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

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¹<http://www.tidwellcreative.com>

²<mailto:cover-art@atpm.com>

³<http://mjtsai.com>

⁴<http://www.retrohisch.com>

⁵<mailto:pfatula@atpm.com>

⁶<http://www.secondinitial.com>

⁷<http://chrislawson.net>

⁸<http://qaptainqwerty.blogspot.com/>

⁹<http://www.ritterskoop.org>

¹⁰<http://mjtsai.com>

¹¹<mailto:editor@atpm.com>

¹²<http://www.raoli.com>

¹³<mailto:mchamberlain@atpm.com>

¹⁴<mailto:cdudar@atpm.com>

¹⁵<http://www.eubanksconsulting.net>

¹⁶<mailto:mglidden@atpm.com>

¹⁷<http://www.sirius-beta.com>

¹⁸<http://andrew.katorlegaz.com>

¹⁹<mailto:rleitao@atpm.com>

²⁰<http://www.wesmeltzer.com>

²¹<mailto:sroque@atpm.com>

²²<http://www.chivalrysoftware.com>

²³<http://www.tennent.co.uk>

[Evan Trent](#)²⁴
Vacant

Artwork & Design

Layout and Design	Michael Tsai ²⁵
Web Design	Simon Griffiee ²⁶
Cartoonist	Matt Johnson ²⁷
Blue Apple Icons	Mark Robinson
Other Art	RD Novo
Graphics Director	<i>Vacant</i>

Emeritus

RD Novo, Robert Madill, Belinda Wagner, Jamal Ghandour, Edward Goss, Tom Iovino, Daniel Chvatik, Grant Osborne, Gregory Tetrault, Raena Armitage, Johann Campbell, David Ozab.

Contributors

Lee Bennett, Eric Blair, Jennifer Curry, Matt Johnson, Chris Lawson, Robert Paul Leitao, Linus Ly, Wes Meltzer, Ellyn Ritterskamp, Charles Ross, Mark Tennent, *Macintosh users like you*.

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the March issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* This month we move the clock forward earlier than in the past to provide more evening daylight before winter finds its end. The editors of ATPM have worked hard on our March issue during the last of these snowy days to bring daylight on the issues that impact the quality of your personal computing experience. We do this in our unique and popular monthly format.

Saint Patrick's Day and the Emerald Isle

It's no coincidence St. Patrick is a popular saint here in the States. There are more Americans of Irish ancestry than there are people in Ireland. On Saint Patrick's Day, some rivers are made to run green, and Irish pubs pack in the crowds. This year's Saint Patrick's Day will be a bit of an anomaly. For the first time since 1940, March 17th, the traditional day to celebrate the life of Ireland's patron saint, falls during Christianity's Holy Week. Celebrations will be moved forward or back depending on where you live, and in some locations they will not be moved from the traditional date.

No matter when Saint Patrick's Day might be celebrated around the world in 2008, the Emerald Isle will no longer be green with iPhone envy. Just in time for this year's celebrations, the folks in Ireland will have Apple iPhones to connect with friends and family. On March 14th, the iPhone officially goes on sale in Ireland. Perhaps it's the luck of Irish for the phones to arrive just in time.

iPhone Holy War

No matter the rescheduling of Saint Patrick's Day due to Holy Week in 2008, debate over the importance of the iPhone SDK (Software Development Kit) has taken on the fervor of a holy war. Now scheduled for release on March 6th, Apple boards and blogs have been filled with comments concerning the importance of the SDK to the iPhone's future.

Media reports suggest the iPhone's sales momentum has stalled since the first EU releases in November, and many consider third-party development of iPhone applications essential to the iPhone's market penetration. For some, the debate has been an education in what an SDK is and why it might even matter.

After all, many people bought an iPhone primarily to make phone calls. For others, the SDK is seen as vital for the development of the iPhone as not only a phone, but as a personal handheld communications, entertainment, and information assistant. We'll be following the SDK issue in the coming months.

Tim Cook For President

It's an election year in the United States, and the presidential primary process will soon be coming to a close. Thanks to his late February presentation at the Goldman Sachs Technology Investment Symposium 2008, there's talk he should be elected president. Not of the United States but of Apple Inc. Mr. Cook currently serves as Apple's Chief Operating Officer. His upbeat view of the company and its product plans caused a mini rally in the share price. On February 29th the Tim Cook rally ran into a wall of worry, and the share price ended the month at \$125.02. As Apple's COO, he's increasingly seen as the president-apparent as Steve Jobs continues his transformation of the company and broadens its consumer product line.

iTunes Surpasses Best Buy

In late February it was announced iTunes was the #2 music retailer in the US during 2007, surpassing Best Buy and closing in fast on Wal-Mart for the most music sold. In 2008 it's expected iTunes will outsell the big box retailer and become the highest volume music retailer in the land.

Wither the iPod?

It's ironic as iTunes becomes increasingly popular for the purchase of music and movies and has become arguably the most important commercial music distribution system in the US that critics are suggesting the iPod has passed its prime as the dominant force in the digital music player market.

It's not disputed that the iPod's unit sales growth has slowed due to the transition to higher-priced video iPods and increasing storage capacities. But slower unit sales growth doesn't mean the product line has seen better days. The iPod is being positioned to deliver more product as more video

content becomes available through iTunes and other sources.

The iPod shuffle recently saw a price decrease on the one-gigabyte model as a two-gigabyte model was brought to market. Starting at \$49, the iPod shuffle is now being pushed as a high-volume promotional gift item for the corporate world.

What's most ironic about claims the iPod has seen better days is that just a few years ago commentators were claiming Apple was a one-product company—the iPod. Today commentators are suggesting Apple is a one-product company—the Mac. A few short years from now, commentators might be claiming Apple is a one-product company—the iPhone. Different product lines have unique sales cycles. History would provide lessons if commentators cared to take a look.

Our March issue includes:

Bloggable: A Cold Day in Redmond

Wes Meltzer finds parallels for Microsoft's attempt to buy Yahoo, plus what everyone else up to, and including, the Sage of Omaha have to say. That, and the whole wealth of the Indies, in this month's *Bloggable*.

MacMuser: The "Can Do, Just Works" Principle

"Apple excels at looking at something that is hard to do or at markets that are under-performing, then coming up with simple solutions that 'just work.'"

FileMaking: FileMaker 9

FileMaker 9 has been released, and Charles Ross returns with a tour of the good and the bad of this new version.

Desktop Pictures: Havana Vehicles

Reader Jennifer Curry offers this month's photos of vintage vehicles taken during a 2006 trip to Cuba.

Cartoon: Cortland

Lisa is history, and the Mudrix code dissolves to nothing as Cortland makes a huge sacrifice to save the woman he loves. But, is that sacrifice enough to save Angie from Cortland's enemies in meatspace?

Review: ArtixScan M1 Dual Media Scanner

As someone who has spent a reasonable amount of time with both high-end, professional flatbed scan-

ners and low-end consumer scanners, Lee Bennett looks at a mid-range scanner for the first time.

Review: LicenseKeeper 1.3.2

Keeping track your software registration is one of those things you often don't think about until you need the information, and a tool for simplifying the process can help you keep on top of it.

Review: MacPool 8.9

It is definitely simple and easy to use. It might be a little too simple.

Review: Wi-Fire

A \$79 paperweight that's too light for weighing down paper.

Review: Xslimmer 1.5

Save hard drive space by removing code that your Mac doesn't understand or languages that you don't comprehend.



E-Mail

About This Particular Outliner¹

Looking forward to all this stuff in the pipeline, Ted.

I remember you making the argument before about your Mac costing \$1,000 or more, while people are unwilling to pay for software. I agree it seems foolish, but there don't seem to be any good solutions—the market is what it is.

It's frustrating looking for the application that fills your specific needs, but on the upside there are a surprising number of good Mac developers. Let's just hope they survive (especially the applications I've bought).

—AC



I read the thread that you talked about and was amazed at the abuse that your position got, both when you advanced it and when the current owner of Mori explained why a software developer needs to charge more than token money to stay in business.

I don't know whether the Mac community is especially resistant to pricing on software; it may be that the PC world has such comparatively sparse a population in this kind of application (outliners and the like) and has such strong roots in corporate America that people are used to paying over \$100 for what applications do exist, that a real A to A comparison is not possible.

I remember that neither Lotus Agenda (an information manager with spreadsheet-database qualities) nor Grandview (an outliner very similar to MORE), two fine DOS programs, was cheap in its day.

It's very easy to get into a kind of quest to find the outliner that gets it *right* and wind up like the man in the proverb who had a clock and always knew what time it was until someone gave him another clock, after which he was never sure. I have OmniOutliner, NoteBook, Tao, Mori, Hog Bay (ancestor of Mori), Tinderbox, and a number of other outliners. If I am creating a word processing document, I have NisusWriter Pro, Word 2004, Scrivener, Pages and a couple of other alternatives. Not to mention OmniFocus and Bento...

I think a lot of other users are in my position. For something new to make it onto my densely-populated

computer at this point, though, it's got to have something striking in its features—either features I don't already have a access to (unlikely) or a way of presenting them so compelling that it outshines what I have.

Also price is going to matter. I don't need (unlike the misguided folk on the listserve) a developer to commit financial self-immolation to get my attention, but I would have to be awfully convinced to spend more than \$100 on an application.

On the other hand, I *was* convinced enough to spend \$180 on Flying Logic, an application that helps you build and assess logical arguments, very important to my work. And I didn't mind sending Nisus the \$80 they wanted for their Pro word processor after I spent some time with it.

My wish is to settle down into something approaching happy monogamy with applications. In practical terms, this means to find ten or so that, taken together, serve all my computing needs, learn them deeply, and just stay with them over their development life unless there's a really good reason to change one of the components of, or add something to, the core group that I work with. Not there yet, still spread a little wide, but working on it...

All of that said, the idea of someone as deeply immersed in the world of information management and the various outliners and quasi-outliners that have populated it as Ted is developing a product is an exciting one to me and the Mac platform.

—Stephen Chakwin



The big outliner news at Macworld for me was Circus Ponies NoteBook 3.0. Despite all the outliner variety we've had, until now there really hasn't been a good alternative for people who need to mix in freeform diagrams and tables while outlining (usually while taking notes). OneNote on Windows has always had this, but its completely unstructured nature makes it a pain for serious, long-form outlining. I see NoteBook 3.0 as really pulling together the best elements from OneNote while still maintaining structure... basically the best of both worlds. Very exciting to me.

—Alan Yeung

¹<http://www.atpm.com/14.02/atpo.shtml>

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This means to find ten or so that, taken together, serve all my computing needs, learn them deeply and just stay with them over their development life.

What a sweet dream. I wonder why I keep trying out new programs all the time. I even have a couple of more or less legitimate excuses. Yet I also find myself periodically going through my applications folder and deleting gigabytes of stuff. I think there may be an addiction on my part to new programs. There's always the idea of the perfect fit, the holy grail of applications that would make my workflow faster, easier, more efficient, etc.

I've have licenses for Tinderbox, DEVONthink, NoteBook, StickyBrain, and a couple of other information organizers. Yet, the one true program has always eluded me. Mori? Not quite. Yojimbo? That isn't it either. They're all good but not exactly what I'm looking for.

Now you bring up writing programs, you fiend. Ulysses, Avenir, WriteRoom, Jer's Novel Writer, MacJournaler, and Scrivener have all stolen hours from me in testing, testing, testing. Now you say that Avenir has been bought and has features added and there's yet another worthy writing program?

It wouldn't be a problem if they were not all good and worthy contenders, but they are. I, like so many others, keep looking for the champion to arise from the horde of merely excellent. I keep downloading demos and kicking the tires. Then when I do buy a license I still look for something better. Does that make sense?

Barry Schwartz, not a programmer, but a psychology professor may be my savior. I'm reading his book [Paradox of Choice: Why Less is More](#)² and realize how much effort I put into looking for perfect instead of good enough.

Microsoft Office, which I've used since version 2 is out. iWork is good enough for my simple needs. Avenir, Jer's Novel Writer, Tinderbox, DEVONthink, NeoOffice, InDesign, WriteRoom, Mori, all out. You are all fine, but love spread widely won't grow as deep. I'll settle on Scrivener for project file management and writing. No more academic papers so no more Word, Nisus Writer, Mellel or their like. Goodbye End Notes, I loved you well. Pages will do fine for final formatting and club newsletters.

²<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000HWY5MK/aboutthisparticu>

Maybe with all the hours I don't spend demoing new programs I'll get more writing done.

—*Michael McKee*

• • •

Welcome back, Ted. I have thoroughly enjoyed your articles and insights into the thinking behind software.

Outliners have not been a major concern for me, because I do so much of it in my head and with scraps of paper or 3×5 cards; yes, I have been doing this for 40 years and it is hard to get beyond it. Yet, in my mind, I think maybe there is one program that will fill my own needs. So far, in limited testing (I haven't purchased any of them), none seems to work as well as what I want/need. Thus, what Mellel offers is sufficient for my needs (most of the time). Recently I began using Scrivener for planning and initial writing. For everyday writing I use Nisus Writer Pro, and cross-platform work finds me in Word.

