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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the August issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* July was a month of scarcity and plenty. Plenty of popular Macs available for purchase, a scarcity of iPhones to meet overwhelming global demand. Fires in California were making headlines along with hurricane-caused rains in Texas and the east. July was a month of contrasts and a month of extremes. We'll take a quick look back before moving forward.

Where Tectonic Plates Collide

The recent temblor on the Pacific coast was a reminder that no matter where we stand, the world is constantly moving. We know much about the dynamics of tectonic plate movements as it applies to earthquakes and the development of mountain ranges. Major tectonic plate shifts tend to crunch and push the earth around them. There's a secondary definition for the word tectonic that mentions building and construction. At the epicenter of this economic commotion and movement is Cupertino, California.

Preliminary reports for the second calendar quarter of 2008 indicate that Apple has regained the #3 spot among domestic PC makers. Apple may have pushed past Acer, which took that spot following its acquisition of Gateway in 2007. Though still dwarfed by HP and Dell in domestic PC shipments, Apple's economic impact in the marketplace is reverberating through the industry. One forecasting firm suggests that Apple controls roughly two-thirds of the domestic market for PCs sold at retail and costing one thousand dollars or more. As developers flock to the iPhone, they may discover the Mac is an equally lucrative market for games and applications.

In the first three days of release, the 3G Apple iPhone sold more than one million units. The line between consumer phones and smart phones, previously the domain of enterprises, is becoming increasingly blurred. Similar to the way some land might liquefy during an earthquake, Apple is putting what was thought to be solid ground for companies such as Research in Motion in motion.

Take a Number

Buyers waiting in line to purchase an iPhone 3G might have thought they were in line for a pastrami on rye rather than a new cellular handset. Overwhelmed by demand, Apple retail stores resorted to passing out numbers to iPhone customers in order to fulfill the first come, first served promise. At press time, three weeks following the July 11th release, Apple retail store iPhone supplies are still catching up with demand. There are no reliable reports as to when company-owned AT&T stores will be amply stocked. Until ample stocks arrive, pre-orders are being taken for Apple's new phone.

The Number by the Numbers

For the three-month period ended June 28th, Apple reported revenue of \$7.46 billion and net quarterly profits of \$1.07 billion or \$1.19 per share. The results represent a 38 percent

gain in revenue over the prior-year period. During the three-month period, Apple shipped almost two and one-half million Macintosh computers or 41 percent more Macs in the June-ended quarter than last year. The iPod line witnessed a 12 percent increase in unit sales over the prior year period, with the company selling more than 11 million units.

Pick a Number

Apple's executives have a way of raining on Wall Street's parade. The torrents aren't as heavy as what a hurricane might bring, but the company's earnings guidance did shake the ground under the company's share price. With the release of each quarter's earning report, Apple's management provides revenue and earning guidance for the current quarter. Most of us have learned to ignore management's earnings forecasts. They tend to have little resemblance to the later revealed reality. For the September quarter, management estimated earnings of only one dollar per share, despite the June's quarter's much higher results. The lackluster guidance has contributed to the recent dip in the company's share price as some analysts cut their own forecasts in response to management's numbers. Those of us who follow the company closely pick our own earnings estimates no matter management's public guidance.

In the conference call with analysts, management made a rather cryptic or shrouded statement concerning a yet to be released product. Management suggests the company's September quarter earnings results will be impacted by expected lower margins on a new product approaching release. This leads us to a round of . . .

Pick a Rumor

Management's references to this new Apple product that's approaching release have the rumor mill swirling with so much air it's like the hot winds surrounding a fast-moving western wildfire. We won't predict what's about to be released. But do believe it will put many of the company's PC competitors in the hot seat. Watch for Apple to continue to shake the earth under the PC industry as the company seeks to compete with advanced technology products at attractive prices.

Pick an App

iPhone 2.0 swung the doors open on the iTunes Store's newest sales department—the iPhone App Store. Apple's software update for the iPhone works on both the original and 3G models and provides direct-to-consumer sales of iPhone applications via iTunes on Windows or a Mac and via the iPhone 2.0's App Store button on the home screen of the device. With dozens of free applications, including the popular Remote application that allows iPhone owners to wirelessly control an Apple TV or iTunes, there are plenty of applications to keep an iPhone owner entertained and satisfied while 3G handsets remain scarce in the stores.

Whatever You Do, Don't Take a Nap

It's the dog days of summer. The hot, lazy days that make hammock lovers of many of us. If you didn't experience the rainy remnants of the hurricanes, the smoky skies covering

the west, or the shaky ground around Chino Hills, it doesn't mean summer's big events are over. While we can't control the weather, we can forecast hot sales days ahead as the supply of iPhones finally scales to a level to meet extraordinary global demand. By the end of the year, Apple may sell, depending on manufacturing capacity, as many as 20 million iPhones in 2008 and ship more Macintosh computers than at any time in the company's storied history. It's a record-breaking season in Cupertino and Beijing.

Our August issue includes:

Apple Talk: Microsoft, Revisited

Angus Wong is back with *Apple Talk* and, where Microsoft is concerned, is ready to give credit where credit is due.

Mac About Town: A Midsummer Night's Mare (a comedy in multiple acts)

Whether your experience of acquiring an iPhone 3G was pleasant, annoying, or nonexistent, you'll be amused to read Mike Chamberlain's tale.

MacMuser: Rowing Through Roquefort

Mark Tennent spends a brief moment on the topic of storage.

MacMuser: How to Get Pxl SmartScale Running on Intel Macs

Pxl SmartScale is a rather invaluable tool for many, but is a refugee for conversion to Intel CPU compatibility. Mark Tennent has discovered a workaround.

Next Actions: iPhone App Roundup, GTD

A look at GTD options for the iPhone.

Photoshop For the Curious: What If I Just Left It Alone?

Sometimes, the most important adjustment to a photo is choosing not to adjust it at all.

Desktop Pictures: San Francisco

These photos were taken by Julie Ritterskamp in San Francisco and Oakland, California.

Cartoon: Cortland

As the villainous legion regroups and remembers, the shocking truth about Cortland is finally revealed!

Review: Comic Life Magiq 1.0.1

Making comic strips gets even easier with Comic Life Magiq.

Review: Knapsack 1.1

Who are you? Where am I? Why am I here? Eric Blair looks at how Knapsack helps you answer the latter two questions. You're pretty much on your own for the first, though.

Review: SmartMask 2.0

If creating masks in Photoshop is a common task, there are several Photoshop plug-ins on the market to aid the procedure. Lee Bennett finds out whether SmartMask is up to the challenge.



Photoshop: Speech/Thought Bubbles

If you press the “Shift” key as you draw each subsequent oval, it adds them to the same layer without cutting and pasting. Also, you can just select each layer that an oval is on and click the box next to the “eye” icon to “link” the layers. Once you have “chains” on all the layers you want to link, click the options area of the layer navigator and select “merge linked.” This will save a lot of time moving things around.

—*Michael C. Prokop*

Thanks, that’s a great tip!

—*Lee Bennett*

Performing a Video Extraction

Sylvester and Lee, many thanks for this article and comments. I can’t tell you how much time I have spent searching for information on how to convert MPEG 2 files for editing in iMovie 08. I already had the tools, but although MPEG Streamclip is a super handy tool, its help file is abysmal. Now I know what to do and I am about to do it—again—for the umpteenth time.

—*Cliff Newman*

Cliff encountered a few more issues. Please check out [his questions](#) and see if you can help.

Phaser 8200

I know that this article is a couple of years old now. But I thought it might be worth it to mention a workaround for maintenance kits expiring too soon. As a matter of fact, no matter how much copies you have printed, the Phaser 8200 will prompt you to change the kit after one year of use. The first time this happened to me was some months ago (I bought the printer last year—used). However, the printer reported that the maintenance kit still had a capacity of about 95%. So, I didn’t feel the need to spend half a fortune on a new kit. Why should I? The trick was to set back the date in the printer setup! I changed it from April 2008 to January 2008. That’s all. Just set back the internal date setting some months, and you will be able to use the maintenance kit to 100%.

—*Frank Arensmeier*

Cortland

I love reading *Cortland* each month. I try to put it off as long as I can, but by the 5th of each month, I’ve already read it and now I’m impatiently waiting for next month’s strip.

Photoshop: When Reality Isn't Real Enough

I very much resent these post-production changes to pictures. I'd much rather get the real picture even if it's grainy or has reflections. Of course I make an exception for entertainment (such as movies), but for advertisements and for news photography please just give me the real thing.

—Patrick

Thank you for sharing your opinion. As a communication and journalism worker, I'm well aware of the potential issues with replacing portions of a photograph.

I should've been clear that I, also, do not condone photo manipulation for hard news. You are correct to imply that such manipulation distorts fact.

Manipulation for other purposes, however, can be OK. Obviously, people can do whatever they wish to personal photos.

In the case of my cover photo used in this month's tutorial, that story, as well as most all stories in which I have a hand, are feature- and profile-oriented. What I generally hear from others in the business is that illustrative photos (with such manipulations) are acceptable if the story's purpose is not to report hard news. Our goal was to show the man and a computer with his Web site, and not to show exactly how the site appeared on a computer screen at the time the photo was taken.

As for advertisements—well, wow, that's a touchy one. We all know good and well that ads practically never use unaltered photos. People would probably never buy anything if they did. All it takes is a comparison of the food seen in an Olive Garden commercial to the food seen in a small restaurant's commercial with a locally hired video team who came out to film actual plates the restaurant prepared. I actually helped make one of those commercials many years ago. The fact is, "real" food does not often look as appetizing as the spiffed-up food used in big-budget advertising.

The issue is a complex one. One might argue that if a digital photo was taken with the wrong white balance, and you color correct it, that's manipulation. In fact, long before the photo gets to the computer, the photographer is doing a certain amount of manipulation just by how he or she frames the photo. The "facts" of the news seen in a photo can be entirely different based solely on whether the photographer chooses to keep a person standing off to the side in or out of the photo frame.

So, even hard news photos are always just a representation of the truth and may not be literal fact. Here's what it comes down to: does the particular photo's representation of truth aid or hinder understanding of what is being seen? If a manipulation truly aids understanding, then I'm in favor of it. For my photo, inserting a screen image at a later time does, in fact, aid understanding, especially since the image I inserted is the same image that would have been showing had we left the monitor turned on—albeit not as clearly.

—Lee Bennett

Wow, thanks for the reply. Apparently there is intelligent life out there in the Internet.

I agree that the facts that a picture represents have already been altered, or at least chosen, long before the light hits the film (or sensor). I don't have a solution for that, other than for everything that happens anywhere to be recorded and be available for replay (kind of like a video version of Google Street View).

Given three types of photos (ads, news, entertainment), I can accept manipulation for entertainment. But for ads, I'm tired of continually being forced to filter everything I see. When I see a print ad for a TV or a computer, I know that the screen has been superimposed. It's easier just to not believe anything in any advertisement than it is to examine every ad and re-calibrate it to reality.

—*Patrick*

It's definitely something that can be problematic in advertising. Sometimes, the manipulation is done in a believable manner. But, when I see things like a Mac OS X screen superimposed on an Acer laptop computer (yes, I've actually seen that), then it's getting pretty ridiculous.

I get some kicks out of the entries posted to the [Photoshop Disasters](#) Web site—manipulations that definitely distort facts. . .literally!

—*Lee Bennett*

Wii Transfer 2.5.2

Thanks for the review! One quick comment about navigation. You can use the Wii remote directional pad arrows to go back and to click through menus. I realize this isn't obvious, so I hope to do a better job of exposing the feature in a future version.

—*Manton Reece*

Thank you for pointing out this navigation tip. I failed to give the navigations buttons on the remote a try.

—*Lee Bennett*

EyeTV 3.0.2 (3953)

Thank you for a well-tested review. I agree with your conclusions whole-heartedly after testing the new software and going back to EyeTV 2.5. The editing window is a disaster.

As an owner with both EyeTV Hybrid and Turbo.264, I have noticed a marked trend in their software. I feel there are fewer options and less control than what should be available, especially when compared to previous versions. Turbo.264 has been my biggest disappointment, with EyeTV 3.x being my second—especially since during the previous five years I was happy with Elgato's other products, including hardware and software.

