One indicates whether artwork exists in your iTunes library; the other indicates whether the artwork is in your iTunes Catalog library. Green means all albums/songs have artwork, yellow means that some have artwork, and red means none have artwork. Nothing on the screen offers a clue that the left dot refers to iTunes Catalog and the right dot refers to iTunes. I had to dig through the help screens to learn this. Likewise, I also had to search the help files to learn that there is a skill of double-clicking these dots to copy artwork from one place to another and to retrieve artwork from Amazon.

And finally: the amount of time required to publish a catalog. I realize I am closing on 6,500 items in my iTunes library and that my library lives on an older computer, but I hope the developers are exploring ways of optimizing the catalog generation routines. I don’t know the exact time that was required, but I can tell you that after I had begun publishing my catalog, I went to watch a TV program, and the catalog was not finished by the time the first set of commercials ran—about 15 minutes into the show. When I returned again at the end of the hour-long show, it was finished and waiting for me. Thus, on a 450 MHz G4 with nearly 6,500 files, the time to publish a catalog was more than 15 but less than 60 minutes.

My search continues for a better way to stream my music from home in a protected manner. (Yes, I have heard of [accessTunes](#) and would like to review it one day, but I must first work

through some issues that I am not yet convinced are not problems on my end.) For now, iTunes Catalog provides a useful method to quickly snag a song from home to let a friend or coworker hear.

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Hardware Review

by Christopher Turner, cturner@atpm.com

SmartBoard USB5000

Developer: [Datadesk Technologies](#)

Price: \$100

Requirements: USB port

Trial: None



I remember when Microsoft first released its Natural Keyboard, the company's attempt at bringing an affordable ergonomic keyboard to the masses. I purchased one for use at work, where it was a Windows environment, and I longed for a similar keyboard to be available for my use at home, on my Macintosh.

Apple used to sell a semi-ergonomic keyboard, the Apple Adjustable Keyboard, and I located one on an online swap list, and used that until the last ADB-equipped Macintosh in my home departed. Thus continued the search for an affordable, ergonomic keyboard built specifically for the Mac, and a USB-equipped Mac at that.

Some Macintosh users had taken to using the latest versions of the Microsoft Natural Keyboard in conjunction with system hacks and key-remapping software on OS X. Eventually, Microsoft saw this as a potentially lucrative market, and created its own software for Mac OS X that would allow use of a Microsoft keyboard or mouse on the Mac with the appropriate keys remapped. This was the setup I used for quite a while, switching back to the standard black Apple keyboard that shipped with my Cube on occasion. My only caveat with using the Microsoft keyboard was that the operating system had to load for it to be recognized. So if I needed to boot in to single-user mode for troubleshooting, it meant plugging in my Apple keyboard.

When my new Intel-based iMac arrived earlier this year, I began my affordable-ergonomic keyboard hunt yet again, and it led me to Datadesk Technologies, and their SmartBoard USB for Macintosh. Datadesk is no newcomer to the keyboard or Macintosh arena; they've been around for quite a while, and most people are familiar with them through the line of [keyboards for children](#). I contacted the company regarding the SmartBoard, and soon one was on my desk.

The SmartBoard USB for Macintosh is made of sturdy white plastic, with black characters on white keys. The F keys are a transparent grey-purple, which offers a nice contrast without being garish. It has two USB ports, for a mouse or trackball and other USB device. I use the second port for my [Dazzle](#) media card reader. Like the Microsoft Natural Keyboard series, the SmartBoard is tall toward the center, with split key sections, tapering downward for a more natural resting position for the hands.



Datadesk claims the SmartBoard is 20% smaller than other ergonomic keyboards, so it can fit in standard-size keyboard drawers. Not having such a drawer, I cannot speak to this, but the size reduction is noticeable, mostly due to what they had to do with the key arrangement to make it work.

First, not all of the keys are the same size. Keys toward the interior of the board, such as T, G, B, Y, H, and N, are narrower than outer keys like Q, A, Z, P, :, and /. The company refers to this concept as “variable width.” This took considerable getting used to, and I have average-size hands. After a month of use, I’m still missing or hitting the wrong keys in certain situations.



Another adjustment for me was the movement of the =/+ key, from its usual position to the left of the Delete key. Instead, it can be found between the ‘/~ key and the 1 key. I’ve been typing since my junior year in high school, so we’re talking over fifteen years of QWERTY familiarity, and this one key movement has taken a lot of adjustment.



Another size sacrifice is the loss of some F keys, notably F13–16, found on the standard Apple keyboard. This wasn't a huge loss for me, as I have yet to work the F keys as task launchers in to my everyday workflow. The wrinkle it did have was that the F12 key became the substitute Eject key, and I had to remap the Dashboard key in System Preferences.

Lastly, keys you would normally find between the QWERTY layout and the numeric pad on the right have been moved. These keys include Page Up, Page Down, Home, End, and others. They have been sandwiched at the top of the numeric keypad on the SmartBoard. This has not been as much of an adjustment for me; I usually look at the keyboard to use those keys, and unlike with the QWERTY layout, I can't really use the numeric keypad without looking. Other users may have more of an adjustment period with this setup.



Datadesk has a reputation for using mechanical switches in its keyboards, as opposed to rubber membranes. So using the SmartBoard will be considerably louder versus using the standard Apple keyboard, or the one found on your iBook or MacBook Pro. My wife will occasionally remark, from the living room, on the sound of my typing; I would be in the study, separated from the family room by a wall and French doors, which are usually partially open. So if near silence in your computing experience is required, the SmartBoard may not be for you.

I, for one, am willing to put up with the noise, because I appreciate the feedback I get from the keys. Mechanical switches are known for longer-term reliability when compared to rubber membranes, so it's a good bet the SmartBoard will outlast most of its competitors.

There is a two-way wrist leveler, consisting of three sets of two flip-open risers, underneath, allowing you to tilt the front end of the keyboard up to a more ergonomically-pleasing position. (The front of the keyboard in this case is defined as the side closest to the user.) My druther with Datadesk's implementation is that the plastics of the leveler are very smooth, and the keyboard tends to slide during moments of heavy typing, when my wrists might be shifting.

I did have a failure with the SmartBoard: the Caps Lock broke—which was surprising, given how little I use the Caps Lock key. It looks like the plastic connector on the bottom of the key, which fits in to the switch, snapped off. Unfortunately, this means I can't simply

snap it back on. I have been promised a replacement keyboard, which I still await as of publication.



The Datadesk SmartBoard certainly won't be for everyone. Its combination of noise, generated by the mechanical switches, the variable widths of the keys, and the non-standard layout may give plenty of users pause. I still very much recommend the SmartBoard however, with a keen eye on their quality-control improving. Datadesk has produced an affordable ergonomic keyboard, which should last for a long while, even for the heartiest of typists.

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