I was intrigued by the split personality, so to speak, in your current article regarding pricing. You lament the lack of support for commercial programs, noting the small cost compared to the computer itself. Rightly you find fault with those who want a basically "free" ride. And yet, you are developing a product that will be...essentially free. Is that contradictory? Or am I missing something?

Anyway, I always enjoy your thoughtful, challenging articles. Keep it up. We need more authors like you. And I look forward to your future products and writing.

—*Rich Shields*

• • •

Michael McKee's post sums up my experience pretty well. I've tried them all, and have registered a small collection of applications—Mori, NoteBook, TaskPaper, maybe a couple of others.

One thing about these applications is that there are so many different ways to create, organize, and look at your information, and typically the best way will depend on what you are doing right now. Do you want a loose journal type application to jot down notes freeform (with perhaps tags), or do you want an outliner in which you can put new items in their proper areas? Is it more important to be able to see all the trees (and even branches and leaves), or is the forest or main structure more important? Bonus

complexity points if you need to keep manage different “forms” of information (say business management vs. creative writing), like I do.

After getting started with TaskPaper recently for managing tasks, I’ve discovered the joy of plain text files (quick to work with, Spotlightable, super portable, and cross-platform). But I know in the long run that text files and Finder alone isn’t really going to work out in terms of organizing and browsing through information (Quick Look in Leopard actually helps here though).

I’m really looking forward to seeing what Ted comes up with.

—*Steve Lang*

MacPinball 2.6³

Of course you *do* know about [LittleWing](http://www.littlewingpinball.com/contents/en/index.html)⁴, right? They’ve been producing high-quality pinball games for the Mac since at least Mac OS 8.

—*Tim Cox*

Keyboards⁵

I am prone to RSI problems and have been a fan of the MS Natural since it first appeared (one of the few things MS has done that is best-of-breed). Turns out that Adesso makes a keyboard, the EKB-2150W, which has a split and angled keyboard but also has a Glidepoint so one need not mouse if desired. You have to look to find them, but I cannot imagine life without it.

By the way, several folks at my office who were developing RSI problems have seen significant relief from going to an MS Natural-style keyboard.

—*Michael O’Dell*



When my Mac keyboard from my G4 packed it in I started to look around for a replacement. Buying another Macintosh keyboard was too expensive, over \$125 where I live. I then looked at Keytronic, as before I retired they were pretty reliable for me at the work I performed, but their price was not much better.

I finally settled on a Macally keyboard. It seemed a little flimsy, but the price was much better. After a year, and when the warranty was off, the keys started

³<http://www.atpm.com/14.02/macpinball.shtml>

⁴<http://www.littlewingpinball.com/contents/en/index.html>

⁵<http://www.atpm.com/14.02/e-mail.shtml#tactile-pro>

to break. I looked at the insides, and it seemed not worth the effort to try anything.

I looked around and spotted a Microsoft Digital Media Pro. I know this is ugly even to mention Microsoft, but I was desperate.

The price for me was excellent, \$28 Canadian plus tax (they have gone up to \$35 now). I have had it going on three years now, and it works like a charm. The software that came with it was well done.

The only two downers I can complain about are the logos for the Ctrl—Start—Alt keys and the zoom lever on the left-hand side.

All the other buttons do exactly what they say. So if you’re desperate and can turn your head the other way, this is not a bad buy.

I really cannot complain about this keyboard at all as the rest of it works excellently with my Mac.

—*Gerald F. Carroll*

Coping With Mac OS X’s Font Rendering⁶

I’ve used Macs for over 17 years. My business runs on them. But due to the font rendering issue, I never moved to OS X.

I stayed with OS 9 and hoped that Apple would eventually fix the problem. We continued to use our dual boot computers, including 1 GHz Titanium PowerBooks and PowerMacs, and booted in OS 9, which was certainly more comfortable than using Classic in OS X.

So here it is, years later. No fix from Apple. All they’ve done is completely make it impossible to use OS 9—or now to even Classic—on their new computers. And Leopard, which I hoped would help on the pre-Intel Macs, doesn’t have any Classic support—and even if it did, it’s no improvement anyway.

I still use my OS 9 PowerBooks, and the office uses a couple of Power Macs—since years of business records are stored there. But they are tougher and tougher to use on the Web, especially due to old browsers, etc.

About one year ago I had to purchase a ThinkPad running XP Pro for a specific project. (Never ran Windows before—found it much too counter-intuitive in too many ways.)

But guess what? I use the ThinkPad daily now. OS 9 on my PowerBook is still much easier on my eyes. But the ThinkPad is not bad at all.

And most importantly, since I actually use the ThinkPad on my lap, I’ve discovered that the trackpointer—that litter red eraser like object in

⁶<http://www.atpm.com/12.01/paradigm.shtml>

the lower center of the keyboard—is absolutely the best way to navigate your screen, a Web page, a document. It’s just great (At least on this R60 it’s smooth as silk. Not quite as good on an older T43.) I now just can’t live without it.

So, the irony of all this is that Apple got me to migrate from OS 9 all right—to a Windows XP machine.

Of course, what’s even stranger, is that I could, if I chose, use the newest Intel Mac running Leopard and also install very old Windows OS’s. I can run old Microsoft operating systems, ones that preceded OS 9 by years, on new Mac hardware, but I can’t run OS 9 on new Macs. I can run old copies of Microsoft Word and access 12-year-old Word documents, but I can’t run my Apple/Claris MacWrite program, or access my old MacWrite documents.

This just does not make sense.

Talk about fuzzy fonts. How about fuzzy logic. There really is something wrong with this picture.

And by the way, cost is not a factor. I would happily pay an exorbitant premium for the hardware I’d like to use. But it seems that the only thing likely to get me to a new Mac any time soon, is going to be when and if someone comes out with a decent OS 9 emulator that will run on one.

I’ve got my fingers crossed. But I refuse to cross my eyes.

—Neil Rubenstein

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A Cold Day in Redmond

For a few minutes I thought I was reading about AOL buying Time Warner.

When I first saw the news about Microsoft bidding on Yahoo, that was my first thought—you could play Mad Libs with this deal and it would make just about as much sense. Microsoft and Yahoo couldn't be more different: one is a company that sells software for your computer, and the other is a company that gives away Webware, mostly for free, in exchange for advertising revenue.

On some level Microsoft's mega-money [\\$44.6 billion](#)¹ bid vindicates what I've said in private for years about Google, that the smart money is on giving away software and making your money on hardware or advertising. But at the same time, Microsoft buying Yahoo to gain a foothold in the paid-advertising market online is disturbingly reminiscent of AOL's purchase, or for that matter the Tribune—Times-Mirror merger in 2001. The logic behind these deals always sounded to me like, “We lack X to fill out our business model; Y has X; therefore, we'll buy Y to get X.” The AOL—Time Warner and Tribune—Times-Mirror mergers were designed to tap into “synergies” between the Internet, broadcasting, and publishing worlds, but they've both failed because there was no such synergy.

Now, for another analogy on the Microsoft-Yahoo deal: remember when Microsoft bought Hotmail? I'm still not sure what it bought them circa 1997, other than a massive userbase and a small ad revenue stream. Then, they spent seven years redeveloping it, and letting the current version stagnate. It's now part of the Windows Live suite, but in the process of all of this redevelopment Redmond lost sight of the big picture. I don't have access to these numbers, but I wouldn't be surprised if the growth in Web mail market share is mostly contained to Yahoo and Gmail. Microsoft has a very large base, and I'm sure that provides a healthy revenue stream, but that's not a good weapon going forward.

¹http://biz.yahoo.com/ap/080201/microsoft_yahoo.html

So far, Yahoo is [resisting](#)² [being](#)³ [bought](#)⁴. Who knows what the future holds? I have no idea whether the deal will go through, but its implications are huge.

But enough on my opinion—I'm hardly the only one with one. The BBC's Tim Weber kicks it off by saying he thinks this is Microsoft's attempt to [strike back at Google](#)⁵:

Microsoft has watched Yahoo's struggle closely, and seen the writing on the wall. As Google has grown into a billion dollar business, it has increasingly strayed into Microsoft's territory, competing not just for advertising revenue but rivaling core Microsoft products like e-mail and word processing.

[...]

Making the offer is an admission that Microsoft's management has been scared by the success of Google.

The bid is also an acknowledgment that its numerous attempts to become a dominant Internet content provider have failed.

But to make it pay, Microsoft will have to demonstrate that the combined company can offer a superior business model.

And on Weber's side is no other than AOL's Randy Falco, irony of ironies, who told AdAge he thought the deal was a bad idea. “I think it's a mistake,” he said. “But I think Napoleon said [never interrupt your enemy](#)⁶ when they're in the middle of making a mistake.”

On the other hand Weber's BBC blogger colleague Darren Waters disagrees with his analysis. “[T]his

²<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/business/10yahoo.html>

³<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/08/technology/08yahoo.html>

⁴<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/12/technology/12yahoo.html>

⁵<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7222199.stm>

⁶http://adage.com/digital/article?article_id=125371

is about gearing up for the [second Internet age](#)⁷,” he writes, and Microsoft simply can’t compete at all with their current offerings. Buying Yahoo gives them an entrée into social networking, instant messaging, and online advertising markets where their toehold is almost meaningless.

So what’s the problem?

Well, the question is what Yahoo can offer Microsoft, and whether Microsoft can make use of it. John Gruber is compelling when he says he thinks that the deal will [destroy Yahoo](#)⁸ if Microsoft operates like Microsoft rather than like Berkshire Hathaway, and ponders how they could be more like the Sage of Omaha:

Here’s Dan “Fake Steve” Lyons’s analogy: “It’s like taking the two guys who finished second and third in a 100-yard dash and tying their legs together and asking for a rematch, believing that now they’ll run faster.”

That pretty much summarizes the Microsoft-being-Microsoft route—in a word: assimilation. If they try this with Yahoo, they’ll choke. Yahoo is too big, and too different, to be absorbed into Microsoft.

But what if Microsoft does the unexpected and keeps Yahoo separate and distinct? On a vastly smaller scale, that’s what Microsoft has done with its Mac Business Unit.

[...]

Keep the Yahoo brand along with all of Yahoo’s successful products—and product teams—intact. Commission one or two high-profile new Yahoo endeavors. The first should be to have the Flickr team do for video what they’ve done for still photography. (Why Yahoo didn’t do this immediately after acquiring Flickr, instead choosing to stand on the sidelines playing pocket pool while YouTube swelled into a multi-billion-dollar product, is a mystery for the ages.)

Let Yahoo continue to choose and create their own server and software development tools. Yahoo knows as much about

high-capacity Web scaling as any company in the world. That they’ve built their architecture around Linux, BSD, Apache, MySQL, and PHP—not a whiff of Microsoft technology—is a strength, not a weakness. Allowing Yahoo to keep this architecture isn’t just essential in terms of keeping existing Yahoo engineers happy, it would also greatly expand Microsoft’s overall corporate expertise.

If that happens, I think everyone [from Fake Steve](#)⁹ to even me can imagine how Microsoft could make the deal work. But can Microsoft? I doubt it. I can’t wait for the new, rebranded, Microsoft software-supported Windows Live Photos Desktop .Net Home Personal Photographer Edition Online and Windows Live Link Tagging and Search Service .Net Home Online Special Edition, a.k.a. flickr and del.icio.us.

Moving on, Tristan Louis considers how the deal might [change the Internet landscape](#)¹⁰, if it goes through. He says OpenID, AT&T, and AOL are winners, and some of the losers include advertising buyers and News Corp. It’s a good analysis, and persuasive. And *Tectonic’s* Alastair Otter agrees, saying the big question is what the possibility of a near-monopoly on Internet advertising could hurt the industry. Otter writes, “Microsoft and Yahoo together control an [estimated 20–24 percent](#)¹¹ of the global search advertising market and 30 per cent of the online display market, according to an *FT* source.” (One caveat: I’m not sold on the advertising question. With this deal, ad agencies could centralize their buying and extend their reach greatly. And they can bargain on price, because there’s still Google.)

Michael Arrington of *TechCrunch* ponders what Yahoo can do, if they reject the deal. He says, “Yahoo was hoping for a [competing bid](#)¹², any competing bid, if only to boost Microsoft’s offer to the \$40 range.” But there’s no such bid, and he thinks that all that is left is that either Microsoft will buy Yahoo or Yahoo will collapse on its own one way or another. Arrington says they’re no longer the giant they once were, and that torch is now Google’s.

⁹<http://fakesteve.blogspot.com/2008/02/ballmer-im-completely-out-of-ideas.html>

¹⁰<http://www.tnl.net/blog/2008/02/01/non-obvious-winners-and-losers-in-microsoft-yahoo-deal/>

¹¹<http://www.tectonic.co.za/?p=2106>

¹²<http://www.techcrunch.com/2008/02/06/decision-time-for-yahoo/>

⁷http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/technology/2008/02/microsoft_and_yahoo_perfect_pa.html

⁸http://daringfireball.net/2008/02/devils_advocate

And Jeff Jarvis gets the last word: he thinks this is a [deal of the dinosaurs](#)¹³. “It’s appropriate. . .that Yahoo is being bought by what one could say is the last old technology company, Microsoft,” Jarvis writes. “Will this be big enough to beat Google? No, because big won’t win in the end.”