One thing you might not have experienced is Elgato's "new" support system based on forums. It is basically a PR exercise, since any topic replies from Elgato staff spin any issue

to their advantage (such as mentioning other features) and avoiding the topic subject. Of course, there are many other companies that have turned this way for tech support...but in my opinion it is not a good trend.

Elgato was once one of my favorite companies because I could trust their hardware and software to be top quality. Unfortunately, that hasn't been my experience in the last year.

—*Andrew Kator*



I agree with many of the comments the reviewer makes of EyeTV 3.0.2, but I've been using EyeTV 3.0.2 for a while under 10.4.11 and have never experienced a program crash necessitating a restart. It's been totally stable.

There is one other niggler, and that is that the audio by default will be set to stereo, bleeding for example a commentary for the blind into the mix, even though mono was selected before closing the program. Stereo audio also sounds echoing on some channels without additional audio on a sub-channel. I've reported this to Elgato, and they acknowledged it and are working on the audio.

—*Stuart Hertzog*



You can reorder favorite channels.

In the list view for the Favorite Channel list, click on the small leftmost column header. It has no label until selected, then shows a triangle. Once selected, you can drag and drop the channels.

—*flyingout*

Thanks! Yes, that works. I never noticed that you could change a Favorite Channel list to list view; the view icons are at the bottom right of the window, rather than at the top as they are for playlists. (In fact, this isn't even a new feature in 3.0; channels can be re-ordered in list view in 2.5 as well!)

—*Paul Fatula*



As a largely happy version 2.5 user I am dismayed by the frequent “upgrade to 3” pop-up windows which completely cover the television we happen to be watching.

To dismiss these ads I must get up from the couch and hit Esc on the attached keyboard (it took me a while to figure this out).

Unchecking the preference in EyeTV to look for updates did nothing to stop these infuriating windows.

This is a problem makes me feel resentful towards the thought that I could fix this by actually upgrading. What assurance do I have that version 3 will not do this when version 4 comes out?

Thanks Paul for drawing attention to the problems relating to recording what you are watching with a delay. For a reference of the expected behavior take careful note of how iTunes handles playing a CD while you are ripping it into your digital collection.

—*Ollie B*

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Microsoft, Revisited

The Microsoft marketing team is on the war path to clean up “misconceptions” about Vista, with a massive advertising campaign reputedly gunning for Apple’s fabulous “I’m a Mac” series. Well, I say, more power to the Redmond team. Really. If Microsoft has great products, then the world should know, and I say that without sarcasm.

I’m always amused by the propensity of (some) Windows users to simplistically label me a “Mac fan,” as if my choice of platform has less to do with technical practicalities than ethereal trivialities such as peer group identity or chromatic preference. Honestly, my criteria are much simpler than all that: the tools just shouldn’t suck. Now, I know that outside of BBEdit (if I recall, the original “It doesn’t suck” product) great tools might be hard to come by, but somehow there seems a greater number of them on the Mac than Windows, including the Mac platform itself.

This is not to say that I’d neglect to give credit where it’s due. Indeed, I am going to take a break this month from my usual pastime of conjuring up irreverent phrases to annoy the heck out of Microsoft staffers (which by doing so, I entertain myself and, hopefully, many readers). For this particular installment of my textual creativity, I would like instead to highlight choice offerings from Redmond that I’d be proud to be seen using. (The Zune isn’t one of them.)

To start, let’s look at something my fiancée says I spend way too much time with: the Xbox 360. Yes, we know that the Xbox franchise probably would not have gotten as good a start as it did without Halo. And we all know where Halo hailed from: Bungie, originally a Mac-only developer. But we should not discount the very real possibility that the Xbox would have eventually become quite successful even without Halo, primarily because Microsoft can leverage its extensive experience and working relationships with highly talented Windows game developers.

Another thing Microsoft did right was the Xbox Live service. The Xbox Live infrastructure successfully enabled for the first time a highly convenient, easily accessible virtual universe of like-minded gamers, in the comfort of our collective TV rooms. No longer do we need to scour esoteric chat groups to locate other players for our choice of poison. Just turn on the box and go. (Good luck to Sony trying to replicate that experience for the PlayStation 3. That company hasn’t exactly been on top of any of its games, pun intended, in recent years.) Microsoft now has a [strong position](#) from which to battle the Wii, the PlayStation 3, and the Apple TV.

But the world’s largest software vendor is not best loved (or despised) for its gaming console. The Windows franchise is immensely more significant and profitable than Redmond’s entire

entertainment division. So it is astounding that Microsoft managed to screw up the Vista roll-out so badly. In fact, it is precisely because of Vista's poor reception that I find myself so impressed by Microsoft Office 2007. Not Office 2008 for the Mac, mind you, but Office 2007 for Windows.

Yes, folks, I am actually saying that I like Office 2007 and even dare to think it's still the only serious office suite for the enterprise market, iWork included. And the reason for my opinion goes beyond just the newfangled user interface, but let's talk about that for now. The Microsoft Office team has given Office 2007 a spectacular "geek makeover," and it works for me. Take Word, for example. Even though there's still Microsoft's legendary feature bloat, Word 2007 is the first version of the program since Word 5.1 (released in 1992) that I've been excited about. The scribe sharing my corporeal footprint is very discerning about writing tools, and Word 2007 makes me actually happy to use the program and almost forget that I am on Windows (that part I am still unhappy about). In fact, I feel the user interface improvements of Office 2007 have achieved the rare combination of being both functionally efficient and aesthetically pleasing; the same sweet spot that we love the Mac OS for hitting. Office 2007 is ergonomically better than its predecessors and meets (or exceeds) human interface improvements by alternatives.

But the real *pièce de résistance* is [OneNote](#) 2007. I can almost hear the screams of [NoteTaker](#) and [NoteBook](#) fans that OneNote isn't that much different from their choice of note-taking software. I agree, but Microsoft has nicely integrated OneNote 2007 functionality into the rest of the suite, and even with Internet Explorer, so capturing notes is quite seamless and convenient. OneNote 2007 shares the ergonomic refinements of the rest of the suite and has become my information-capturing tool of choice. That's saying quite a lot, for someone who is so gung-ho about the Mac platform, and to be honest I wish I could use all of this [on the Mac](#), rather than put my data at risk on Windows.

Which leads me to a very important point: To use this stuff, I need to run Windows. It's the old "killer app" battlefield again. It's the same reason Microsoft spent so much cash and time offing Netscape. It's the same reason the Java wars were (are?) waged. If you own the user experience, you own the rest of the pie. But wait, there's more.

Office 2007 is the only version of Office that gives me seamless, reliable compatibility with any older Microsoft office document format. This is the most important takeaway here. Even though it natively uses the highly controversial Microsoft [Open Office XML](#) format, you can set Office 2007 to default to the older Office 97–2003 format. For better or (probably) worse, the reality is Microsoft has a hard lock on the most ubiquitous business file formats in the world (except PDF).

I have not seen seamless compatibility with Microsoft office files with iWork (despite Apple's claims), OpenOffice.org, or even the Mac's Office 2008. While those alternative suites generally are able to load files from Word and Excel (and, to a lesser extent, PowerPoint), from what I've experienced, there are oftentimes spurious formatting problems that make the transition less than perfect between the platforms and tools. That might be acceptable for personal or academic documents (or environments where you do not exchange files

with Microsoft Office users), but it's a deal breaker for the business world. I wouldn't, for instance, want an extra carriage return somewhere in an official press release, or a misaligned caption on a product's datasheet.

So while Apple has been winning numerous battles against the old regime in the "Computing World War Two" of recent years, I feel this is a key area that has yet to be seriously contested. Microsoft, on the other hand, has been quite adept at defending its turf, as can be witnessed by its victory with the OOXML specification.

Ideally, we would be free of proprietary format and protocol locks on our data (including the rendering of the raw data), and be able to choose front-end tools based on their independent merits. But for the time being, Microsoft has a stronghold in the enterprise and can probably withstand a very long siege, even with a growing population of Macintosh hardware clients (which can't completely get away from running Windows).

As for Web 2.0-based Google tools and iPhone-Exchange interoperability, Microsoft still has a weapon-of-mass-deployment with the Office suite, and seems to be so focused on honing this advantage that the company's actually produced a quality product, impressing even moi! Microsoft knows that so long as it owns this area, it can always recapture lost ground. I don't know what Microsoft's done with its development teams in recent years, but if it could apply the same level of *kaizen* it had with the Xbox 360 and Office 2007, to its other offerings, maybe many of us would be less unhappy about its dominance of the computing landscape.

As it stands, the saga has yet to play out. That's the nature of world wars.

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Mac About Town

by Mike Chamberlain, mchamberlain@atpm.com

Mac About Town: A Midsummer Night's Mare (a comedy in multiple acts)

I think I remember [writing](#) (not all that long ago) that I was committed to my Treo 755p as the phone that would satisfy my need for an all-in-one communicator/PDA. The iPhone just didn't have what I needed, mostly basic enterprise applications. And then...

iPhone 3G was announced and the App Store became a vision on the horizon and I was *sold!* The fact that it was arriving within a week of my birthday *and* that I could mask the overall cost with the reduced sale price was a convincing argument before the finance committee (made up of the person with whom I live—she chairs, records, and is the final authority on all things expensive). So what if I had to sell out my loyalty to Sprint? So what if I would have a phone with a reduced battery life? So what if I would lose all my Palm applications? So what if I would have to stand in line to get in a store where I would also be required to activate my phone on-site?

I live in Kansas City. 3G goodness abounds. I move in a wired world.

I am ready. I am willing. I am able!

And thus begins our tale...

At my age (older than I care to think about at this point), I worried about showing up too early to stand in line at the AT&T store that I had scoped out. I was pre-approved and had everything in hand. When I woke up at 5 AM on Friday, I dawdled a bit so as not to be up front with the rain-soaked geeks who had weathered the night's storm to be first in line. It seemed to me that it would be uncool to be seen to be too eager, so a bit after 6 AM I headed out. I was surprised by the length of the line at our little shop but counted myself around 25th or 30th, not a bad number. Sadly, four hours later, it turned out to be a number too far. The third person in front of me snapped up the last 16 GB model and left the store. "We have an 8-gig model, sir." "No thanks, I'll wait for the 16." After giving the clerk my credit card and my first son's birth certificate, I left the store with a guaranteed delivery promise of some indeterminate nature. "When they come in, we will reserve the phone you ordered and contact you immediately. Have a nice day!"

I am generally not a patient person, so I was proud that I had resisted the temptation to settle for a model other than the one I wanted. I went home and consoled myself by downloading 40 applications from the iTunes store. Hey! Some of them were free! Who elected *you* to the finance committee?

Friday night I checked the store availability for the Plaza in Kansas City and found that it had all the models available. Saturday morning it was the same, so I headed downtown to see if I could snag one. Why wait for AT&T? The line was reasonable and I jumped in. Have I mentioned it was raining in KC this weekend? Not long after, an Apple elf came out to let everyone know that there were a couple of 16s and some 8s in the store but clearly not enough for all. Exercising patience again (where am I finding all this?), I headed home to search for more applications.

Monday morning and the Plaza store is showing availability again, but is it real? A call to the store elicited a kind and thoughtful response: “We have no phones in the store at the moment, but there is a shipment on the way that we expect in a couple of hours.” An early lunch from the office and I am on my way to iPhone nirvana! Can’t wait. I’ll take the other one from AT&T and give it to my son for *his* birthday. Excellent. Life is good. The sky is a cloudless blue, and the sun is shining.

There is no line at the Apple store at 10:30 AM. People are milling around inside, and when I ask an elf if they are going to form a line he says, “Oh well, we’ll do that when the phones get here.” “Really?” I ask. “You mean you will start a stampede right here in the store?” Ten minutes later, the elf comes to tell me that there is a line forming outside. I am number 15. *All right!* How many phones in a box? Surely, more than enough.

The Mac-people-waiting-in-line community forms and we drift in and out of conversation for the next hour. The conversations get more spirited in the hour that follows. A FedEx truck pulls up in the middle of the street, and the driver jumps out to deliver. . . dresses for the shop across the street. Another FedEx truck delivers leather goods to the shop next door. UPS comes around. Who knows what it had? Who cares? At 1:30, Plaza security shows up to move the line away from the dress-shop windows (where the shade was. . . did I mention that it was a cloudless sky?).