Do They Wear Ski Parkas in Seattle?

- Jason Snell (*Macworld*), Jacqui Cheng (*Ars Technica*), David Heinemeier Hansson (37signals), and Wil Shipley (Delicious Monster) all got their hands on the MacBook Air and posted their impressions. As you might expect, the most detailed are Snell’s [extra-extra-comprehensive](#)¹⁴ review of every facet of the machine and Cheng’s examination of a model with the [solid-state drive](#)¹⁵. Verdicts? It’s not fast, but it’s an extremely solid machine with a lot of virtues for certain kinds of users. Hansson seriously considers using the MacBook Air as his [only computer](#)¹⁶, something no one in the technorati seems to even imagine, and Shipley raves about the [build quality](#)¹⁷ of the machine. It sounds nice.
- Philip Greenspun noted the miserable experience of trying to make a \$1,000 HP desktop work. It was bought off the shelf at Best Buy—astonishingly, no DVI! in 2008!—and the misery sounds just unreasonable. The machine crashed on its [very first boot](#)¹⁸, and system restore failed. I mean, really? A brand-new computer? Come on, Microsoft and HP.
- The iPhone’s mail client was switched from two-pane to modal somewhere between Macworld 2007 and its release. I’d forgotten all about it, but Ryan Block posted some screenshots of the [elusive original client](#)¹⁹. How funny is that?

¹³<http://www.buzzmachine.com/2008/02/01/microsoft-yahoo-the-deal-of-the-dinos/>

¹⁴<http://www.macworld.com/article/131864/2008/01/macbookair.html>

¹⁵<http://arstechnica.com/reviews/hardware/macbook-air-ssd-review.ars>

¹⁶<http://www.37signals.com/svn/posts/858-the-macbook-air-could-easily-be-the-only-machine>

¹⁷<http://wilshipley.com/blog/2008/02/macbook-air-rambling-first-impressions.html>

¹⁸<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/philg/2008/01/30/the-1000-hp-desktop-tower-running-windows-vista/>

¹⁹<http://www.ryanblock.com/2008/01/the-iphones-long-missing-two-pane-email-client/>

- Speaking of the iPhone, I think it’s hilarious that Edward Tufte is [critiquing](#)²⁰ the thickness of the borders of certain interface elements. Cathy Shive picked up on this, and ran with the ball: the thing that makes the iPhone such a success is the absence of what Tufte calls “computer administrative debris,” she says, and the challenge is to minimize it and at the same time provide [interface power](#)²¹. (That’s probably why the iPhone still doesn’t have copy and paste, something I might eventually figure out with my Windows Mobile phone which theoretically supports it. *That’s* the difference.)
- 37signals’ Sam Stephenson figured out a quick and dirty way to keep iPhoto from launching when you plug in your iPhone, but still launch it when you plug in your camera: link OS X’s auto-connection action to an Applescript that [checks which device it is](#)²². Smart, ingenious, and painless. The trifecta!
- James Duncan Davidson writes about his positive experience with the Aperture development team. He’d complained about some of the things that he didn’t like about Aperture, especially its speed, and had switched to using Adobe’s Lightroom principally. But Apple’s dev team called him in and sat down with him, listened to his feedback, and [made a lot of those changes](#)²³ in Aperture 2.0. That’s one hell of a response, if you ask me. He was clearly impressed, too.

And that’s all for March, folks. Just take a raincoat instead of a heavy jacket: this is Seattle’s rainy season.

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²⁰http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=00036T

²¹<http://katidev.com/blog/?p=20>

²²<http://www.37signals.com/svn/posts/873-tip-prevent-iphoto-from-opening-when-you-plug-in-your-iphone>

²³http://duncandavidson.com/blog/aperture_20_they_listened/

The “Can Do, Just Works” Principle

We were at my mother-in-law’s recently and needed to look up a map to the hospital I was taking her to for an appointment. We grabbed her Vista laptop (as recommended by my Windows-centric brother-in-law), connected it to the outside world via modem, and tried to dial into Google Maps.

Fifteen frustrating minutes later, after trying to get it to connect and stay online, then its painfully slow progress, we gave up. Instead, we bunged on an ancient G3 iBook we had been given that day, running an equally old operating system. In moments, we had setup a connection to an ISP through a modem we had never used before, whistled into Google Maps, and taken a screen shot for me to use.

Although I am not too familiar with Vista, one Web browser works pretty much like another. That brief experience of Vista was enough to persuade us to stay with Mac OS X or maybe Linux or Solaris, XP or 2000, but to avoid Vista as a dread disease. My mother-in-law is not stupid, nor are we, but we all decided that anyone who willingly uses Vista needs to be reformatted.

Excel All the Way

Apple excels at looking at something that is hard to do or at markets that are under-performing, then coming up with simple solutions that “just work.” They did it with the iMac, making it a computer you’d be happy to have in the living room. Then again with iTunes to establish the best digital music experience. It’s the same with the iPhone to make a smart phone that’s easy to use and live with, and it looks as if Apple will do it with film rentals next.

Alongside this is the world’s first easy-to-use Unix, as well as the little things such as software applications like iMovie and GarageBand. At one point, Apple even had the best Web site creator in Claris Home Page, still a great package for simple HTML-based sites—which are often the fastest and easiest to use.

Guessing Game

Below is a selection of remote controllers. They all do pretty much the same jobs: change channels, adjust

volume and picture, control a video or audio recording.



Guess which one Apple designed.

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FileMaking

by Charles Ross, cross@atpm.com

FileMaker 9

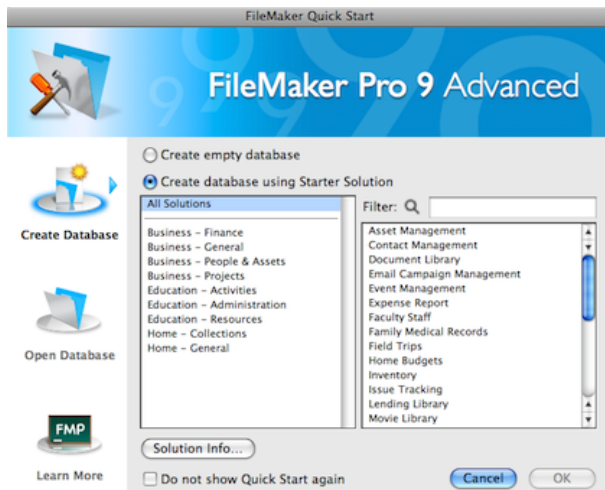
Although our [last article](#)¹ covered FileMaker 8.5, in that lengthy interim, a new version of FileMaker has been released, pushing the version number up to 9.

[FileMaker Pro 9](#)² is available for \$299, or \$179 to upgrade from FileMaker Pro 7 or higher. The [Advanced version](#)³ retails for \$499, and is a \$299 upgrade from FileMaker Pro 7, FileMaker Developer 7 or FileMaker Pro Advanced 8 or above.

I'll begin with those features aimed mostly at the novice database user and move gradually toward the more complex features aimed at the developer. The summary can be given in advance, however: while the list of feature additions in FileMaker Pro 9 is long, it's also shallow, and while all are welcome, none seem critical. I'll include everything new, with a brief description and comment.

Quick Start Screen

The first, and most obvious, feature you'll see after installing is the new Quick Start screen, similar in function to FileMaker 8.5's Template dialog box. If you need to use one of the built-in templates included with FileMaker, navigation to the one you want should be quicker with the categories of templates now in a list box rather than a pop-up menu.

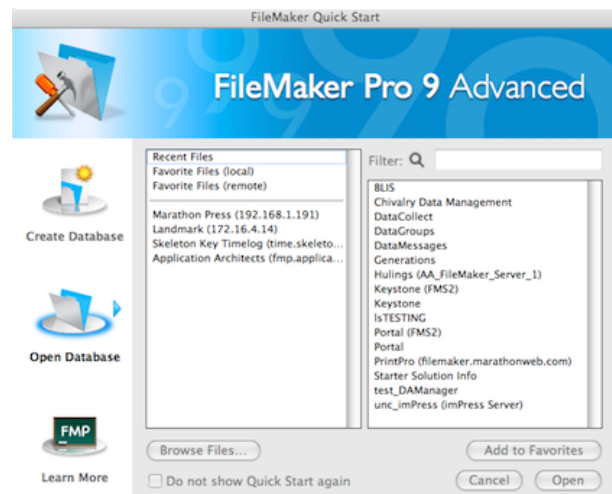


¹<http://www.atpm.com/12.09/filemaking.shtml>

²<http://www.filemaker.com/products/fmp/index.html>

³<http://www.filemaker.com/products/fmpa/index.html>

Additionally, recently-opened files are integrated into this Quick Start screen, so that clicking on the “Open Database” icon to the left displays a list of recently accessed files, both local and remotely accessed. Given the frequency with which I open the same files over and over again, this may prove helpful, although the feature still tracks a maximum of 16 recent files. The File > Open Recent menu will probably be more convenient for most people. My solution for opening commonly accessed files has been to use a third-party utility, such as [DragThing](#)⁴ or [Butler](#)⁵, to open local files and Web location files pointing to remote systems.



Also included here is quick access to the FileMaker Learning Center, although I anticipate that this would probably be the least-used portion of the Quick Start screen.

⁴<http://www.dragthing.com/>

⁵<http://www.manytricks.com/butler/>



Software Update Notification

A welcome addition is automatic software update notification, which, given that almost all computers are constantly connected to the Internet, should be standard with all software. However, this feature could have been made easier with the addition of the ability to automatically install updates from within the program, as other programs have begun to offer, rather than necessitating a visit to a Web site, downloading the software, and manually installing it. Also, the software update feature will check for updates every seven days or not at all; there's no option to change the frequency, for which my preference would be daily.

Multiple Undos and Field-Level Spell Checking

Although, when in layout mode to design a screen, FileMaker supports only a single level of undo, when editing text within a field, multiple undos are now supported. There's no mention of a limit on the number of undo/redo steps, so perhaps it's limited only by available memory or disk space, but experimenting showed that it's at least 100 steps.

While a nice addition, this feature has some drawbacks: it only works when editing fields, not when performing other actions such as layout editing or script editing, and the undo queue is cleared once you exit a record. So, for instance, you can't perform an edit, move to a different record or layout, and still be able to undo any of the editing actions of the previous record.

Field-Level Spell Check Settings

Another addition is that field-level spell checking options now allow you to turn off the spell checking for an individual field. Prior to this, spell checking was either on or off, which meant that if you ever needed spell checking, you turned it on, and if FileMaker was set to indicate questionable words with the commonly used red underline, then e-mail fields and other similar fields that shouldn't be spell-checked would show that the spelling needed to be corrected. While spell checking is useful, many fields in FileMaker, including proper names, e-mail and Web addresses, product codes, etc., shouldn't be spell checked, so this is a nice addition.

On the topic of spell checking, it's unfortunate that FileMaker still doesn't seem to use the Mac OS X global spelling dictionary, so setting a proper name, for instance, as learned in FileMaker, doesn't update the Mac OS X dictionary.

E-mailing Database Links

FileMaker has long had the ability to open URLs using the "fmp7://" protocol. However, sending a link to a served file has become much easier with the new File > Send Link command in the menu. Choosing this will create a new e-mail message in your default mail program and embed a link to the open FileMaker system into the body of the e-mail. If the recipient has FileMaker on his or her computer, clicking the link in the received message will open the database from the server.

Append to PDF

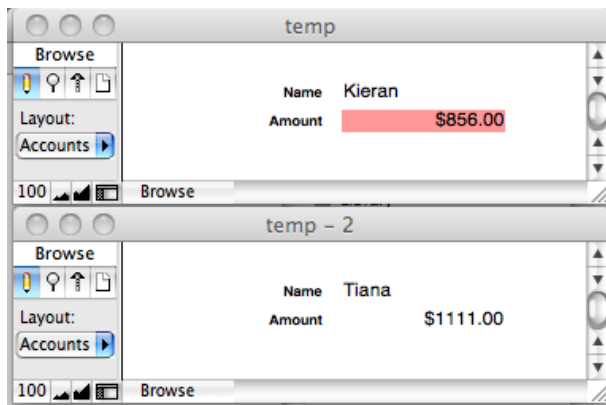
Extending FileMaker's ability to send a report to a PDF file is the ability to append a report to an existing PDF. This could, of course, be a previously run FileMaker report, but could also be a PDF created elsewhere, allowing the easier integration of documents generated in other applications with data compiled by FileMaker.

Conditional Formatting

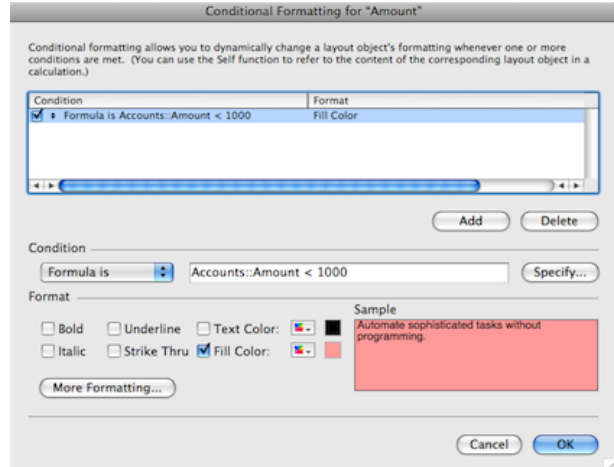
This one is probably my favorite feature introduced with FileMaker Pro 9. A favorite category of FileMaker feature introductions are those that eliminate the need for developer fields. In the past, script variables eliminated the need for global fields to act as variables in many cases, and text formatting functions allowed the direct manipulation of a field's format from a calculation, eliminating the need for a separate field having different formatting. Now con-

ditional formatting eliminates calculation fields used solely for providing context feedback to the user.

For example, perhaps you have a field that tracks the balance of credit with a vendor. If the balance falls below a certain amount, say \$1,000, an easy way to bring this to the notice of the user would be to have the balance include a red background. Prior to FileMaker 9, this would have required an extra calculation field and an extra global container field. The concept is that the global container field contains a small red swatch graphic and the calculation field is set such that if the balance is below \$1,000, it contains the contents of the global field and otherwise contains nothing. Then the number field and the calculation field are placed on top of each other such that when the calculation field has a color it can be seen beneath the number field.



That's a lot of work for so simple a feedback mechanism. Conditional formatting eliminates everything but the original number field. The format of a field can now have any number of conditions, and when they are true, display the formatting options specified.



New Functions

There are a few new functions this time around, but it's usually difficult to anticipate how necessary they are until a need for them is found. The new `Get(HostApplicationVersion)` allows you to retrieve the version of FileMaker that's hosting the system. `Get(TemporaryPath)` returns, as expected, the path to the temporary folder used by the operating system.

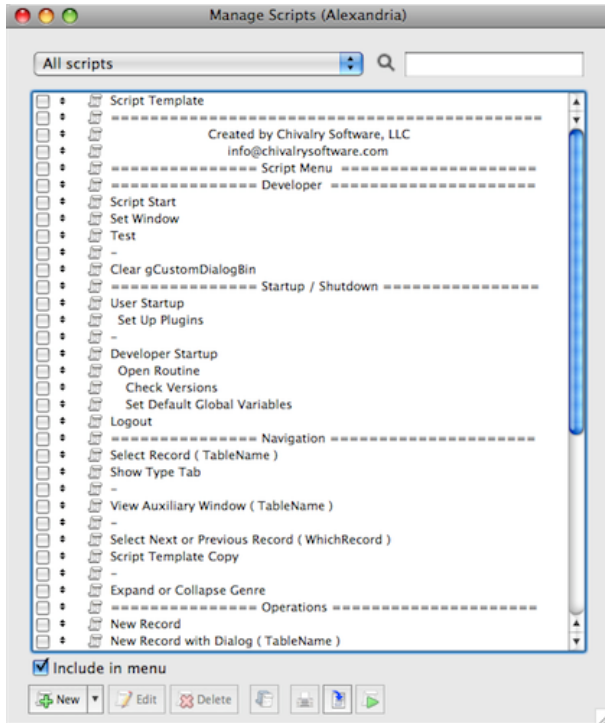
The `Self` function returns the contents of the object containing a calculation with the function. For example, in the conditional formatting example above, where I used the calculation `Accounts::Amount < 1000`, I could have used `Self < 1000` because the calculation was being defined within the object. Depending on the naming convention used for fields, this might also prove useful for tooltip calculations. When used in any other context (those in which it doesn't make any sense), the function will either return an empty string or FileMaker will prevent its use (such as in a custom function).

On the other hand, `Acos` and `Asin` don't do anything that couldn't be done before. The best new features in FileMaker are those that enable behavior that was not previously possible. While it's convenient to have built-in functions to retrieve the arccosine and arcsine of a number, custom functions are available for such needs, and the need for trigonometric functions is sparse.

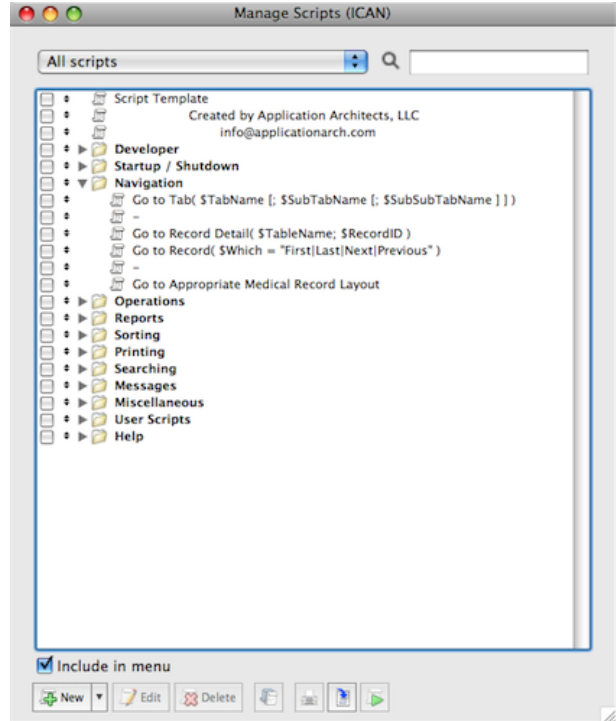
Script Organization and Editing

Two welcome additions for developers deal with the creation of FileMaker scripts. The first allows scripts to be organized into groups. Developers have had

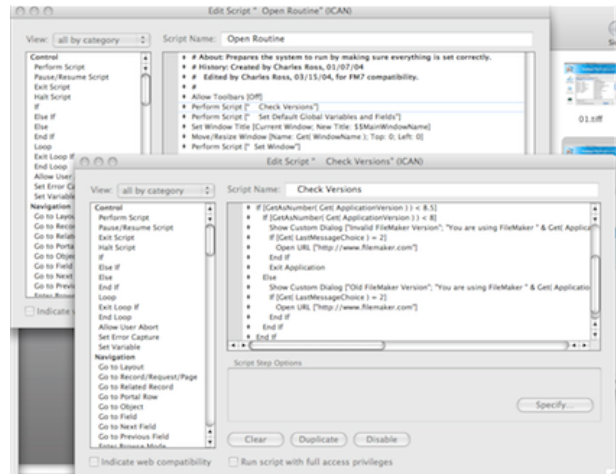
numerous techniques for organizing the flat format of script lists previously available, which usually entailed creating empty scripts as labels and separators.



FileMaker 9 now includes the abilities to group scripts into folders and to create explicit separators for groups of scripts. Since the file format hasn't changed, files that take advantage of this script organization can still be opened in FileMaker 7 or 8, with the folders and separators appearing as specially named empty scripts. This also has the advantages that a developer can work with an organized script list in FileMaker 9 for end users still working with FileMaker 7 or 8 without having to worry about compatibility issues, so long as the other new features of FileMaker 9 are avoided.



A second nice addition when working with scripts is the ability to have multiple script lists and multiple scripts open at one time. The script lists can be from separate files, and the scripts either from separate files or within a single file. Even though script parameters have eliminated some of the need for identical steps in multiple scripts, there are still times when copying steps from one script to another can be useful, and the ability to have multiple scripts open at one time makes this process, as well as comparing scripts, much easier.

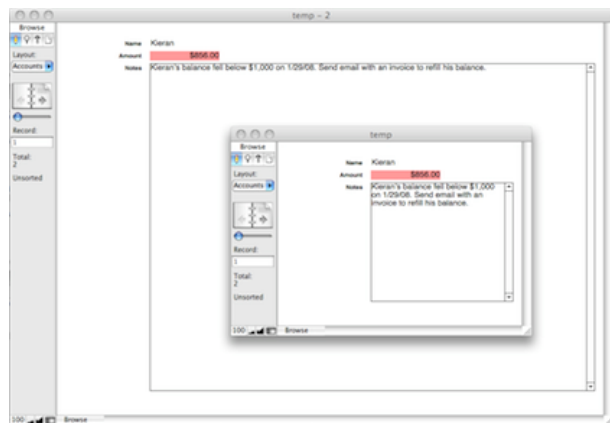


Enhanced Layout Objects

FileMaker layouts are getting more and more dynamic with each release. Back in the old days, it was common to create multiple versions of a single “screen” to account for multiple tab views and possible for multiple screen resolutions. FileMaker’s tab feature solved the first problem, and resizable layout objects addresses the second problem.

For example, perhaps you’re building a multi-user system, and while most users have a screen resolution of 1024×768, there are a few out there who have larger resolutions. A developer has three options in such cases: build layouts for the lowest common denominator and don’t take advantage of the extra screen real estate when available; build layouts for the larger screen and force those with smaller resolutions to scroll to see everything; build two versions of the layouts, one for the smaller resolution and one for the larger resolution. None of these options is very satisfactory.

With FileMaker 9, none need be chosen. Layout objects now have the ability to resize with an increase in the window’s dimensions, so that if the user has a larger screen and a script zooms the window to take advantage of that, layout objects can be configured to also resize in order to use the extra pixels. Developers who have worked with Xcode or REALbasic will be familiar with this feature.



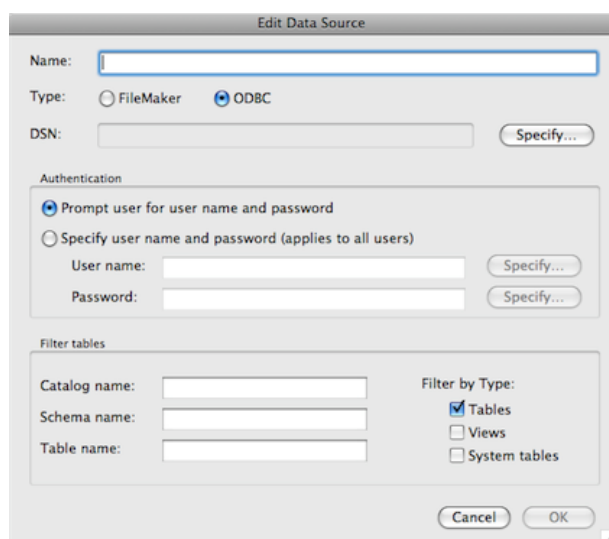
This image shows two views of the same layout where the Notes field has been automatically resized to account for the larger window that was manually set.

Connect to SQL

FileMaker has long had the ability to bring data from SQL sources into existing tables in FileMaker, but

there were limitations to this feature, the most basic being that the data brought in from SQL sources was not live, but had to be periodically updated.

FileMaker 9 brings SQL tables to the same level as FileMaker tables found in another file. To FileMaker, a SQL source is just another external data source, like a table found in another FileMaker file. This means that data in such tables is live and can be related to, just like native FileMaker data. What all this means is that the integration of FileMaker data with existing SQL data is seamless. If you happen to have existing data in, for example, a MySQL database, that data can be viewed and manipulated within FileMaker as easily as native FileMaker data.

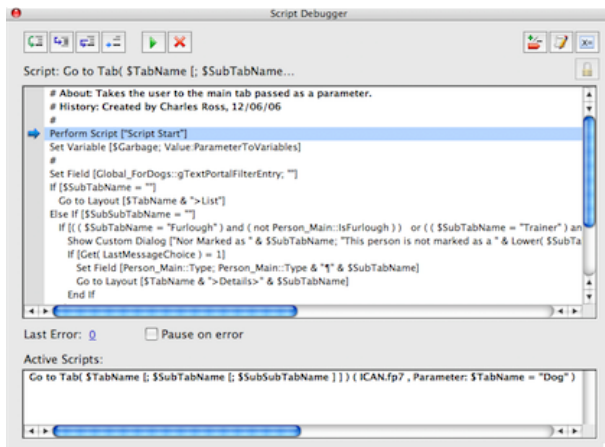


This feature doesn’t stand alone, however. In addition to FileMaker and the external SQL data source, you’ll need the appropriate ODBC driver. For example, the one recommended by FileMaker, Inc. is published by [Actual Technologies](http://www.actualtechnologies.com)⁶ and costs \$30 per license.

New Script Debugger

There have been minor but welcome enhancements to the script debugging feature in FileMaker Pro Advanced. If a script’s access is restricted and the account currently being used is not a full-access account, authorization can be given when the script is debugged. This means that a developer can debug a script while logged on as an end user, which had always been problematic.