Elves turn up with water bottles a couple of times. A word leaks from the store that the phones are in and being entered into inventory. A manager elf comes out to say that that is not true, but there is a truck en route with a shipment for the store, and it is expected any minute. I am wishing I had worn a hat—especially since my follicular covering is. . . well, actually, there is no covering.

Strangely, at 2:30, security shows up again. Sidewalk encroachment? No, a team of older elves (Who knew that there were adults in the back of the Apple store?) comes out of the front door to inform the line that there are no iPhones on the truck nor will there be any that day. All of a sudden I notice the mace in the right hand of one of the Plaza security guards, or is it a taser? Hard to say for sure. Elves hand out more water. Not many takers. A list is offered to record our position with the promise of a call when new phones arrive. Grumble, grumble, sign, sign. My secretary and I have a good laugh on me when I come back empty-handed. That evening, my wife, the finance chair, wonders why I am sunburned on only one side of my face and neck and on one arm. (Note to self: If I ever set up a line in the sun, it would be good to turn it every half-hour or so.) Sleeping is a bit uncomfortable.

Tuesday dawns, and it's another gorgeous Kansas summer day! I turn the shower as cold as I can and stand sideways in the shower to keep the heat off of my sunburn. I head for work. At 12:30 the call comes. "Mike? Were you in line yesterday? You were? Great! Come to the store and identify yourself. There is a phone with your name on the box."

Patience and good humor is rewarded! "They have a phone with my name on it," I tell my secretary, "and *no line!*" Sure enough, when I arrive at the store and show the elf my sunburn and my ID, thereby confirming my line cred, he goes to the back and returns with a 16-giger with my name and phone number stuck on it. We start the process, which, conducted in somewhat hushed tones, has the aura of a religious experience.

Open the account, check.

Credit check, check.

Porting the number, check.

Waiting, waiting, waiting. . . "Takes some time," the elf says encouragingly.

What? Error # *\$#R&#*#0!!!

"No sweat," the elf says confidently, "this happened to some people on Friday, and I had an AT&T number to call to get it fixed."

But, sadly, even Apple elves have bad days. While talking to the somewhat non-co-operative AT&T rep, the elf's hand-held checker-outer-thingy times out and shuts down. I am puzzled by the look on the elf's face—a mix of surprise, query, and horror.

Now, here's the funny thing with this whole "You have to do it in the store" activation comedy. Turns out that once an iPhone is scanned and the purchase process begins, there is no turning back. The only thing the store can do in the event of an interrupted transaction is to send the phone back to the shipment center to be re-entered into inventory. "Maybe we can fix it," the elf says, with what I note is less than certainty. Soon I am standing with the elf and the elf manager, both on the phone with different AT&T agents trying, on the one hand, to get my activation reversed. "But, Ma'am, you have activated the account and I haven't sold the phone yet, so I can't reverse anything!" And, on the other hand, trying to recapture my now-ported Sprint number. "But there is no SIM card in the 755p! (who knew?). Isn't there any way you can undo the port?"

When I return to the office, empty-handed again, my secretary is amused. Call me crazy, but I guess I have gotten to the age where I can be amused as well, because the whole adventure has become hilariously absurd.

The good news is that I am at the top of a very special list to get a phone call from the manager of the Apple store when the next new 16-gig arrives. (All the others in stock already had names on them.) When I go back in, we will do the drill more carefully and, in all likelihood, I am told, AT&T will charge me full, second-phone price because, as far

as it is concerned, I already *have* an iPhone! See? I even have a number! But don't bother calling at the moment, because the ringing in your ear will be as imaginary as my midsummer night's iPhone. For now, all I own is a no-number Palm Treo PDA—and it isn't ringing anymore.

Oh, yeah. My application count is up to 51.

Here's hoping your iPhone experience was a real hoot!

—*Mike Chamberlain*

(N.B. Apple has assured me that it will pay the extra cost—if any—for the second phone.)

P.S.

Someone reading this piece asked about advice for a better experience next time. Here are my lessons learned:

1. Go ahead and get up early. The only people who'll know will be the geeks, and they don't care.
2. Always take a hat and an umbrella to the Apple store when there is a line.
3. Take the water when the elves offer it.
4. Keep your cool and your sense of humor. It's not the elves' fault. It's the system.
5. Rotate when in the sun for long periods of time. It's a well-tested grilling technique.
6. And one for Apple and AT&T: if you want to be certain of activation or receipt of the full cost for the next phone, why not charge the base price in the store and hold a pending charge for the remainder of the full cost to be applied if the phone is not activated in 14 days? That way, it's in and out and thank you, Ma'am. Sounds simple to me.

I've learned some things in the past few days. Here's hoping the Apple and AT&T have, too.

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Rowing Through Roquefort

Perpendicular storage: who would have thought we needed it? We can remember turning our old Mac IIci's on their sides, and our external drives run upright. Surely that's perpendicular enough for any man or woman?

Perpendicularity, and what it could do for us, was the main reason for considering replacing one of our herd of G5s. Although the computer had twin internal drives, they were only 160 GB each—just about enough space to store the average iTunes library plus the occasional movie or two that, according to [the latest research](#), 38% of us Brits are pirating. Then Snow Leopard was announced, and it looks likely to make all G5s obsolete.

Hanging off all our computers are a variety of gadgets on the USB and FireWire circuits: DVRs, scanners, printers, and a whole load of external drives daisy-chained together. Two old Maxtors have never given us problems, but newer ones, such as Western Digital MyBook Pros, proved completely unreliable with a 60% failure rate.

We find it amazing that they get awards and best-on-tests from the computer press in much the same way motoring writers admire Ford cars. They rate them highly but never buy them. It's almost as if the collective noun for journalists is a "corruption," one even wrote [this article](#). FireWire and USB are also not without some problemettes, but the speed of FireWire 400 and 800 makes working with USB 1 and 2 seem like rowing through roquefort. You could do it, but why bother?

Not Such Hot Stuff

The new Mac Pros running Intel chips don't need all the fancy internal cooling the G5s have. Apple stripped out umpteen fans and pipework to discover an almost empty case to play with. Their designers made it simple to bung in up to four SATA drives. If you've never seen inside a Mac Pro, the drives are screwed to drawers that slide in and automatically connect drives to power and data sockets. Better still, the drawer's screws are firmly attached, with no likelihood of dropping inside the computer's internals. That used to be one of those "Oh @#\$\$%^&!" moments followed by an hour of trying to retrieve the darned thing before resorting to turning the computer upside down.

Seagate 44s: Not Seen, Not Heard

Most hard disk manufacturers make drives to fill the empty slots, but one stands out with a five-year guarantee and good reports for its drives: Seagate Barracudas, currently £41 at DABs for their 500 GB versions. Not quite the speediest, but definitely the quietest drive

we've not heard, and they run cool, too. Their 32 MB cache is larger than the entire first hard disk we owned.

The drives arrive with a tiny 2×4mm jumper making them only SATA1. This is recessed deep inside a slot. It took a long, thin pair of pincers to pull them out.

Now all we need is a copy of Windows-something to install on one of the drives, and we'll be able to experience how the rest of the world lives, marveling at how insane they must be to accept their lot. Or is that just a Mac fanboy being smug?

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How to Get Pxl SmartScale Running on Intel Macs

One of the few refugees left behind during the switch from an IBM G5 to an Intel Xeon-powered Mac was a little Photoshop plug-in named pxl SmartScale. When we tried to run it, the dialog boxes were messed up, and Photoshop crashed trying to enlarge an image with SmartScale. That is, until we worked out a little wrinkle to get it running on Intel.

SmartScale is invaluable because it scales images by a far greater degree than either Genuine Fractals, SmartScale's rival in digital enlargement, or by using Photoshop's built-in bicubic interpolation. They introduce too many artifacts, halos, and jagged edges as the degree of enlargement increases. Whereas SmartScale, on the other hand, has extra tools to control sharpening and edge smoothing so that images can be increased up to 1,000% and stay usable. It's also a lot faster than Genuine Fractals.

Better still, SmartScale works in the image's color mode rather than converting it to RGB on the fly. Our version of Genuine Fractals 4.1 does this before resizing, then converts back afterwards. We've never noticed any color shifts during the conversions, but they take time to achieve, especially on larger photographs. Finally, the best feature of SmartScale is that it also increases the size of any paths inside the image, whereas Genuine Fractals leaves paths at the original size. Clipping paths inside images enlarged in Genuine Fractals have to be remade.

How to Do the Dirty Deed

We found how to get SmartScale Intel-icized by accident. Both SmartScale and Genuine Fractals' most recent publisher has been [onOne Software](#). SmartScale was originally an Extensis product, but Extensis sold it and Genuine Fractals (originally LizardTech's) to onOne in 2005. OnOne has stopped supporting SmartScale in favor of Genuine Fractals 5, a \$300 plug-in. We downloaded the demo version.

Peek inside Genuine Fractal 5's .pkg file by holding down Control and clicking on Show Package Contents. Then delve into the **Contents/Resources** folder where there are two versions of the onOne Library, one for PowerPC and one, presumably, for Intel. We copied the second into the Photoshop plug-ins folder, replacing the existing version still there, and fired up Photoshop again.

SmartScale now runs without a glitch, as does Genuine Fractals, which also seems to be, perhaps, slightly speedier than when using the old PowerPC library.



Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

iPhone App Roundup, GTD

Of course the launch of the iPhone 2.0 firmware on July 11, and the subsequent availability of all manner of tools and fun in the App Store, answered many of the questions from [last month's column](#). Let's take a look at what's available now (as of mid-July, just a week or so after release of the updates—so the list is sure to be larger by publication).

What We Knew Already

[EasyTask Manager](#) is the iPhone companion to the well-established desktop version, and it offers full syncing with both the desktop and the online versions. The expected basics are all there: project view, context view, and a “dashboard” that gives quick access to tasks due today, as well as easy navigation to upcoming tasks (tomorrow, next week, past due, etc.). Several reviewers/commenters mentioned that it is not especially easy or fast to enter new tasks, but managing existing tasks is more straightforward. By and large, EasyTask Manager is a well-implemented tool that will serve as a great complement to an already well-established base. EasyTask Manager for iPhone is free.

[OmniFocus](#) for iPhone got so much hype and press before release that most of us knew a good bit about it well before the 7/11 launch. And it does what we've come to expect from the Omni Group. It is billed as a suitable stand-alone application, but of course it also syncs with the desktop version (1.1, which is currently in a beta release). Capture of new tasks is easier than EasyTask Manager, and the Omni Group has included some iPhone-specific capabilities for task creation (such as taking a photo and attaching it as a note, or recording an audio clip). And of course the “location-aware” feature is neat. Most, I think, were expecting OmniFocus for iPhone to be free, since the desktop application is already pricey; it isn't, but costs \$20. Still, many think it's worth it.

[Things](#) doesn't yet sync with the desktop version, but that is clearly in the plans for a coming updated version. Otherwise, Things works very much like its desktop counterpart, and it offers the same GTD features and touches we would all expect. Things is well-designed, perhaps exceeding EasyTask and rivaling but not quite beating out OmniFocus in elegance. Things is \$10, again finding middle-ground between EasyTask Manager and OmniFocus.

Newcomers (To Me)

[Chores](#), a simple list manager, is a stand-alone tool, though it sounds like it has a companion desktop application coming soon for the Mac. Chores will cost you \$5, but if you buy now you'll get a free copy of the desktop application.

[Dejumble](#) must not be confused with the desktop application by the same name, produced by the same developer; this is the iPhone version of the application, though it has a similar feel to it. They promise syncing with the desktop version soon. Notable is the use of smart groups to collect your tasks together by tags—which gives flexibility for GTD-style use. Dejumble is \$8.

[DoBot ToDos](#) is an iPhone/iPod Touch-only application that makes good use of the touch interface for handling tasks. They already have a list of features they plan to introduce with future versions, and they invite feedback of desired features. DoBot ToDos is free.

[Lists by Tynsoe.org](#) appears to be the most basic list manager ever, with two kinds of lists: ordered and unordered. With some work it could be adapted to a GTD system. Lists is \$6.

[Lists by MobilityWare](#) is another general purpose list manager. Not really too much to say otherwise. This Lists costs \$2.

[My Lists](#), a GTD-styled list manager, is distinctive because the interface is customizable, and it allows notes attached to list items. It also allows e-mailing lists and employs some use of the multi-touch interface well. My Lists is \$2.