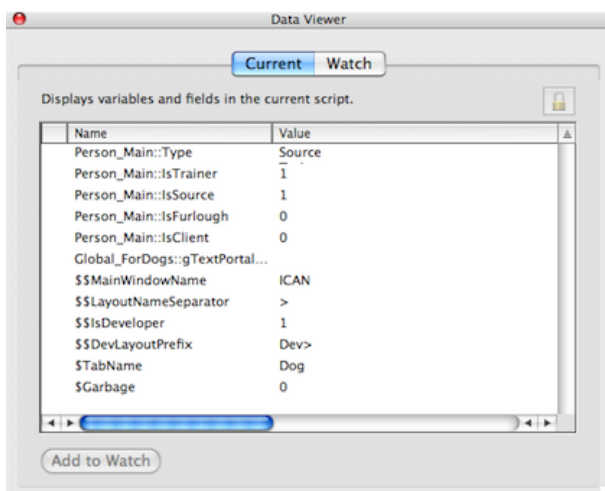
⁶<http://www.actualtechnologies.com/filemaker.php>



Also, error codes generated during script execution can be viewed within the debugger window, eliminating the need for extra script steps just to reveal such codes. And if an error does appear, it's displayed as a link that will take the user to the relevant help page for more information on the nature of the error.

Improved Data Viewer

Like the script debugger, authorization can take place as needed when working with a file using an end-user account. The Data Viewer also tries to be a bit more intelligent by attempting to automatically show variables that are local to the currently executing script, although I've found that this isn't always correct, and often variables still need to be manually added to the watch list.



Leopard

Although the initial release of FileMaker Pro 9 had some compatibility issues with Mac OS X 10.5, FileMaker, Inc. has since released an update to account for some of these issues. A new update is expected to deal with some remaining issues, such as window selection, especially while using Spaces.

Conclusion

There was a time when a full number increment to the FileMaker version numbering scheme meant a large number of new features. Honestly, this hasn't seemed to have been the case since the release of FileMaker 7. I actually tend to think of this as version 7.7, given the incremental improvements made since then. I sometimes think that software developers increment the full version number in an attempt to justify the upgrade price. If you work with FileMaker as a full-time developer, the new conditional formatting and script editing feature will be worth the upgrade. If you have existing FileMaker databases for your own personal use, you're probably fine with the version you have. FileMaker 9 is still a great product if you need a simple database manager, although you might also look into FileMaker's other recent offering, [Bento](#)⁷, which may be a better choice for simple list keeping, both in terms of ease of use and price.

*Copyright © 2008 Charles Ross, cross@atpm.com. Charles Ross is a Certified FileMaker 7 Developer and the Chief Technology Officer of Chivalry Software, LLC⁸, a company specializing in custom database, web and automation software and publisher of Function Helper⁹, a FileMaker calculation debugging tool. He was a contributing writer and the technical editor for *The Book of FileMaker 6*¹⁰ and has contributed to *ISO FileMaker Magazine*¹¹ and *Macworld*¹² in addition to his series on *AppleScript*¹³ for ATPM.*



⁷<http://www.filemaker.com/products/bento/overview.html>

⁸<http://www.chivalrysoftware.com>

⁹<http://www.chivalrysoftware.com/home/functionhelper.php>

¹⁰<http://www.nostarch.com/frameset.php?startat=filemaker>

¹¹<http://www.filemakermagazine.com>

¹²<http://www.macworld.com>

¹³<http://www.atpm.com/Back/roll.shtml>

Desktop Pictures

by Jennifer Curry

Havana Vehicles

We need new desktop pictures each month. [Write](#)¹ to us!

[This Month's Desktop Pictures](#)²

This month's pictures were taken by ATPM reader Jennifer Curry during her 2006 trip to Cuba.



[View Pictures](#)^a

^a<http://www.atpm.com/14.03/havana-vehicles/>

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the desktop pictures [archives](#)³.

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

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

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

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#)⁴.

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.

¹<mailto:editor@atpm.com>

²<http://www.atpm.com/14.03/havana-vehicles/>

³<http://www.atpm.com/Back/desktop-pictures.shtml>

⁴<http://automator.us/examples-02.html>

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x through 10.5.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

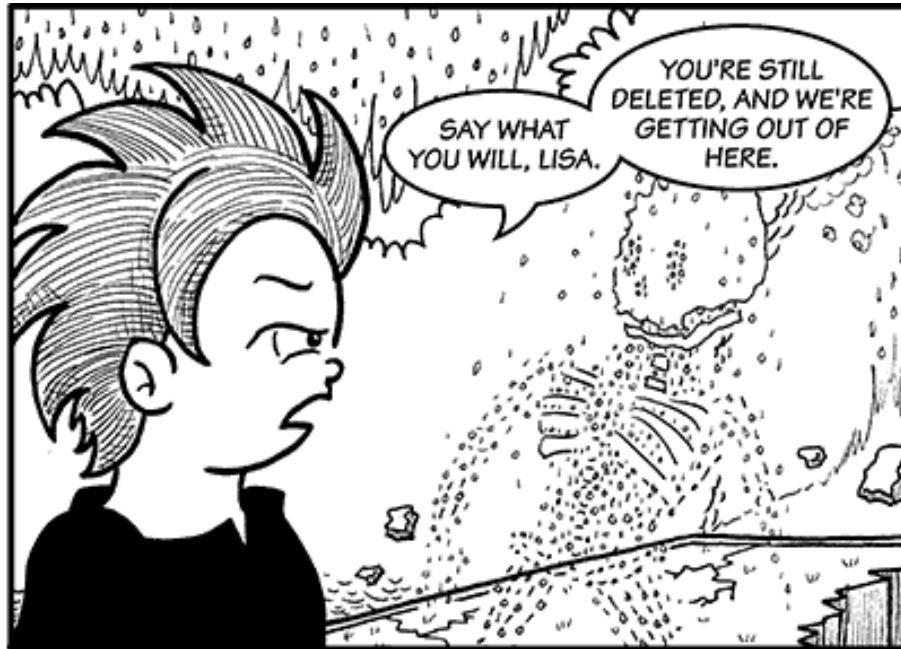
Mac OS X 10.0.x

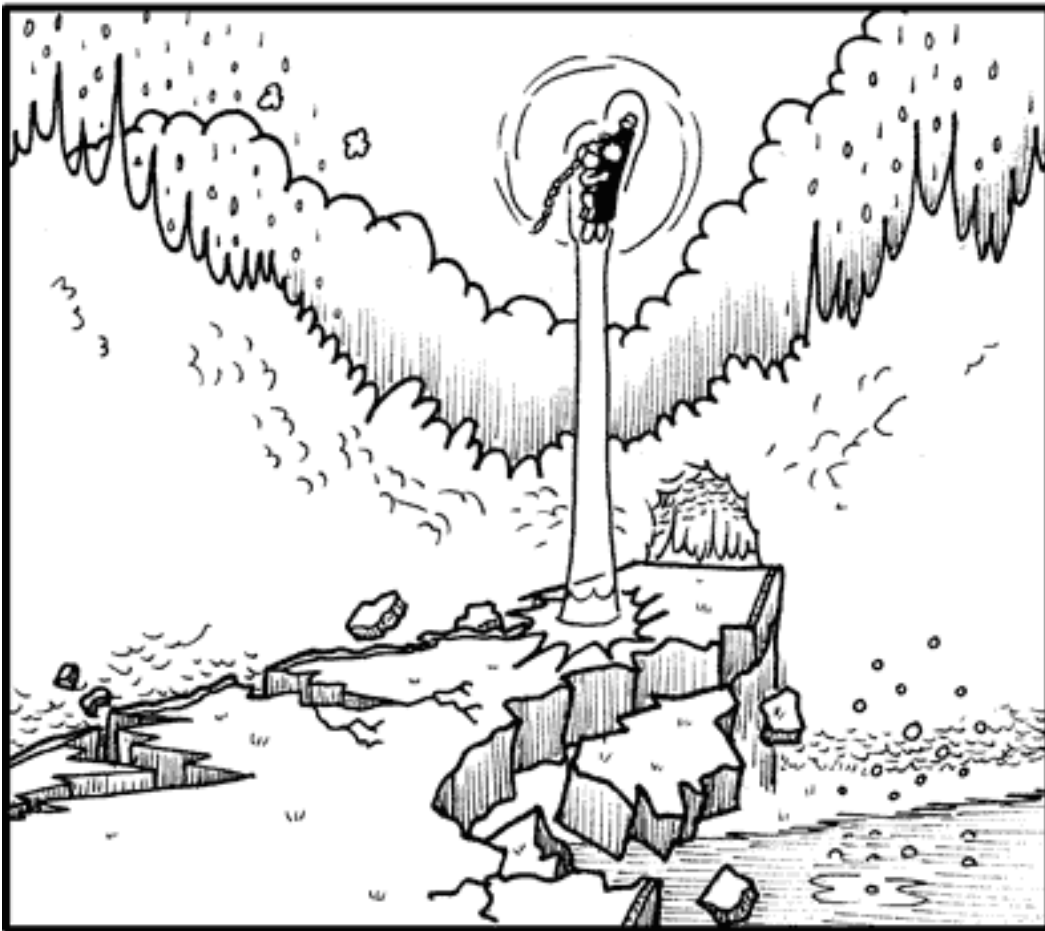
Switch to the Finder. Choose “Preferences...” from the “Finder” menu. Click on the “Select Picture...” button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the “Finder Preferences” window when you are done.



Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com















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Hardware Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

ArtixScan M1 Dual Media Scanner

Developer: [Microtek](#)¹

Price: \$650

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 or 10.4
(10.5 is not officially supported).
[Not Universal](#)².

Recommended: USB 2.0.

Trial: None

Having used Microtek's [ScanMaker 9800XL](#)³ at my office for a number of years, my expectations were rather high for the ArtixScan M1.



Hinge Quality



The Microtek ArtixScan M1 Dual Media Scanner.

At \$650 retail, this scanner is significantly less expensive than professional flatbed scanners, but is conversely priced significantly higher than most consumer scanners. Out of the box, the ArtixScan M1 appears, at first, to be a solid piece of hardware, and the included software might seem to support that appearance.

Alas, it was more of an illusion than an appearance. In a nutshell, the ArtixScan M1 doesn't seem to be well constructed, it's slower than molasses in winter, and it makes noises worthy of a carnival spook house.

I did like that the ArtixScan M1 was simple to set up and get the software installed. But that's where I stopped liking it.

¹<http://www.microtekusa.com/microtek-artixscan-m1.html>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>

³<http://www.microtekusa.com/sm9800xlma.html>



Even though the ArtixScan M1's cover is lightweight and thin, its support hinges seem extremely chintzy.

Clearly, inexpensive consumer scanners won't have world-class sturdiness in the hinges. Also, I must note that I'm accustomed to the solid hinges on my pro scanner at work. With this in mind, my expectation was that I'd find middle-ground hinges on this mid-range scanner. What I actually found were hinges that would cause me concern if I were planning to use this scanner long-term. In the photo above, the two plastic struts that hold up the lid are visible. The bottom end of these struts swivel inside the indentations on the scanner itself.



One of the ArtixScan M1's plastic hinges.

The upper fourth of the above photo is the scanner's lid. The plastic strut and the hinge can be seen. The hinge portion is just a rounded bulb of plastic at the end of the strut which rests in the round indentation. When the hinge swivels to close the lid, the strut is upright and the lid is flush against the top of the scanner. The round hinge portion is barely a half inch in diameter.

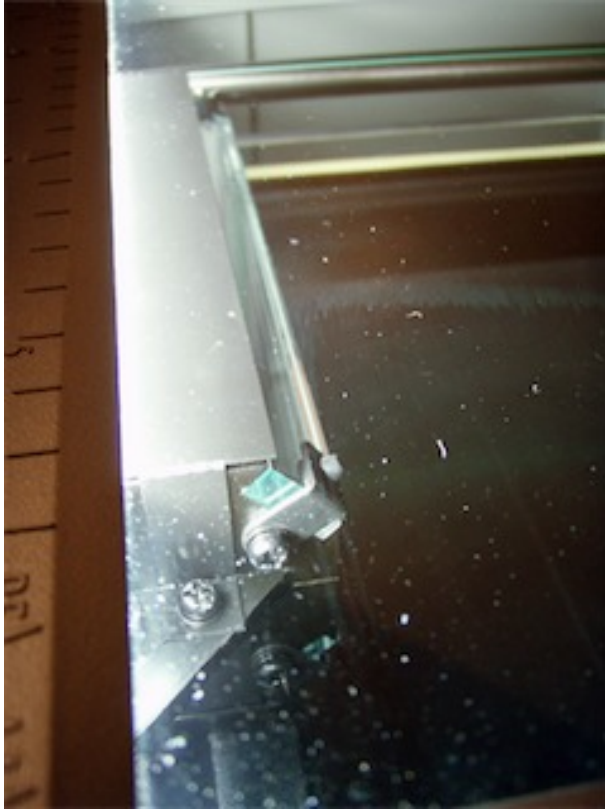


The scanner lid is removable. This image shows the entire strut that fits into the indentations on the scanner.

This type of consumer-grade hinge, combined with a lid that is larger than those found on less expensive scanners, is a recipe for potential catastrophe. An owner would be highly advised to take care about the stress placed on this hinge. I'd be concerned with even a minimal amount of twisting, something I found the lid prone to doing.