[Outliner by CarbonFin](#) takes a slightly different approach to list management, presenting (as the name implies) an outliner that is simply flexible enough to handle tasks and lists. You can organize your lists into groups and activate whether or not a list item is a task. As such, it is capable of being a fine GTD solution. Outliner costs \$10.

[Tanjaz Checklist](#) is designed to be a shopping list that can double as a list/task manager. As such it is very bare-bones and will satisfy only the most basic task management needs. Checklist will cost you \$2.

[Tasks](#) focuses on priority, and it has only three basic categories (low, medium, high), so it may be a bit too bare-bones for most GTD folk. Still, Tasks does offer e-mailing capability, and the interface is not unlike that of iPhone's calendar and mail. Tasks is \$1.

[ToDo by Appigo](#) is built to be a GTD application, and it syncs with Toodledo and RememberTheMilk (Pro version). It employs some good iPhone "iCandy" in its interface and is customizable. ToDo costs \$10.

[To Do by Erica Sadun](#) is a simple, basic task manager written by Sadun for her friends! It's basic, but not any less so than some of these that are selling for actual money. To Do is free.

[Zenbe Lists](#) is a companion application for [Zenbe's ZenPages](#) (huh—I hadn't heard of these either. . .I'll add them next month). Good for task lists, or any lists. One neat trick: Zenbe's stuff is set up to be shareable, so it's easy to share a list with another iPhone. Zenbe Lists is free (as are Zenbe's online services).

What's True of All of Them

Let's face it: as good as iPhone is, who's going to pull out their iPhone and do their whole daily review or a brainstorming session with it? I love my iPhone, but it isn't a replacement for my Mac (yet!). So we need to be reasonable about what we expect in an iPhone GTD (or compatible) application, and not ask more of them than is right.

It's also true that we've only begun to see the possibilities for what will be available on for iPhone. Look—it's only been a week (as of this writing) and there are already 15 different applications that are GTD/task-management oriented. I've been surprised and disappointed to hear some who have grumbled about how "this application doesn't work like it should" or "it crashed on me the first time I ran it." Sure, it was a bumpy upgrade for many, but overall I'm quite impressed with how well everything actually works.

I, like most, am excited about what the future holds for the iPhone. My productivity is already improving because of the dandy tools I've installed since July 11. Getting things done never looked more fun!

Future Coverage

I won't cover the GTD and task management applications for iPhone on a regular basis like I do the local applications for the Mac. Instead, I'll add two features to my regular list: just as I do with Web-applications, I'll make mention when there is an iPhone application available. Also, I'll create a basic list at the bottom that includes all of the iPhone applications that I know of (and, as always, if one is missing I'd love to know about it).

Master List

Two Web-based GTD applications are added to the list below: 43 Actions and GTDAgenda. Thanks to those readers who suggested these two.

Also, it is with both regret and great satisfaction that this is the first-ever list to be without KinklessGTD, arguably the first GTD "application" and the one that got all of this started. (Satisfaction because it was kGTD that eventually became the foundation for the Omni Group's OmniFocus, arguably one of the better GTD applications around.)

As you know, I strive every time I edit to be comprehensive in this list; I'm sure that I have missed one or two, perhaps even your favorite. I welcome feedback on the list and invite you to alert me to those applications that deserve a spot on it.

Locally Installed GTD Applications

[Action Tracker](#)



Developer: Mac Productive

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

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

News: None

[ActionTastic](#)



Developer: Jon Crosby

Current Version: 0.9.3

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Beta

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

[EasyTask Manager](#)



Developer: Orionbelt.com

Current Version: 2.0

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: iPhone version is available in the App Store.

Frictionless



Developer: Twin Forces

Current Version: 2.0d18

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: Latest update introduced Defer, templates, an updated interface, and a few other features, as well as some “under the hood” improvements.

Ghost Action



Developer: Ghost Park Software

Current Version: 1.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: Beta version (1.2.23a) is available for Leopard compatibility [here](#) (link is a download)

[iGTD](#)



Developer: Bartek

Current Version: 1.4.5.6

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: Though development appears to be defunct, I'll continue to track this one for a while to come.

[iCog](#)



Developer: HensPace
Current Version: 1.88
Price: Free
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
Required Applications: Python 2.4 or later
Distinguishing Features: Compatible with any OS running Python (including Windows); very simple text-only utility.
News: None

[mGTD](#)



Developer: Apokalypse Software Corp.
Current Version: 1.2
Price: Free
Development Status: “Pre-final”
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
Required Applications: Mori 1.4
Distinguishing Features: Expands Mori (digital notebook) functions to include GTD principles.
News: None

[Midnight Inbox](#)



Developer: Midnight Beep Softworks

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: \$35

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: There continues to be noise about versions 1.5 *and* 2.0, neither of which is available yet.

[OmniFocus](#)



Developer: Omni Group

Current Version: 1.0.3

Price: \$80

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

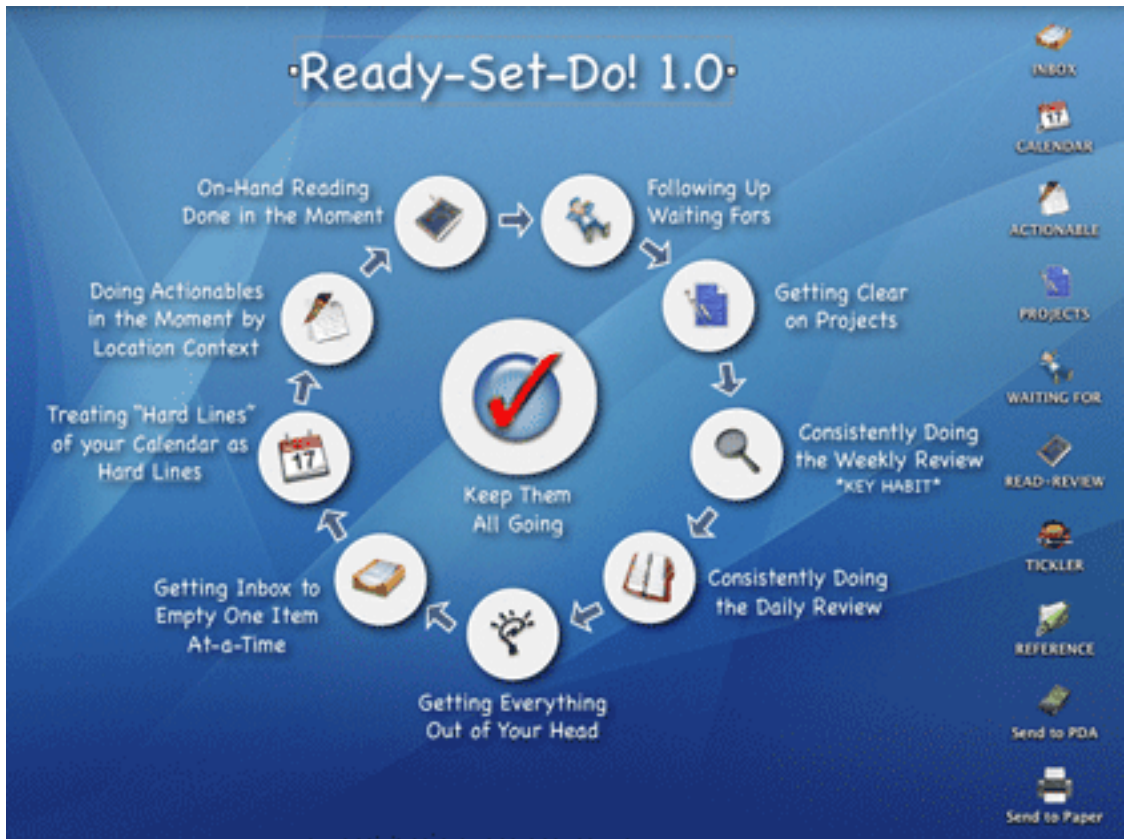
Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: iPhone version is now available in the App Store; also, version 1.1 is available as a “sneak peek” beta that allows syncing with the iPhone version. (1.1 will be a free upgrade; the iPhone version costs \$20.)

Ready, Set, Do!



Developer: Todd Vasquez

Current Version: 1.3

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: Version 1.3 is a recent release, with a small hoard of new, useful [features](#).

TaskPaper



Developer: Hog Bay Software

Current Version: 1.0.3 (26)

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: Check the [comments](#) section of last month's column for helpful tips from the developer about syncing and an online/semi-mobile presence.

Things



Developer: Cultured Code

Current Version: 0.9.3

Price: \$50 (pre-release price of \$40 with sign up for newsletter)

Development Status: Alpha

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: An iPhone version of Things (dubbed Things Touch) is available in the App Store for \$10 (introductory price). Syncing with the desktop version isn't possible (yet), but is seen as a must for future versions.

Thinking Rock



Developer: Avente Pty Ltd

Current Version: 2.0.1

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Cross-platform compatibility through Java; interactive collection and processing.

News: None.

What To Do



Developer: Objective Satisfaction

Current Version: 1.3.2

Price: \$29

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

Locally Installed General Task Managers

[Anxiety](#)

Developer: Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

[Check Off](#)

Developer: Second Gear

Current Version: 3.8

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that manages basic task lists; syncs with iPods; a .Mac Backup QuickPick is provided.

News: Version 4 discussion has [begun in the user forums](#).

[Dejumble](#)

Developer: Thinking Code Software, Inc.

Current Version: 1.2.b1

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

Docket

Developer: Surprise Software

Current Version: 1.3

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

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

News: None

Dolt

Developer: Jim McGowan

Current Version: 2.6

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

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

News: None

High Priority

Developer: Aram Kudurshian

Current Version: 1.11 (Mac OS X 10.4 only)

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

Hot Plan

Developer: Intuiware

Current Version: 1.4.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

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

News: None

iClock

Developer: Script Software

Current Version: 3.0.5

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

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

News: None

Life Balance

Developer: Llamagraphics

Current Version: 4.0.5

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

MultitaskingAssistant

Developer: Green Cog Software

Current Version: 1.0.3

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

Distinguishing Features: Perhaps especially helpful for repetitive and redundant tasks.

News: None

Stapler

Developer: The Blue Technologies Group

Current Version: 1.1

Price: €7.50 (about \$10)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

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

News: None

[ToDo X](#)

Developer: Omicron Software Systems, Inc.

Current Version: 2.2

Price: \$15

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Import from iCal only

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

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

News: None

[ZooDo](#)

Developer: InterfaceThis

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

Browser and Web-based GTD Applications

[30 Boxes](#)

Price: Free

Description: Lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction. Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface, too.

[43 Actions](#)

Price: Free (donations get extra features)

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

[GTDAgenda](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTDInbox](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTD-PHP](#)

Price: Free

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

[Neptune](#)

Price: \$10/year

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

[Next Action](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nexty](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nozbe](#)

Price: Free

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

[SimpleGTD](#)

Price: Free

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

[Toodledo](#)

Price: Free

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

Tracks

Price: Free

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

Vitalist

Price: \$5/month (premium)

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

Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

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

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

GTD and Task Management Wikis

- [D3](#)
- [GTD TiddlyWiki](#)
- [MonkeyGTD](#)
- [Pimki](#)

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Photoshop For the Curious

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

What If I Just Left It Alone?

Let's take a little break from the regular tutorials to think about a very simple, yet very important decision for each and every photograph that is a candidate to run through Photoshop: to adjust, or not to adjust. This decision manifests itself in the form of three questions:

1. What kind of adjustments are needed on this photo?
2. Why are they needed?
3. Does it even need any adjustment at all?

I've seen plenty of Photoshop tutorials that do a great job of explaining the various adjustment tools available—and I hope the tutorials I've offered in *Photoshop For the Curious* are worthy to join them (wink wink). However, for the purposes of demonstration, a photo with a blatant need for some sort of correction is always used.

Give the Camera Some Credit

The truth is, modern digital cameras tend to capture splendid photos. Even with my small point-and-shoot camera—an Olympus Stylus 720 SW—I routinely snap photos that I don't feel require a trip through Photoshop. For example:



The only thing I might have done to this photo is a bit of cropping.

Other than possibly (but not necessarily) cropping a bit off the bottom, I was very happy with this photo (and so was the girl's mother). The flash kicked in even though it was sunny, filling in the harsh shadows. The color looks nice, and details are sharp. When I think about those three questions for deciding what to do to photos, I'm inclined to look at the third question and decide I am going to leave it alone.

Consider how many untold numbers of people take an even greater untold number of digital pictures to a photo lab to get prints made. If most of those photos were in blatant need of a trip through Photoshop, I don't imagine so many people would be spending all that money on digital cameras and prints. Customers expect great photos right out of their cameras and, often enough, the cameras deliver.

Even still, there will always be some shots that didn't initially turn out so well, but can be salvaged. So, here's where I let you in on a not-so-well-kept secret: I have never had any formal training in photo adjustment techniques. Well, OK, I did once have a pro come for some one-on-one training in color management at my office, but that had more to do with adjustments needed for commercial offset printing—not personal photos that never go through the offset printing process. Yet, I'm asked somewhat often how I know what to do to a photo. As a matter of fact, this very question put to me by ATPM's publisher is exactly what spawned *Photoshop For the Curious* in the first place.

So, How Do I Know When to Adjust?

The best answer that doesn't involve registering for Photoshop courses is to start taking a good long look at all sorts of photos with a critical mind and ask yourself things like, "Do I feel like I'm looking at this photo through a pair of orange-tinted [or whatever color] glasses? Does the photo seem dull? Do I like it exactly as it is?"

Admittedly, it'll take practice. I assure you, when I started using Photoshop, I made a horrid mess out of most color adjustment attempts for a long time. Even today, some photos will stump me and I'll only work with them to an acceptable outcome rather than ideal.

I hope you've surmised by now that there's no such thing as a simple set of steps that will improve any photo. As long as the monitor being used is [reasonably calibrated](#) and you do not have symptoms of color blindness, I really don't believe there's a specific skill required other than just taking the time to practice. You can definitely teach yourself, which is exactly what I've done over the past 15 years. This is why I've *always* stressed in the past to edit copies of photos and save the originals. If the outcome of your adjustments isn't to your liking, examine what it is that didn't work with the result and try again.

Adjust, or Not to Adjust...



Original available-light group photo.

Once again, the goal is just to look at the photo and consider what it needs. This shot was taken with the available incandescent light in the room. Often enough, a digital camera can sense such color shifts and adjust the white balance to compensate, but there are many factors that can sometimes throw off the auto-adjustment. So, in this case, the warm color cast is the biggest concern I have.

As I continue to study the photo, my secondary concerns are that people in the middle are much brighter than the rest due to overhead directional lights. I also don't like the very prominent table in the foreground, nor the fact that something caused a reflection that appears as a light blob near the bottom of the frame.

Fortunately, a simple crop will take care of those last two problems. Even without cropping, the reflection could be pretty easily removed with the Clone Stamp tool. I must also remember that if I crop too much and if I want to make a print from this photo, a cropped version may not fit the standard sizes used by photo labs and a special-size print would be needed.

Once I've considered what the photo needs, I can now address those needs in Photoshop. After cropping, I'll deal with the brighter lighting in the middle. I could use the Dodge and Burn tools, but I'll instead make a rough Lasso selection around the bright areas and feather the selection a generous amount. Now, I can use either the Levels or Curves tools to gradually improve the shades in that area to not be so bright. Next, I simply invert the selection and use the Levels or Curves tools to lighten everyone else in the photo.

After I've balanced the lighting a bit, it's time to take care of that bad color cast. A quick trip through the Color Balance palette, followed by a touch of sharpening, and voila:



The same photo after a run through Photoshop.

I could probably spend even more time on the people in the back row since they were in a pretty heavy shadow at the time the photo was taken, but even still, the photo has been improved.

Oh, that whole part about gaining the experience over time by practicing? Here, let me help you along, and consider this one of those little tidbits you pick up as you're building your experience: I've discovered that the Color Balance palette works *a lot* more predictably if the photo is in CMYK color mode instead of RGB. The only problem with this is that the CMYK color space is [smaller than RGB](#).

Fortunately, this isn't too often a problem, especially in most of my work. Since many of the photos I work with are bound for offset printing, they have to be in CMYK mode anyway. But, even for photos that won't go on press, the smaller color space usually isn't noticeable. If you choose to give this tip a try, make sure to stare at your photo when you change it to CMYK. You might even use the Undo command to toggle back and forth so you can compare the differences. Very bright reds, blues, and greens, will tend to lose some brilliance when converted to CMYK. So, as I've been saying, study the photo, and decide for yourself whether or not you're OK with what you see. If you don't like it, Undo back to RGB.

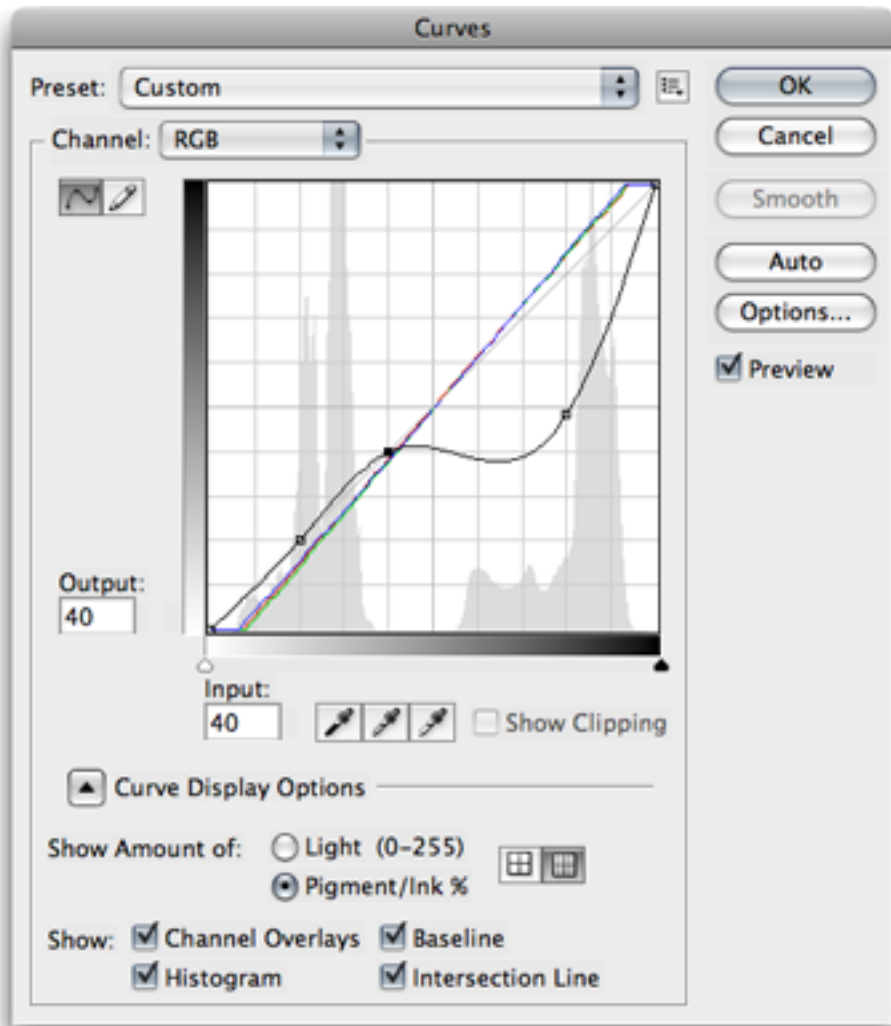
Let's try one more:



Shooting anything up toward the sky almost always throws off a camera's light meter.

Clearly, my camera metered a bright, albeit overcast, sky. As a result, the sign is too dark. At first, I tried for just a basic brightening of this photo, but long before the sign was to

my liking, the sky was completely blown out white. So, I got a little creative with a Curves adjustment:



The initial Curves adjustment.

The grey spikes on the left (brighter) side of the histogram represent the sky, and the peaks toward the right are showing the darker sign. So, I created two anchor points in the adjustment curve over the lighter portion to lock it in place, then used a third point to brighten the darker part of the photo.

This was a pretty nice improvement, but I wanted it better. Even though the sign was lighter, the white letters didn't look right. Remember, I had locked the lighter shades in the first adjustment. To address this, I used the Quick Selection tool (which is a subset of the Magic Wand tool) to create a selection of the sky. I inverted the selection to affect only the sign, then used the Refine Edge command to soften the selection. Finally, I used the Levels adjustment palette to brighten the highlights of the sign.



Yes, it was overcast and rainy this day. (By the way, [Lambert's Cafe](#) is an awesome place to eat if you ever have the opportunity.)

I Reject Your Reality and Substitute My Own

Bringing a photo closer to reality does not necessarily have to be the goal when choosing how to adjust the image.

Let's go on a virtual field trip. I like to occasionally look through some of the portraits [taken](#) by a particular Flickr user. I imagine, judging from her list of equipment, that many of her photos straight out of the camera are fantastic.

However, often her style is to create photos with adjustments that better convey a desired mood. Many of her photos are of models in cheerful poses, and she seems to like to push the color saturation a bit higher to emphasize the mood. For example, [this photo](#) shows some vibrant colors in the model's outfit—probably brighter than real-life perception.

Here's [another photo](#) with an effect that intrigued me. The photographer increased the saturation in the green grass and seems to have reduced saturation in the model's skin tones. However, I look at this photo and can't help but think what I might have done to it to come closer to my tastes. One easy fix would have been to erase what I suspect is a clump of leaves hanging out of the top right corner of the frame. I may have also done something about the fact that a light flare from the sun is washing out the model's face.

Let's go for [one more](#). It's pretty obvious the day was overcast and rainy during this photo shoot. The photographer chose to modify the dull, gray tones into green shades. I really liked the effect. Compare it to [another photo](#) that I imagine is closer to how the day may have really looked.

Homework Assignment

Try starting a small journal log of the adjustments you make to some of your favorite photos. Be very specific about not only each step you performed to adjust the photo, but why you chose to do that step. Were you trying to get closer to real colors? Were you trying to make it look gloomy? Were you addressing a specific problem with the photo? Did each step accomplish what you intended? When you're done, make a final comment about how you felt with the end result.

Keep up with this log for a dozen or more photos, then review your past comments. Perhaps you'll find photos both from early and late in the journal log where you were trying to accomplish a similar goal, but took different approaches to get there. Think about which steps were most satisfactory to you.

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Desktop Pictures

by Julie Ritterskamp

San Francisco

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos were taken by Julie Ritterskamp in San Francisco and Oakland, California.



[View Pictures](#)

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

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

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

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#).

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

If you have a picture, whether a small series or just one fabulous or funny shot, feel free to send it to editor@atpm.com and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue. Have a regular print but no scanner? Don't worry. E-mail us, and we tell you where to send it so we can scan it for you. Note that we cannot return the original print, so send us a copy.