Dust Devil

The next major issue was one I didn't notice until I had installed the software and powered up the scanner. As soon as the bulb lit up, a horrific amount of dust and debris was visible on the scanner glass.



This might be an expected scene on a two- or three-year-old scanner, but brand new out of the box?

Unfortunately, 95% of this dirt was on the bottom side of the glass, and I found absolutely no way to clean it. I asked myself, “How does this much dirt get inside the scanner in the first place?” I needed only remove the transparency adapter tray to answer that question. Once removed, a three-quarter-inch-tall cavity stands ready to grant access to all forms of floating debris. It’s so huge, yet is so small because I still can’t get anything inside to clean the glass.



Because the transparency adapter is inserted directly into the scanner’s innards, dust can easily fly into the slot, or be carried from the adapter, into the scanner.

Vague recollections from high school science classes had me theorizing that the glass probably gains a certain amount of static electricity, causing an even greater invitation for dust to cling to the bottom side. I’m accustomed to my pro scanner at work, which contains a secondary lighting element in the lid. Transparencies, once fitted into templates, are laid on the same surface where standard photos are placed. As such, there are no large transparency tray slots that dust can float into. Admittedly, this may be much of the reason my pro scanner retails for \$1,800, but I don’t believe a scanner at any price should be designed so that dust can fly in so easily.

Transparency Adapters

Since I’m on the topic of transparency adapters, this is the right moment to mention that the ArtixScan M1 is bundled with adapters for four different types of transparencies.



The ArtixScan M1's transparency adapters. The holder tray is above. The four adapters, clockwise from upper left: 35mm slides, 35mm filmstrips (negatives and unmounted slides), 6cm transparencies up to 22cm in width, and 4x5 medium format film.

The transparency holder tray is open in the middle. Another tray with this space filled with glass is also included. With the glass tray and included tacky strips, transparencies that do not fit one of the four adapters can still be scanned.

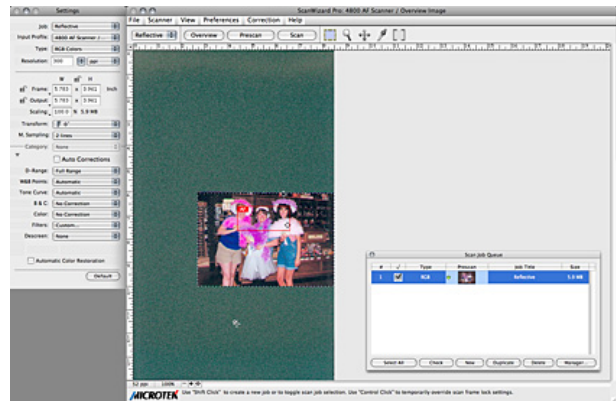
Other than having to insert the trays into the scanner's internal mechanism, the transparency adapters were one of the ArtixScan M1's features that I liked. 35mm slide mounts happily live in the 12 slots, and sliding film in and out of the 35mm filmstrip adapter is far easier than with the adapter on my ScanMaker at the office. I also liked the lids on the larger format adapters which securely hold the film in place.

Software

Officially, Microtek's ScanWizard Pro software is not supported on Mac OS X 10.5. Apple's current operating system has been out for more than four months and has seen a much higher rate of adoption by users

than any previous version. It is a travesty that 10.5 is not yet officially supported.

Yet, other than two issues I encountered, I was still able to install the software under Leopard and perform some scans. One of the issues was that the Photoshop plug-in couldn't be recognized. I had to launch the application separately and then open the images in Photoshop. The second issue turned up when I tried to type in the desired filename of my scan. No matter what I tried, the filename field would only accept a single character. Each character I typed replaced whatever had come before. The filetype extension, however, stayed as part of the filename, having been auto-filled by an option in the Open/Save dialog box.



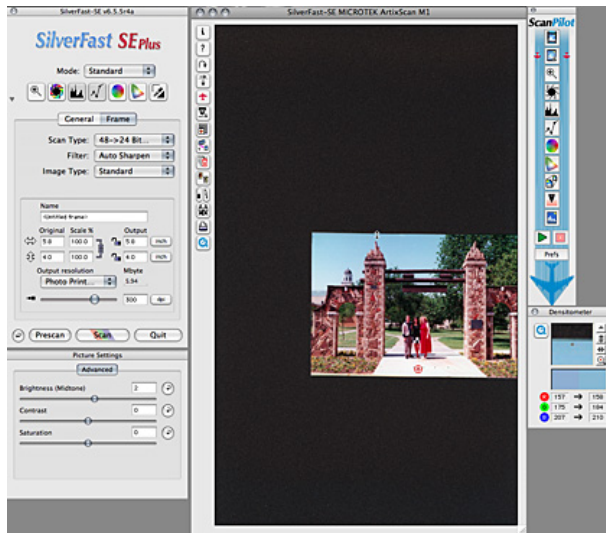
Microtek's ScanWizard Pro software.

ScanWizard Pro is not the worst scanning software I've ever used, but it's far from the best. Visually, it appears as though it's a haphazard port of a Windows version. The menu bar items don't even appear in the Macintosh's main menu bar. They instead show up within the scan window, just like a Windows application. The Settings panel contains advanced adjustments that will quickly confuse a novice user with no indication that they are optional/advanced settings.

At the top of the Settings panel, the Job adjustment contains a pop-up menu, suggesting I can change from a Reflective original to a Transparency. Yet, no other options were visible when I clicked the menu. Instead, I must change the scan type with the menu in the main window. This setting is updated in the Settings panel as needed.

As an alternative to ScanWizard Pro, Microtek included the SilverFast SE Plus software. I strongly advise the use of this software instead of ScanWizard Pro. Though also not perfect, I find it far simpler

to use. A variant release of SilverFast designed for upper-end scanners is what I use at my office.



SilverFast SE Plus third-party software.

Leopard compatibility was an issue with SilverFast, as well. The bundled version installed without a problem, and even worked as a Photoshop plug-in. I then noticed a setting to switch from Standard to Basic scanning mode. Standard was used by default. When I tried changing to Basic, a portion of SilverFast crashed. Only the main scanner window remained, but the settings window on the left disappeared. Subsequent relaunches repeated this crash. With the settings window inaccessible, I could not switch back to Standard.

It took a trip to SilverFast's Web site, registration of the software, and a download to retrieve an updated version to resolve this issue. Once I was up to date, I encountered no further issues with the SilverFast software, and I would even recommend that novice users start with the Basic scanning mode.

Speed and Sound

The process of performing a scan on the ArtixScan M1 is an exercise in patience—a great deal of it is required. I honestly don't feel as though it took much, if any, longer to install the scanner than it did to scan a photo. I'm sure this assessment, in reality, is an exaggeration. But perception is important, and I just didn't like how long it took for a scan to complete.

Likewise, this scanner makes an outrageous racket. It was of sufficient annoyance that I did some searching in forums, and I found other users

complaining of both noise and lack of speed. I did ponder whether the review unit that was shipped had a defect, but I don't believe anything is wrong with it. It's simply slow and noisy.

Scan Quality

The reasons are pretty straightforward why I assigned an Okay rating to the ArtixScan M1 and not Rotten. Once I started using the latest version of SilverFast SE Plus, the scanner performed reliably—speed and noise notwithstanding. The quality of the scans is quite in the same league as my ScanMaker at work, but the images seemed better than scans I've encountered from cheaper scanners. The flexibility of the transparency adapters also gives the ArtixScan M1 an edge over cheaper scanners.



My first scan with the ArtixScan M1. This image of the Dallas School Book Depository was taken in 2000.



This scan, also from 2000, features a darker background which I used to demonstrate the severity of the dust on the scanner glass.

The images above are directly from the scanner. The only adjustments performed were reduction to ATPM's default image width, and a slight amount of sharpening. Scans seemed to have a slight red cast, but I find that to be rather common with most scanners—even my higher-end ScanMaker. Otherwise, the scan quality was very acceptable.

The second image's dark background, however, reveals just how bad the dust problem is with the ArtixScan M1. The contamination, in my opinion, makes this scan unusable.



This detail of a small portion of the second scan appears at 1:1 ratio—no reduction.

The above detail was lightened slightly to better reveal the dust specks and lint strands strewn across the image. (Note: don't confuse the light reflections of the canister lids in the background for the dust appearing everywhere else.)



This image was scanned from a 35mm negative.

Scanning a 35mm negative produced scarier noises than scanning a printed photo, but the results were satisfactory.

If you'd like to study the original/raw TIFF scans, all three can be [downloaded](#)⁴ as a Zip archive (15.5 MB).

Conclusion

I started out indicating my high expectations for the ArtixScan M1, based on my experience with Microtek's ScanMaker 9800XL. The ArtixScan M1 is actually capable of pretty good quality scans, but the hurdles to get there just aren't worth it. Moreover, the scan quality doesn't seem sufficiently better than some less-expensive scanners to justify the ArtixScan M1's higher price.

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⁴http://www.atpm.com/14.03/images/Raw_TIFFs.zip

Software Review

by Eric Blair, eblair@atpm.com

LicenseKeeper 1.3.2

Developer: [Outer Level](http://outerlevel.com)¹

Price: \$20

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

Trial: Feature-limited (5 products with 3 attachments each).



Were we so inclined, we could waste many hours debating the relative merits of electronic and physical software distribution. As we can now buy and download much of our software directly from the Internet, this much is clear: if the paper serial number and registration card are not yet dead, then the day of their demise is drawing nigh.

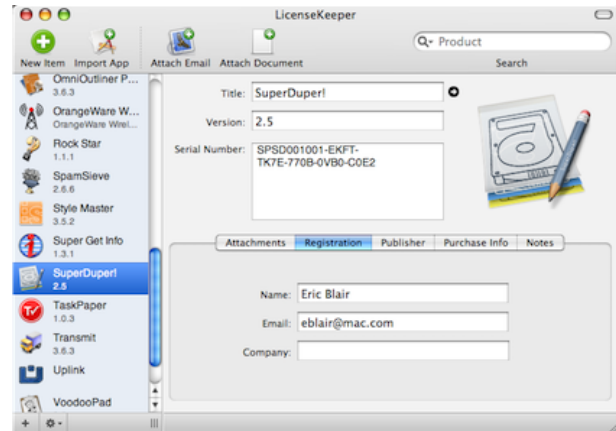
As much of a pain as those cards could be, they provided us with some degree of physical evidence that we'd purchased a product. With the move to digital distribution, our proof-of-purchase has also been digitized, often in the form of a serial number-bearing e-mail or a license file. The challenge, then, is how to manage this information so it is available when you need it. My personal approach to this has evolved over the years, from "just chuck it" to "keep the e-mails" to "store it in [Yojimbo](http://www.yojimbo.com)³."

LicenseKeeper, from Outer Level, lets me track my software registration history in a manner that is segregated from other information that I'm tracking. I have found that this dedicated application offers some advantages over my previous approaches, but that it also suffers from certain shortcomings.

License Management

Unlike many applications dedicated to information management, LicenseKeeper breaks away from the common three-pane display by eschewing any sort of organizational component. Instead, each record you add is displayed in a source list, along with an icon and version number. The records are listed in alphabetical order, so you can quickly get a rough idea of where to locate a specific record. If you are tracking a number of records, though, you will be scrolling through the list. Fortunately, LicenseKeeper does

offer search functionality, so you can cut down the number of listed applications.



LicenseKeeper allows you to track information related to many aspects of your software purchases.

When entering information into LicenseKeeper, you of course have the option to type everything by hand; however, LicenseKeeper offers several shortcuts for collecting information. The first of these are import commands for applications, plug-ins, preference panes, and widgets. At the very least, these commands create new entries in LicenseKeeper containing the name and icon of the chosen source. In many cases, these commands can extract additional information, like the version number and the developer's Web site.

I did discover a shortcoming of the plug-in importer—it only appears to recognize certain types of plug-ins, perhaps by examining the file extension. While I was able to import plug-ins that ended in ".plugin," LicenseKeeper did not recognize my copy of [FlickrExport](http://connectedflow.com/flickrexport/)⁴, which has the ".iPhotoExporter" extension.

Registration records in LicenseKeeper can also contain attachments. As far as I can tell, the two most common usages of attachments will be registration e-mails and license files. When you attach a file or e-mail to a record, LicenseKeeper actually makes

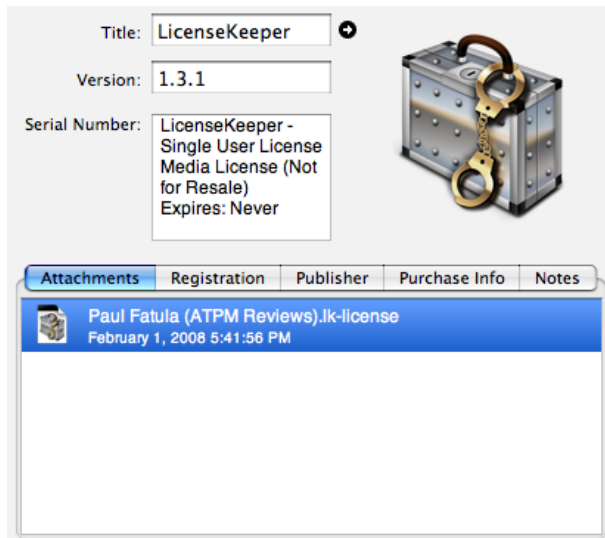
¹<http://outerlevel.com/licensekeeper/>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>

³<http://www.atpm.com/12.06/yojimbo.shtml>

⁴<http://connectedflow.com/flickrexport/iphoto>

a copy of the source data, so you don't have to worry about keeping track of the original.



Any type of file can be stored as an attachment to a record.

Being able to store license files is one of the major advantages a specialized license management application can have over a more general information management application, like Yojimbo. In my experience, this type of registration scheme is not as common as serial number-based schemes, but having a single tool that can conceivably handle any type of registration information is very convenient.

Attached e-mails can be used for more than just reference material; LicenseKeeper includes e-mail scanning capabilities that should allow the application to pull registration information directly from e-mails. In practice, I've found this functionality to be a little hit-or-miss. Sometimes, no information is retrieved from the e-mail. In other cases, incorrect information is retrieved (I have one registration e-mail where the scanner insists that the serial number is "Serial"). Given the vast number of ways registration information can be represented in an e-mail, I can't say I was surprised by this feature's performance.

Currently, LicenseKeeper supports e-mail attachments directly from Mail, Entourage, and PowerMail. If you use another e-mail client, you can save your message as a text file, then manually attach it to the appropriate record. You can also tell LicenseKeeper to override your default e-mail client if you split your mail among multiple programs.

I did see one reproducible crashing issue with generating e-mail attachments directly from Mail that I believe is related to my e-mail archiving technique. I move all of my old e-mails from Mail to an [EagleFiler](http://c-command.com/eaglefiler/)⁵ library. EagleFiler, in turn, lets me open these saved messages inside of Mail. I originally attempted to capture old registration e-mails using this approach, but LicenseKeeper would crash whenever I tried to capture an e-mail from Mail using this technique.

Owning Your Info

One thing that's always important to know when dealing with any sort of information management applications is whether or not you can access your data if you decide to stop using the application. LicenseKeeper is somewhat successful in that regard. For mass-export options, LicenseKeeper allows you to export your information as either a text file (comma-separated, tab-separated, and the like) or as an XML file. The XML file is the only option that also exports all of your attachments, but this export is plainly meant for machine processing and not human consumption, as all your attachments are named with UUIDs. The only way to figure out the identity of the attachments is to look through the XML file. Unsurprisingly, this XML format is the format that LicenseKeeper supports for import.

That's not to say that your attachments are permanently trapped inside of LicenseKeeper—attachments can be copied out of LicenseKeeper via drag and drop or via a menu item. However, these approaches require you to repeat the steps for every record that contains attachments. There does not appear to be any quick and simple way to export your records with attachments in a format that you would find useful.

Rough Edges

Frankly, I was surprised by the number of rough edges I encountered while using LicenseKeeper—I would expect such a specialized application to have its details down pat. The first of these cases involves LicenseKeeper's Address Book integration. For the times when LicenseKeeper is unable to determine a registration e-mail, it can query your Address Book card for the information. In my case, LicenseKeeper constantly selects my Gmail address, which I never use for software registration. For each record, I need to go in and manually reset the address to the correct value. I would expect LicenseKeeper to make this

⁵<http://c-command.com/eaglefiler/>

easier. Since the application is already referencing my Address Book record, there should be a quick way to switch between my e-mail addresses. One approach I've seen is to provide a combo box that lets the user type in any value or select an e-mail address from the addresses listed in their record.

Another issue that seems common in LicenseKeeper is a failure to disable user interface items as appropriate. LicenseKeeper uses iTunes-like arrow buttons to trigger actions which will take you out of the application. You can visit the publisher's Web site, you can create an e-mail to support, or you can launch an application. When there is no text in either the Web site or support e-mail fields, the associated arrow buttons are still drawn as active. Likewise, when you are viewing a non-application, the Launch button appears to be active. I first noticed this behavior when I attempted to open a preference pane, expecting System Preferences to launch. Instead, nothing happened.

A similar issue can be seen with some menu items, including the Launch command. The same behavior can be seen with the Scan for Serial Number command, which is active whenever an attachment is selected, regardless of whether the attachment type is supported by LicenseKeeper.

LicenseKeeper offers the ability to print out a record of your licenses, which could come in handy should you find yourself in need of a hard copy. However, you have the choice between printing each record on a single page or printing multiple records on a page (a record takes up slightly less than half a page). If you choose the latter option, the page break will sometimes occur mid-line. At the very least, page breaks should line up with line breaks. A better option might be preventing records from spanning multiple pages.

Closing Thoughts

The more I time I spend in LicenseKeeper, the more mixed my feelings become. Thanks to its attachment support, it offers a clear advantage over my previous approach to license management. Furthermore, the e-mail scanning feature shows promise and will hopefully improve in future versions. That said, there is a rather high barrier to switching to LicenseKeeper if you been managing your licenses in another application—between the import feature only supporting LicenseKeeper's XML format and crashing when I tried to import e-mails from EagleFiler, I ended up having to add my applications, copy over

the serial numbers from Yojimbo, and retype my e-mail address.

If you currently have serial numbers scattered about or are relying on various customer support departments for your password management, you should consider LicenseKeeper—I've found that having an organized record can be very beneficial should something happen to your computer. However, if you already have a management system that meets your needs, I would recommend holding off on LicenseKeeper to see what improvements come in future versions.

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Software Review

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, eritterskamp@atpm.com

MacPool 8.9

Developer: [BaKno](http://www.bakno.com)¹

Price: \$20 (download); \$30 (for two licenses).

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2. Universal².

Trial: Feature-limited (main games have a ten-shot limit; Billiards and Snooker are available only with registration).



Confession time: I played a little pool, back in the day. I am old enough to be allowed to say “back in the day,” but just barely.

I was never great at the game, with a handicap smack in the middle of the league, but that wasn't bad. I especially liked the idea of angles. One time when I played with a physics major friend who'd never played and was struggling, I had an epiphany, and told her it was just vectors. She was great after that. So this game appeals to me on a mathematical level even though I am not that great at math. It appeals to some people who like to hit the ball hard and hear it hit other balls hard. Some folks like the way the felt feels, or its color. There is something in it for a lot of us.

So I had high hopes for MacPool 8.9. I had yet to play a good pool game on a Mac, though I know they exist. Mostly it had been online Flash games that did not satisfy.

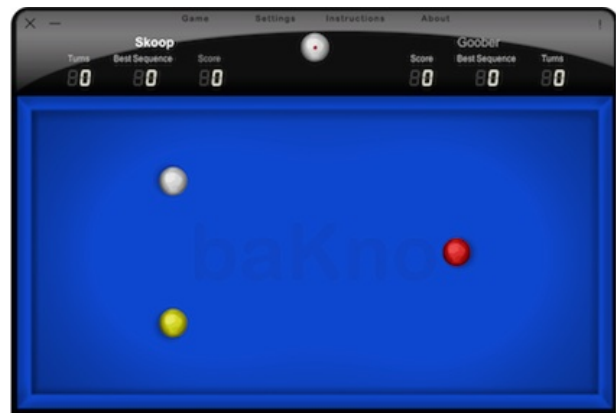
This game comes from BaKno, which describes its games as “collaborative development work,” which I am not sure if they are for-profit or just breaking even, or what. I was unable to find out much about the group on the Web, except for several announcements about game releases. I was particularly intrigued to see that MacPool 8.7 was released in mid-January 2008, version 8.8 a bit later, and version 8.9 in early February. I bet that doesn't mean anything to developers, who understand versioning. But to a casual user like me, I thought it was odd. I wondered if it Meant Something.

I downloaded the game, which took mere seconds, as the file is maybe 3 MB and there is no installer. I find this to be an asset. I was surprised to be able

to just click on the icon and get moving. I read later on the Web site that all BaKno's games are set up this way. They are designed to be simple to play, and simple to use, and I find this one to be just that.

I say it is simple to use, but there are a few snags in the playing process, but nothing substantial. There's a game called 14:1, which I loved, which requires you to call your ball and pocket. It felt like it took a while after I clicked the ball before I could click the pocket, and then another long second before I could click the cue ball to start the shot. I am not a whiz-kid fast video gamer, so this is not the ranting of someone who expects instant gratification. But I felt like this was a delay that could have been speeded up.

That 14:1 game was a revelation to me. I'd played 8-ball and 9-ball, both of which are here, and snooker, which is available as an add-on. But this 14:1 game was new to me, and I liked it a lot. It starts off just like 8-ball, but you call your ball and pocket first. You can call any ball and any pocket, the whole game. Turns out this game is otherwise known as straight pool, and though its day has passed, it has been very popular in the US (especially in the movie [The Hustler](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054997/)³).



Billiards starting position.

The billiards game is fine, but it was the first time I missed the tactile sensations of the in-person game.

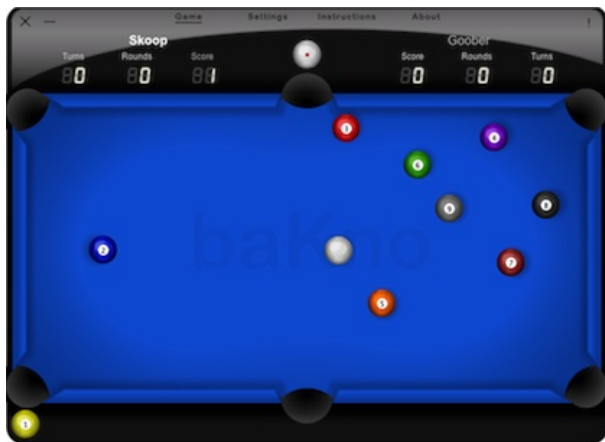
¹<http://www.bakno.com/MacPool/index.html>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>

³<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054997/>

I guess the other games have enough numbers and multiple things to keep your attention, that you can set aside not having a stick in your hands and chalk on your fingers. But billiards is such a simplistic game, it was more obvious to me on this one that I was on a computer and not for real.

Billiards is more popular in England, and 8-ball and 9-ball are more popular in the States. Pocket billiards games are more goal-oriented, while carom billiards games are tests of patience. You score points, but nothing drops into a pocket, and it's different.



I dropped the 1-ball on the break—see it in the bottom corner?

One disconcerting flaw I found in the pocket games is that while the balls are in motion after a shot, the numbers and stripes drop out. They reappear when the balls stop rolling, so you can't start planning your next shot unless you remember the positions of 1-ball and the 9-ball (both yellow). 2-ball and 10-ball, both blue, etc.



The idea of “snookering” someone may come from this game (it was also a military term to refer to a newcomer or rookie).

The idea is to leave your opponent trapped with no valid shot, as in other billiards games.

If you've never tried snooker, I recommend it. The simplest explanation is that you must sink a red ball, and then you can try for a higher-point-scoring colored ball. The instructions explain the rules well enough.

Good Stuff

I found a helpful forum on BaKno's Web site, with much of the discussion centering on online game play speeds and such. I like the quick download, multiple games, availability of 14:1 (straight pool), and the sound effects.

Not-So-Good Stuff

The stripes and numbers dropping out is problematic. I want to start planning a shot, and I can't. There are some typos on the Web site (“Your are done!” instead of “You are done,” and something else minor I don't remember). My keycode stopped working after a few shots of snooker, but it was good enough to get me several cracks at the main games. I am sure this would be resolved quickly if I'd asked for support help, so it's not a big deal.

In earlier versions, MacPool cost \$10. Now it's \$20. At that price, I expect a little more for the money. If it was still \$10, I'd rate it Good. At \$20, it's Okay. Definitely test it before you buy.

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Hardware Review

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

Wi-Fire

Developer: [hField Technologies, Inc.](http://hfield.com)¹

Price: \$79

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3 or 10.4
(not yet compatible with 10.5).
[Universal](http://www.apple.com/universal/)².

Trial: None



Ever since Apple's engineers had the brilliant idea of enclosing their laptops' wireless antennas in a metal case, there have been third-party solutions for improving the wireless range of Apple's various laptops. The Wi-Fire, a directional, high-gain 802.11 antenna by hField Technologies that runs off of a free USB port, purports to be one such device.

There's only one problem: it doesn't work.

Oh, you can connect the silly-looking panel to any USB-equipped Mac and dangle it off the top of the screen or monitor. You can even point it at your router using the directional arrow on top of the antenna casing.

¹<http://hfield.com/wifire.htm>

²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>



But what you can't do is actually use it to connect to a network.

There are at least two different software versions available, one of which shipped on CD with the device. The other is available for download at hField's Web site. The CD version of the software, which is more recent, is marginally more functional than the Web version.

Neither version would allow a PowerBook running Mac OS X 10.4.11 to connect to a network, and both versions caused `kernel_task` to start eating all available CPU cycles. The Web version hung the `SystemUIServer` immediately on boot, causing the menu bar to freeze. The CD version's monitor and configuration application hung on every quit, requir-

ing multiple attempts to force-quit the application before it finally went away.