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x through 10.5.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

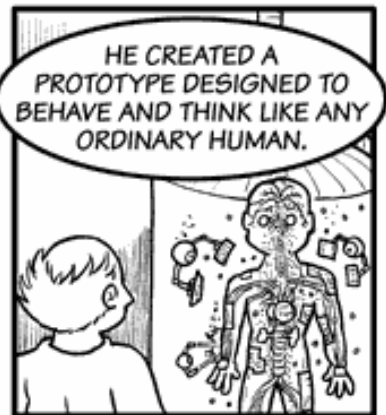
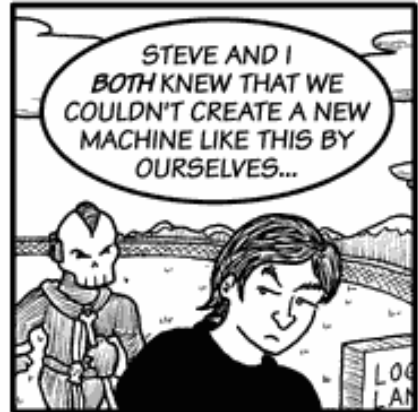
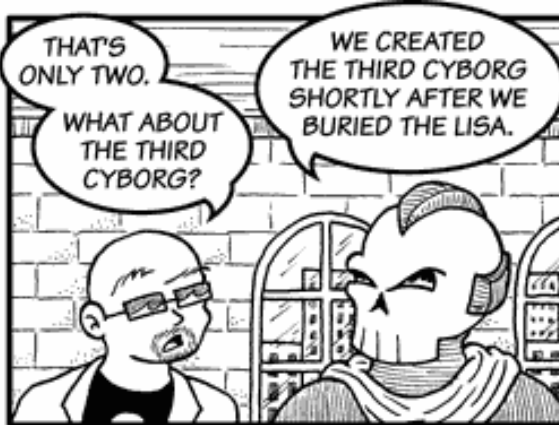
Mac OS X 10.0.x

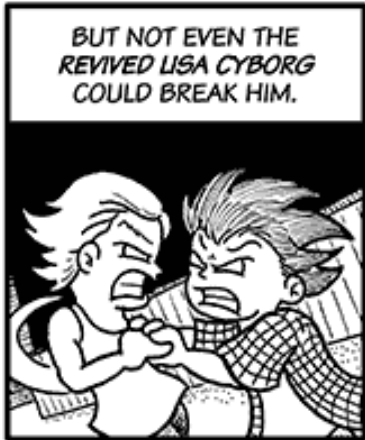
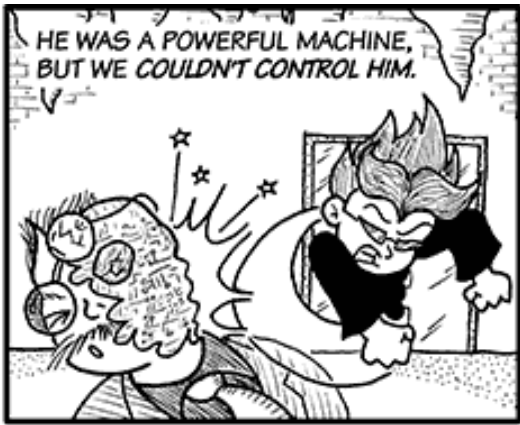
Switch to the Finder. Choose “Preferences...” from the “Finder” menu. Click on the “Select Picture...” button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the “Finder Preferences” window when you are done.



Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com





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Software Review

by Linus Ly, lly@atpm.com

Comic Life Magiq 1.0.1

Developer: [plasq](#)

Price: \$45; \$30 (crossgrade from Comic Life)

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

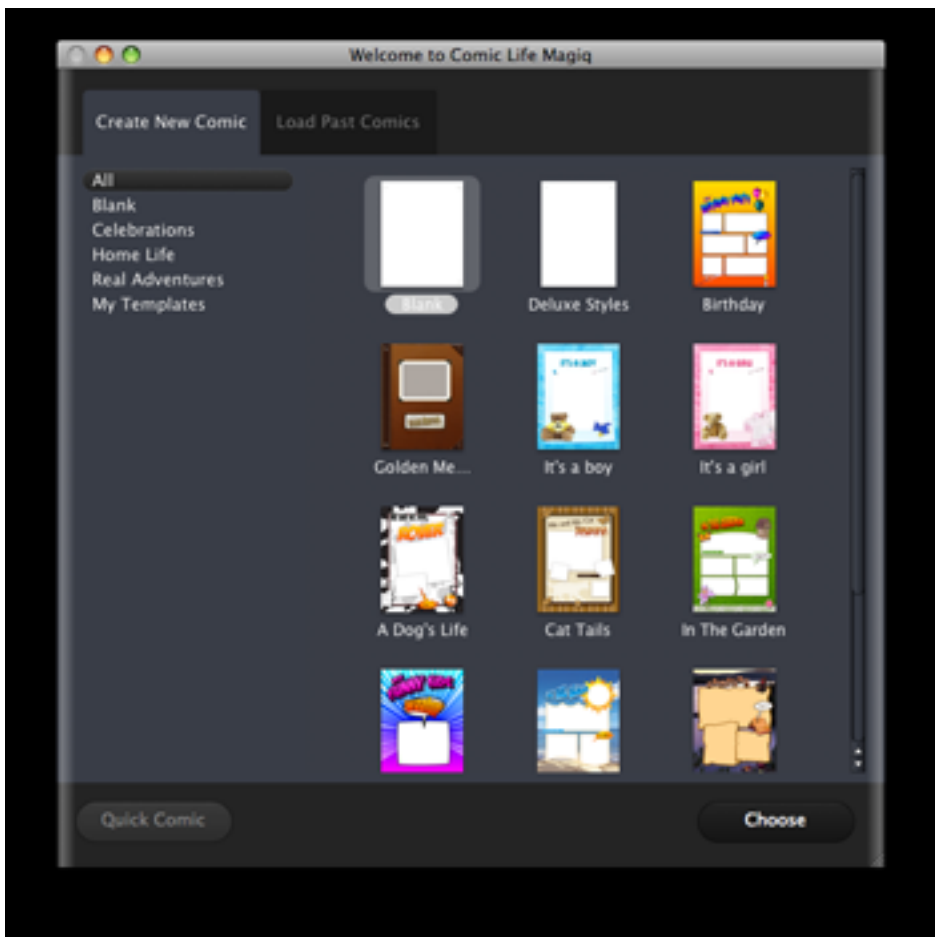
Trial: Fully-featured (30 days).



As an aspiring cartoonist, for me the most uninteresting task in the process of making a cartoon is lettering. Whether done on paper or in Photoshop, lettering often involves trial and error. The text may not fit the frame or the speech bubble, or the words may need to be corrected; whatever the case, it is a laborious task. To spend more time drawing witty cartoons instead of worrying about lettering, I got [Comic Life Deluxe](#). With many preset frames, text styles, and action words, Deluxe served my needs, but now there is also Comic Life Magiq. Is Magiq better? What is so magical about it?

New Interface

The most obvious difference with Magiq is the interface. Instead of a clean page to drop frames, texts, photos, etc., you now have a handful of templates to choose from. With the new interface, Magiq looks like a program to make greeting cards. Initially, I thought it was a bad move to go away from making comic strips, but after a little time exploring the templates, my mind was changed. The templates are easy to use and very nicely designed. Any set of pages can be saved as a template, too. I happened to go camping a few weeks earlier and was able to make use of the camping template. Using the templates is a good way to become familiar with the new features Magiq offers, but I also dove in with a blank template.



On Magiq's initial screen, you either choose a template or load a past comic.



Templates get you up and running quickly.

After the templates screen, there are even more changes compared to Deluxe. On the right, you still have the frames and your photo collection, but the left side of the screen is eaten up by the Details panel. Running along the bottom, somewhat like the old Comic Life,

you have the various types of speech balloons and lettering styles. However, here you also have some of the new Magiq features, like clip arts and the spray can. Clip arts are vector graphics that can be adjusted to your heart's content, although I have not been able to use them outside the templates. The spray can is more like the brush in Photoshop, where you can add shapes like hearts or flowers atop your image. The panels are fully adjustable and can be totally hidden away, although I prefer to have the old setup, with just one panel on the right.

Controls Galore

Most of the time, you probably can work with all of the panels hidden. Every page element, when selected, shows control gadgets on their borders. You can adjust the item's angle, location, and shape. A new way to select style, whether for a speech bubble or a frame, is the wheel, which corresponds to the control gadget at the upper left of the item. As a different slice of the wheel is selected, you get a preview of the style. Unlike Deluxe, no names are associated with the styles. While it is true that sometimes the names in Deluxe seem meaningless, most of the time they are descriptive enough, so I do miss them.



By default, you have just a center area to work with, but all the panels can be hidden away if needed.



Control gadgets all around each page element.



Make your style selection with the wheel.

Welcome Changes

There are some much more welcome changes. One is the speed at which Finder pictures are listed. On my 1.67 GHz PowerBook G4, there is a long delay when I switch Deluxe's image source from iPhoto library to Finder. On my wife's 2.16 GHz MacBook—a faster Mac, granted—there is no delay whatsoever with Magiq. Another difference that I like is

the ability to have more than one picture inside a frame. Drop a picture on top of one already in a frame, and you have the option to add the picture or replace the first.

The most appreciated new feature is probably the Magiq image editor. With Deluxe, once you drop a photo into a frame, there is not much else you can do to it, other than applying filters to the entire photo. In Magiq, you can do so much more, all without ever leaving Magiq. In the sample image, I applied a sepia tone to the image to give the impression that the event happened in the past. I also drew by hand a series of lines emanating from the center of the photo, to highlight the center.



No more switching to Photoshop and re-importing photos.

To somewhat illustrate the new features found in Magiq, I created a comic strip based on the song “A Laptop Like You” by folk singer [Jonathan Coulton](#). Coulton’s songs are Creative Commons licensed, and everyone is welcome to use them as long as some [conditions](#) are met. Coulton fans have created music videos out of his songs but the “A Laptop Like You” video happened to be no longer available on YouTube. I am not much into video, so the comic strip is the platform for me.

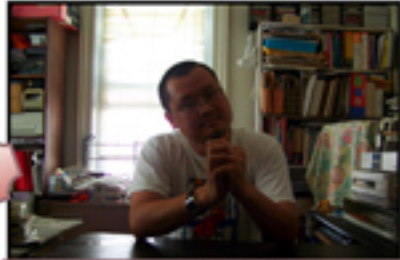
A LAPTOP LIKE YOU



Here you are at last
To bring my cold lonely soul sweet release



From my weary past
Always searching, the one missing piece was you



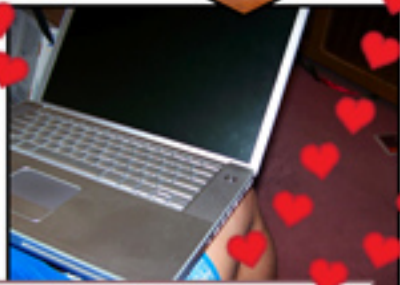
And I beg you, come away with me
And together we will find a place to call our own



I can't wait to see what I can do
With a laptop like you



It's not your CD slot
Or the Unix on which you are based



You make my lap hot
Cause underneath your aluminum case
there's love



And I forgive your strange one-button mouse
I forgive the way your keyboard leaves marks on
your screen

The first few verses of Jonathan Coulton's "A Laptop Like You" in comic strip form.

For now, I made just enough frames for one page of the strip but still made enough use of some Magiq features. The first frame is really a borderless frame containing a circular cutout of the photo within. In the fifth frame, where I found love with the Aluminum

PowerBook, the frame itself takes on the heart shape. Finally, in frame seven, the “love” emanating from underneath the aluminum case is a result of the spray can.

Conclusion

Comic Life Magiq is a big improvement over Comic Life Deluxe. Deluxe was already easy to use, and Magiq keeps the ease while adding more power. Not all the changes are good, like the apparently cluttered interface, but overall the changes are for the better. With features like templates, clip art, the spray can, and the image editor, Comic Life Magiq is a Very Nice application to have. If you already use Deluxe and need one more reason to upgrade to Leopard, Comic Life Magiq can be that last excuse.

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Software Review

by Eric Blair, eblair@atpm.com

Knapsack 1.1

Developer: [Tiny Planet Software](#)

Price: \$40

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

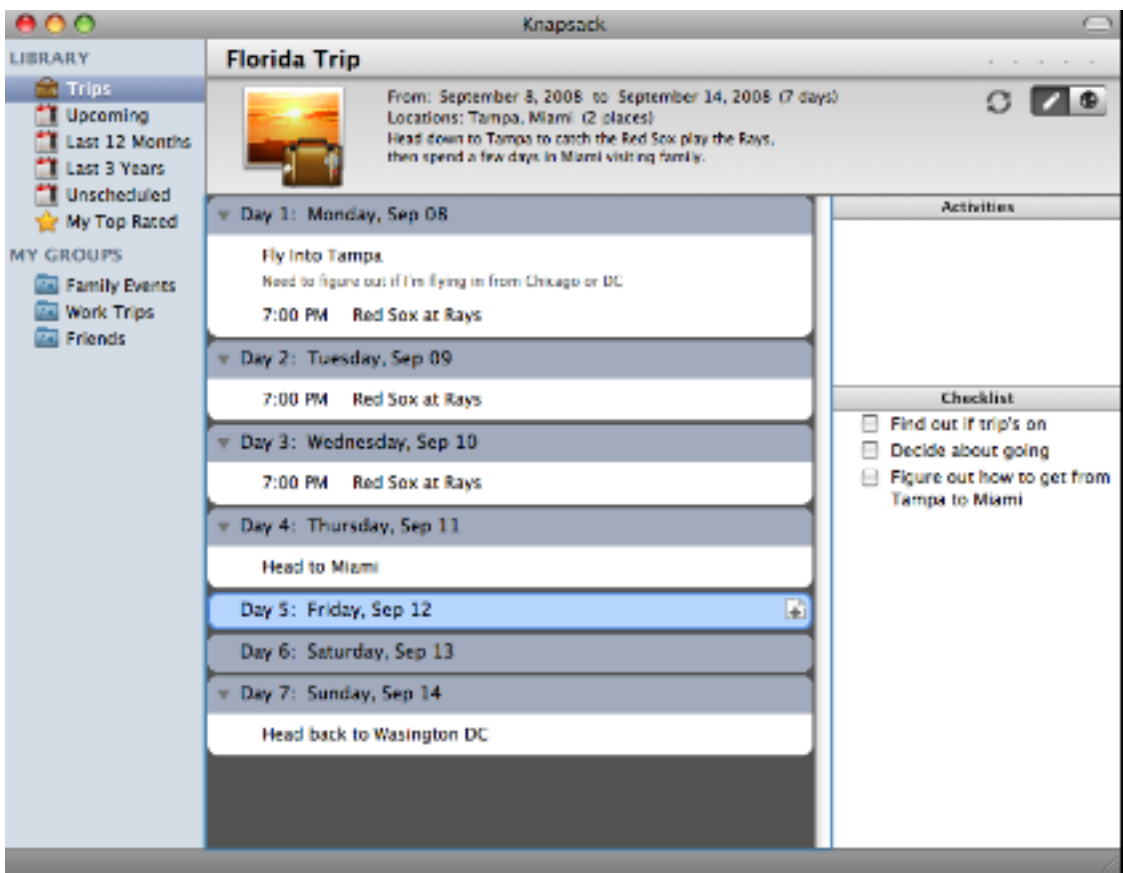
Trial: Fully-featured (30 days).



It seems like whenever I go on a trip, I forget something. I may forget to pack something, or I may forget where I wrote down some important information about the trip. These oversights, depending on their magnitude, can turn into anything from a minor annoyance to trip-ruining headache. Knapsack, Tiny Planet Software's trip planning software, can help you minimize, or even eliminate these issues before you even board the plane by giving you an interface for all your trip planning needs. Then, when your trip is far in the rear-view mirror, you can refer back to Knapsack to see the highlights of you past experiences.

Trip Planning

Knapsack's trip interface really tries to take into account everything you might need for your trip. Along with specifying the trip's dates and location, Knapsack breaks your trip down, day-by-day, allowing you to record notes about the specific day and schedule either timed or un-timed activities.



The trip itinerary contains a day-by-day breakdown, a to do list, and un-timed activities.

Depending on the type of a trip, your plans may not be quite this set in stone. For instance, a business trip will likely have a set itinerary whereas as a family trip might have general goals (take the kids to the zoo) without specific scheduling needs. Knapsack recognizes this and also allows you to enter unscheduled activities and to-do items. Furthermore, since plans can change, you can reschedule your activities by dragging them between days and the unscheduled activities list.

Although the flexibility in recording your trip plans is nice, I was initially a bit confused by the interface for creating activities and to-do items. There's a single command for adding an activity and a single command for adding a to-do item. The function of Add Activity changes depending on the application focus. If you've selected a day in your itinerary, the new activity will be added to the selected day. When any other aspect of the trip itinerary is selected, an unscheduled activity is created. Conversely, to-do items are never associated with a day. It took me a while to figure this out, since I was expecting them to act analogously to activities.

The inability to associate to-do items with days seems like an odd limitation. The shortcomings of the approach can be seen in the sample trips that Tiny Planet Software includes

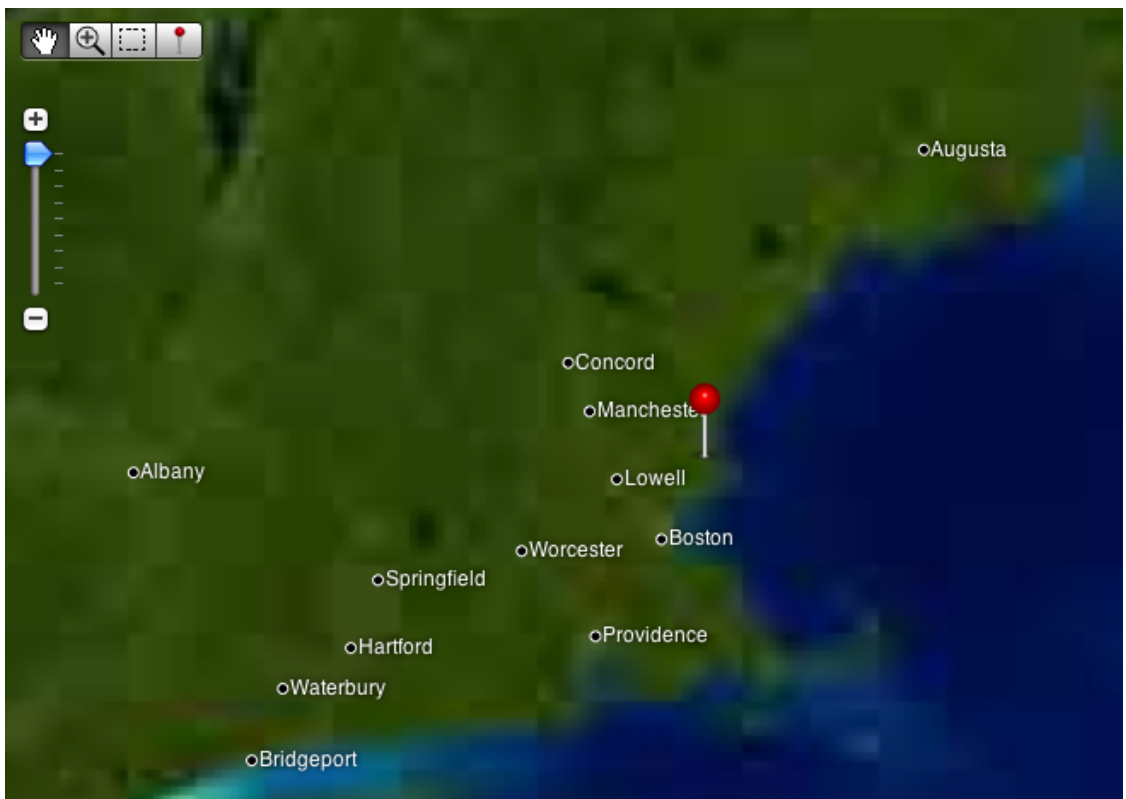
with Knapsack—day 1 of the sample National Parks Road Trip includes a reference to “Stop at REI near Vegas for supplies,” and the checklist contains an “REI Shopping List” item. With the exception of the similar titles, there’s absolutely no connection between the two related items.

Recording a trip’s location is done entirely through the map. When editing a trip, you drop a pin on the map and specify a name. Trips can include multiple locations, but there doesn’t appear to be any way to tie a location to a specific portion of the trip.

Although the map gives you a quick overview of where you’ve been just by looking at the pins, it’s not the most exact way of plotting your travels. There is no Google Maps–like search interface for placing a pin by location or address. Once you have placed a pin, you can move it by specifying a latitude and longitude. While latitude and longitude can be quite accurate, they’re not the easiest pieces of information to track down.

Additionally, there doesn’t appear to be any way to re-use a pin. I currently have two trips planned for Miami. Each trip has its own pin, and they’re in ever-so-slightly different locations. It would’ve been nice if Knapsack could have just used the existing Miami pin when I entered the second trip.

Complicating matters is the relatively poor quality of Knapsack’s map. While it looks fine at the lower zoom levels, it quickly become pixelated when you increase the zoom level. Also, the maximum zoom level isn’t that high—I was able to see most, if not all, of New England on the map at the maximum zoom level, even when I had Knapsack’s window at the smallest allowable size.



Accurately placing pins can be difficult, even at higher zoom levels.

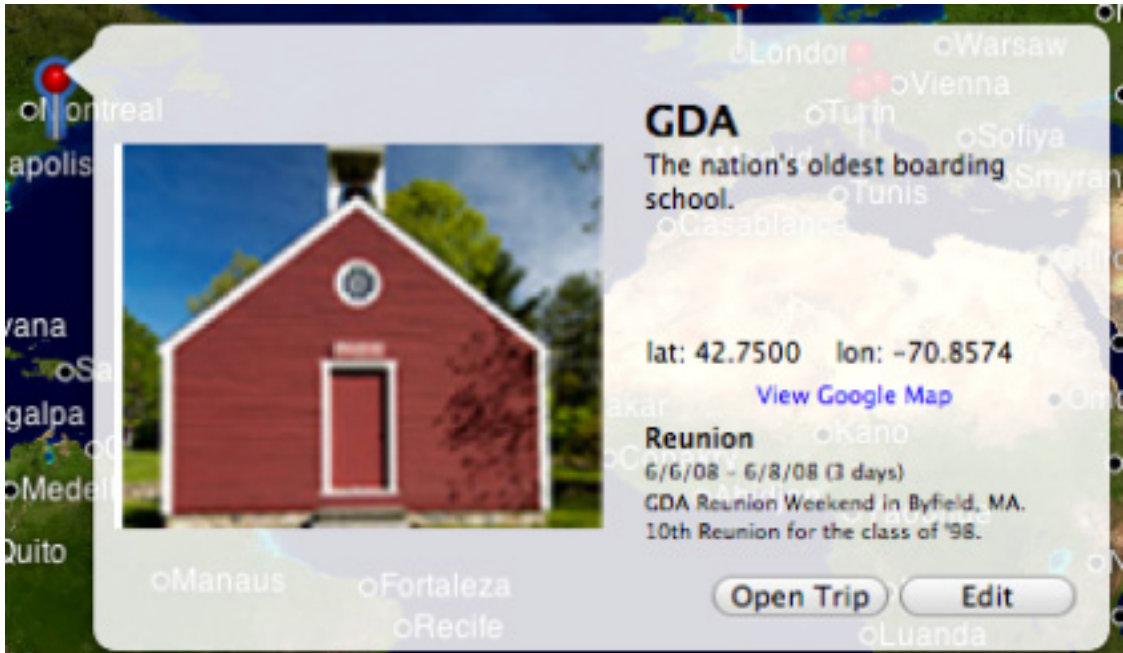
Post Trip and Organization

Knapsack uses the now-familiar iTunes-style source list for organizing your trips. In addition to viewing all of your trips, there are several smart collections which group your trips by certain criteria, typically the trip's timing. There's also a collection that displays your favorite trips, if you take the time to give your trips ratings of between 1 and 5 stars.

You can also create your own groupings. As you can see in the earlier screen shot, I currently have groups for family trips, work trips, and trips involving friends. Like iTunes playlists or iPhoto albums, trips can be included in multiple groups. In addition to providing a navigational aid for locating trips, a group like my Work Trips group gives me a quick reference to the trips I've taken for job-related tasks. Having the information separated in this way could prove useful for things like classifying business expenses come tax time. At the very least, I'll have a personal record of the work-related trips that I can refer back to when preparing information for an accountant.

The pins on the map provide an additional way to view your your information about a trip. Clicking on a pin will display a postcard view of your trip that can include your description of the trip, your description of the location, and an image from the trip. Due to the aforementioned issue with pins and multiple trips, it's not always possible to select a pin. Fortunately, you can filter the display pins by viewing a specific group. In the event

that the trips containing the overlapping pins are in the same group, you view the pins for a specific group by double-clicking the trip in the trip list.



The postcard view gives you a quick overview of a location from the map.

Knapsack also includes a search feature for locating trips. The search functionality, however, seems a bit limited. While the search includes the trip name and description, it doesn't appear to include any of the information about the locations or the trip itinerary.

Sharing Information

Getting information in and out of Knapsack is a bit of a mixed bag. On the positive side, Knapsack's integration with iCal seems particularly impressive. Not only can you export a trip to iCal, but you can also sync a trip with iCal. In this latter mode, changes made to the trip's calendar are mirrored back into Knapsack. This includes both the trip's itinerary for a given day and the to-do items. Unscheduled activities are not synced, but it's unclear what iCal would do with this information. Thus, even though Knapsack runs only on Mac OS X 10.5, you conceivably have many more options for viewing and editing information about your trips. For instance, I was able to create my trip in Knapsack, sync it to iCal, then modify the trip information on my iPhone. When I later synced my iPhone with my computer, the changes were reflected back in Knapsack.