The Web version wouldn't even let the Wi-Fire see my router, sitting six feet away from the computer with no walls or anything else in between them. At least the CD version could see it, if not connect to it.



At the heart of the Wi-Fire is a Zydax ZD1211b chipset. As far as I can tell, Zydax was bought by Atheros, which seemingly last updated the driver in July 2006 and now no longer offers it for download. (I apologize for the vagueness of the information here, but none of the companies actually involved with writing the drivers or making the chipset seems to want to admit to ever having done it, as there's literally nothing on Atheros's Web site about the chipset, and Zydax doesn't appear to have any remaining Web presence.) It's probably just as well; the release notes from the CD version of the driver (4.5.70, which appears to be the latest version) offer the following "known issues:"

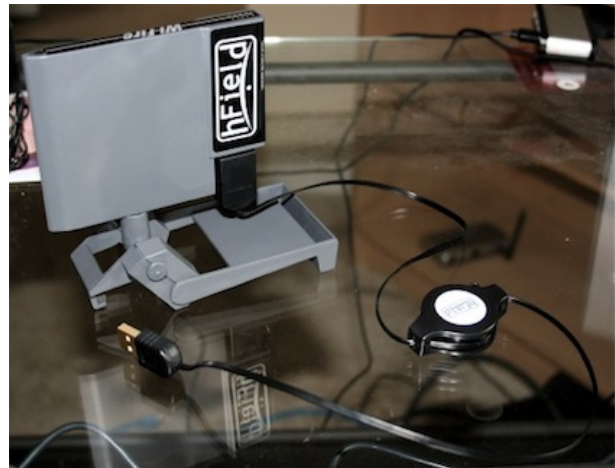
1. For an Intel-based system, the wireless network adapter can't work anymore after system restart. So please unplug the wireless card before system restart.
2. For an Intel-based system, the wireless network adapter can't work anymore after system wake-up from the sleep state.

So please unplug the wireless card before system entering sleep state.

3. For an Intel-based system, the driver will hang if the wireless USB adapter keeps scanning before associating to a [base station] successfully.
4. For a PPC-based system, the system would hang if you unplug the wireless card while the card is scanning.

In the interest of being completely fair, at least one Mac rag [was able to get the device working](#)³, so perhaps the experience here is the exception rather than the rule.

On a more positive note, the Wi-Fire has a very nice retractable USB cable, even if the Wi-Fire does look a little silly perched there loosely on the top of my screen. What it really needs is a padded clamp to hold it more securely in place. The odd clamp/stand works much better as a means of attaching the Wi-Fire to a monitor.



Unfortunately, this product is doomed to failure on the Mac due to its non-functional drivers and very un-Mac-like configuration/monitor software. Keep the \$80 for a wireless adapter or antenna with real Mac drivers.

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³<http://macenstein.com/default/archives/811>



Software Review

by Linus Ly, lly@atpm.com

Xslimmer 1.5

Developer: [LateNiteSoft](http://www.latenitesoft.com)¹

Price: \$12

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9.
[Universal](http://www.universalapp.com)².

Trial: Feature-limited (saves up to 50 MB).



Whenever my hard drive space is low, the usual candidates for removal are iTunes duplicate songs, copies of movies or pictures I made, expired demos, and items in the download folder. The Applications folder takes up about 10% of the entire hard drive, but other than throwing away any demos or software that are no longer useful, there is not much else I can do about that folder. Or is there? With my recent discovery of Xslimmer, there is one more way to reclaim some hard drive space.

How Xslimmer Reclaims Space

There are two potential sources of hard drive space that can be reclaimed with Xslimmer: Universal applications and localization files.

In 2006, after many years of using the PowerPC processor, Apple made the switch to Intel. Existing software made for the PowerPC chip still worked through the Mac OS X dynamic translator, Rosetta. However, if developers wanted to take advantages of the Intel processor they would have to adapt their applications for the new architecture. Not to ignore the installed user base with PowerPC Macs, developers also maintain their code to work with the PowerPC processor. Instead of offering different versions of the same programs, many Mac programmers include code for both architectures in their software. Universal applications run natively on both PPC and Intel Macs.

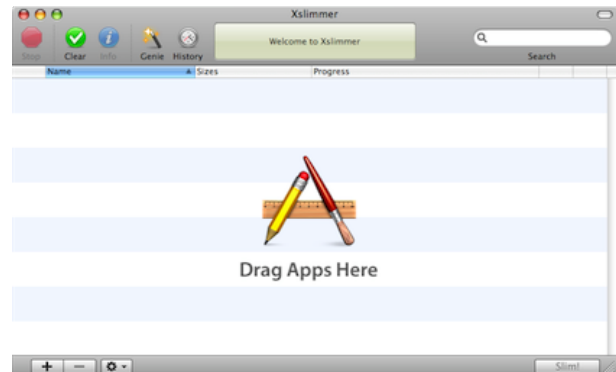
While it is convenient for the users not to need to know which version, PPC or Intel, of a program to install, a small price to pay is that Universal applications take up more hard drive space. Today's Macs boast hard drives of 160 GB or more, and it may not matter if a few gigs are lost to software written for a processor that's not present in the machine. For older Macs with smaller hard drives, Xslimmer pro-

vides a safe and simple way to reclaim the lost space by removing the extraneous Intel machine code (on PPC Macs) or PPC machine code (on Intel Macs).

Another way Xslimmer reclaims hard drive space is by removing language files. Many programs boast about their localization feature, meaning the applications' interface can be displayed in the language chosen. While localization is a good selling point for the developers, to most users it is just more wasted space. For example, even though I can converse in English, Vietnamese, and the Chinese dialect Cantonese, English is the only language I can compute in. If I have to work with menus and dialog boxes in any other languages, my computing experience would be very unpleasant.

Xslimmer Mechanics

Upon opening, Xslimmer invites you to drag applications into its window. Drag in an application, look at the Sizes column to see how much space you will save, and click the Slim! button. Presto, the application now takes up less space because it has only the code pertinent to your machine's processor.



Drag an application into the Xslimmer window.

Alternatively, use the Genie button to scan your hard drive for eligible applications. Click on the Info button to read more about the highlighted application, then click the Slim! button in that window to slim just that one application. If you are comfortable

¹<http://www.xslimmer.com>

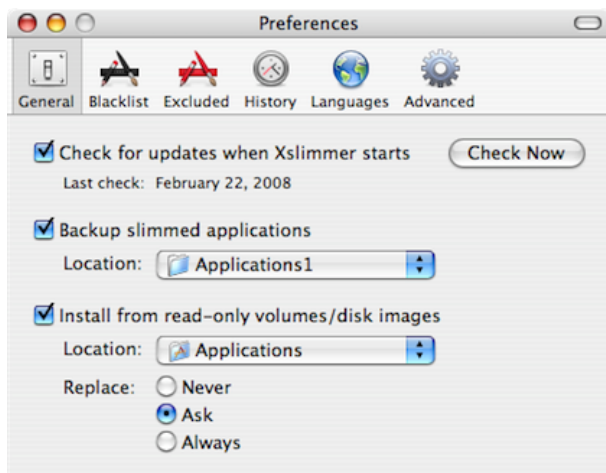
²<http://www.apple.com/universal/>

about it, slim everything in one fell swoop by clicking the Slim! button in the main window.



Let the Genie find the eligible applications for you.

Actually, before you even slim a single application, it is wise to visit Xslimmer's Preferences window. The first setting you should change is Backup. Using Xslimmer is supposed to be safe, but it cannot hurt to back up your applications should anything go wrong. It does not make sense to back up to the hard drive where you are trying to save space, so I recommend an additional hard drive. To restore an application, you would have to go through Xslimmer, as the backup of the application is not normal application that you can double-click to launch.



Have a backup plan before you start slimming.

Backing up of applications is not Xslimmer's only safety net. Xslimmer works with a blacklist of applications, and you can also maintain your own excluded list. I do not believe in *feng shui* and already used Xslimmer on many applications, but I still feel uncomfortable about having it touch iTunes. I really like my playlists, podcast subscriptions, even the sync settings, and do not want to take any chances

with losing them. It is an irrational fear, as those files are not in the iTunes executable file. Still, I added iTunes to the excluded list, and even if someday I become forgetful and try to slim iTunes, Xslimmer will refuse to work with it.

Last but not least, starting with version 1.2.8, Xslimmer honors the code signing technology introduced in Leopard. Xslimmer will not slim resources that the developer has marked as mandatory.

Is It Worth the Trouble?

To many people, using Xslimmer to reclaim some hard drive space may not worth the trouble. How much space can you reclaim? In my case, with a PowerBook and an 80 GB hard drive, I was able to save more than 800 MB (over 1.1%), as shown by the History window of Xslimmer. I believe the effort is worthwhile. Xslimmer by itself certainly cannot free up the space I need, say a few gigs to put the amount of free space over 4.3 GB so that a DVD can be copied. It must be used along with other applications or processes. If I did not reclaim that 800 MB via Xslimmer, I would have to work harder with other processes. Maybe I would have to search through iTunes for more songs or podcasts I no longer want, or use [Baseline](http://www.atpm.com/14.01/baseline.shtml)³ to find more big files to delete or compress.

Name	Version	Initial	Final	Saved	Date
PulpMotion	v2357	122 MB	97.6 MB	23.9 MB	2/18/08 9:13 PM
TextWrangler	262	24.4 MB	16.9 MB	7.44 MB	2/9/08 11:57 PM
VLC	0.8.6d	41.8 MB	41.5 MB	336 KB	2/3/08 9:01 PM
VLC	0.8.6c	41.9 MB	41.4 MB	492 KB	2/3/08 12:37 AM
Xslimmer	1.5	4.00 MB	1.54 MB	2.46 MB	2/3/08 12:31 AM
Big Bang Reaction	1.0.0b1	65.6 MB	55.3 MB	10.3 MB	1/30/08 12:17 AM
Google Earth	4.2.205.5730	94.7 MB	51.2 MB	43.4 MB	1/30/08 12:17 AM
Address Book	490	21.5 MB	3.53 MB	17.9 MB	1/29/08 11:51 PM
flything	1.0.1	252 KB	220 KB	32.0 KB	1/29/08 11:45 PM
Burch	2.0	368 KB	364 KB	4.00 KB	1/29/08 11:45 PM
WMV Player	2.2.0.49	448 KB	392 KB	56.0 KB	1/29/08 11:45 PM
DigitalColor Meter	3.4	592 KB	176 KB	416 KB	1/29/08 11:45 PM
Name that iTune!	1	632 KB	612 KB	20.0 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
GrandPerspective	11	780 KB	560 KB	220 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
HP Photosmart Share	2.2.3	1.09 MB	700 KB	420 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
ODXvnc	1.71	1.12 MB	584 KB	564 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
HP Image Dropper	8.1.0	1.14 MB	920 KB	252 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
HP Software Update	2.0.2	1.18 MB	640 KB	572 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM
HP Panorama Stitching	1.1.5	1.16 MB	760 KB	432 KB	1/29/08 11:44 PM

800 MB saved on my 80 GB PowerBook.

So far I haven't had any troubles with the slimmed applications. For applications that I use regularly, once they are slimmed I launch them to make sure that they still work.

The Alternatives

In many forums that discuss Xslimmer, a common complaint is that there are free applications that can

³<http://www.atpm.com/14.01/baseline.shtml>

do Xslimmer's job. While it is true that there are applications out there perform similar tasks, i.e. removing unneeded code or languages, none exactly match Xslimmer's feature set. First there is the `lipo` Terminal command. The issue with Terminal commands is that you have to know exactly what to type. The other "competitors" to Xslimmer may have a graphical interface, but some only work on PowerPC Macs, and others do not have a backup and restore mechanism or a history page. One Xslimmer feature I really like is the ability to install and slim applications from disk images. You drag an application from the disk image onto Xslimmer, and it copies it to your Applications folder and slims it in one step. As most of my new applications nowadays are downloaded instead of bought on a CD, having this feature helps greatly, especially with applications that are updated regularly.

Minor Quibbles

I have only a few minor issues with Xslimmer. I think there should be a way to selectively slim a few applications together. Currently, you either slim one application with the Info side window's Slim! button, or all the applications using the main window's Slim! button. What's more, the main window's Slim! button should prompt for confirmation. I think it is safer to slim a few applications at a time and test them as you progress.

Verdict

If you have a large hard drive, Xslimmer may not be the application for you. However, for older Macs with small hard drives, it is a great tool to have when used with other space-saving applications or processes. Judging by my own experience, and according to the forums on the Web, Xslimmer works safely and reliably. There are many ways to ensure that slimming the applications does not cause problems, such as backups and the blacklist. There are free alternatives, but in Xslimmer's case, you get a lot more for your \$12. Xslimmer is a Very Nice application to have in every space reclamation endeavor.

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¹<mailto:reviews@atpm.com>

²<http://www.atpm.com/subscribe>

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³<mailto:reviews@atpm.com>

⁴<http://www.atpm.com/reviews/>

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