That's not to say the process was perfect. At one point, I noticed an event on my iPhone had the wrong time duration, so I updated the end time. When I synced the change back to the computer, the event's start time moved. I can't be certain as to why this happened. I don't believe I changed the start time on the phone, only the end time, but I could be mistaken. I wasn't able to reproduce the effect in subsequent trials.

Your other options for getting information out of Knapsack are rather limited. There is an export function, but this feature creates files which are only readable by other copies of Knapsack—it is apparently intended for sharing information with other Knapsack users. If you want to move your information out of Knapsack, particularly what you've written about the trip, it appears you are limited to copy and paste.

Knapsack's other touted sharing option is PDF. However, this is actually just the use of Mac OS X's PDF Services via the print dialog. The printouts and PDF are certainly useful for sharing information about trip plans, but they are more functional than attractive. For instance, they include the name and description of your trip and its locations, but not any of the images you may have associated with said items.

When I first heard about Knapsack, I was actually expecting something a little different—I thought more of the focus would be on post-trip logging than on pre-trip planning. At the time of Knapsack's release, some friends were in the middle of touring Latin America and were writing a travel blog about their experiences. Based on Knapsack's description, I thought it might be an interesting tool for such an endeavor, which is why I was expecting more options for sharing information. For something like my friends' travel blog, the ability to send a write-up to a Weblog editor would be quite useful.

Although it's not exactly the application I was expecting, Knapsack is an interesting tool and it shows some promise. I appreciate that it lets me keep everything about a trip in a single application that's focused on travel, as opposed to some general purpose tool that may not encompass all aspects of a trip. That said, there are definitely places where I think the application needs to be improved in the future.

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Software Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

SmartMask 2.0

Developer: [AKVIS Software](#)

Price: \$120

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9, G4, 512 MB RAM, Adobe Photoshop 6 or later, or any version of Photoshop Elements. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (10 days).



At my day job, building masks in Photoshop to isolate a portion of an image is a common occurrence. In spite of reaching what I feel is an intermediate skill level for creating masks with Photoshop's native tools, I recently began considering various utilities for aiding mask creation. SmartMask is the first mask-building plug-in for Photoshop that I've had the opportunity to try.

SmartMask comes in the form of a plug-in with a version for Photoshop CS3 and Photoshop Elements 6 and another for Photoshop 6 through CS2 and Photoshop Elements versions 1 through 4. Other applications that support the Photoshop plug-in architecture may be able to use SmartMask, though AKVIS' Web page only lists Photoshop and Photoshop Elements for compatibility on the Macintosh.

To begin, the layer to be masked must be one that can hold transparent pixels. If the image is on the non-transparent Background layer, either double-click that layer to convert it to a non-background layer or, more advisable, copy the layer to a new one. Then, access the SmartMask plug-in from the Filters > AKVIS menu.



My first trial using SmartMask was with this photo—a very simple background to mask out. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

SmartMask's User Interface

It's sorely obvious that SmartMask was not initially designed with the Macintosh user interface in mind. Absolutely nothing feels Mac-like about it. It does not use the unified toolbar common to the proper Macintosh interface, and the button icons scream Windows XP. The adjustment portion on the right side uses scroll sliders which don't even vaguely resemble Mac scroll bars, and their small size make each end tricky to "grab" with a mouse click.

ATPM's five-point rating scale comes with guidelines that reviewers such as myself use to choose the best rating for the product being tested. The Okay rating which SmartMask earned from me contains one very specific criteria I found to be the recurring theme: "Sometimes, [the products being reviewed] remind you of Windows."

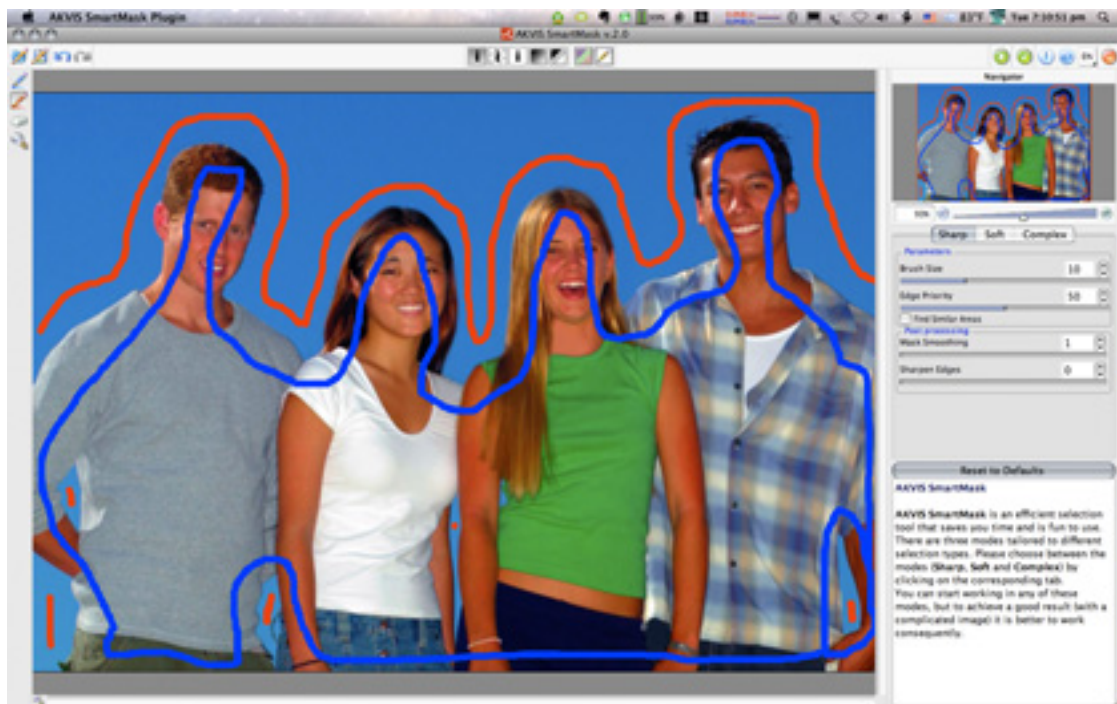
Even worse on the interface is that when I initially launched the plug-in and tried to use the resize widget to make the window larger, I found that it couldn't be made any taller than about 2/3 the height of my 15" MacBook Pro display. The Maximize widget did not help the situation.

When I used SmartMask for the second time, the plug-in window filled the entire screen. But, when I tried to use the resize widget, the window immediately jumped back to 2/3 the display's height. Subsequent access to the plug-in returned the window to full screen, and I now just leave it that way.

So, why have I spent four paragraphs (and this one makes five) talking about the user interface without yet even describing the process of actually masking photos? Because a look at the interface is first thing that will take place for *any* software. If that initial look and feel is an immediate turn-off, it's going to set a pretty solid tone for the software's usability.

Starting Mask Creation, Sharp Mode

Upon initial inspection, the process for setting up a mask—in spite of the eye-rolling interface—seemed very compelling.



A few pen tool lines to loosely define areas that will be masked are all that's needed to get started. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

SmartMask works in three modes: Sharp, Soft, and Complex. I was pleased to discover that the plug-in did not lock me into just one mode, forcing me to start over if I decided I needed another for the job. In fact, building a mask with SmartMask should always begin in Sharp mode. I'll elaborate on this in a moment, but will say now that another hit on the user interface is that nothing visually suggests I should always start with Sharp mode.

To begin, Sharp mode avails two pen tools for the initial steps of defining a mask. The blue pen is used to loosely define an outline of the area to be kept visible. As seen in the above figure, this outline does not have to be anywhere close to perfect. Likewise for the red pen used to define areas that will be masked. What's important to remember is that the photograph's colors beneath the respective lines become the guide that SmartMask uses to start building a mask.



For this photo with a very simple background, the initial result was rather good. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

If all masks built with SmartMask, no matter how complex the background, were this simple to accomplish, I would immediately forgive the poor user interface and rate this software Very Nice. But, remember that this photo already had a flat, near-single-color background. I can pull off essentially the same result just with Photoshop's Magic Wand or Quick Select tools.

Studying the initial mask result more carefully, I see some problems in the models' hair. This was expected, since I see similar problems if I use Photoshop's Quick Select. This is where it's time to move to the next mode in SmartMask.

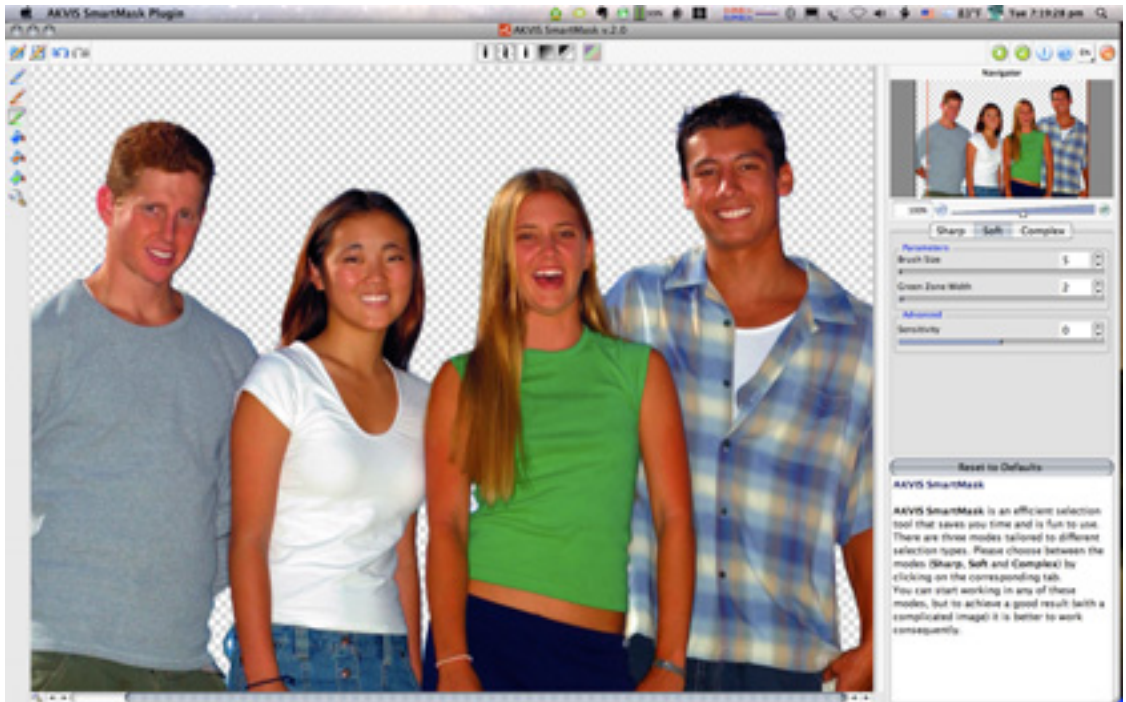
Using Soft Mode For More Intricate Mask Edges

I mentioned above that SmartMask allows me to move up to the next mode if the one I'm using isn't sufficient. By clicking the Soft mode button, I now have additional definition tools available in the left-side toolbar. The addition of a green pen tool allows definition of a mask's transition area—the region where going from masked to unmasked is more complex.

Also added are fill tools for each of the three colors. An example use of these would be to fill red into an isolated area that should be masked after that area's edges are outlined in green.



Broadening the mask transition region with the green pen. ([Click to enlarge.](#))



After applying the updated definitions, I'm getting closer to a good mask. ([Click to enlarge.](#))

Fine-tuning With Complex Mode

Complex mode is where SmartMask is supposed to really show its colors. The premise sounds spot on—define colors to be kept visible and those to be dropped out in the mask.



Defining Keep colors and Drop colors in Complex mode. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

The “Complex” moniker is aptly chosen. The control settings in this mode have a somewhat hefty learning curve. The tools now offer eyedroppers instead of pens—blue to specify colors that remain visible and red for colors to be removed. Once this step is done, the Magic Brush is used to clean up the transition area based on the defined colors.

What complicates this procedure is that I often didn’t have the impression that the colors which appeared in the Keep and Drop regions after clicking with an eyedropper really were representative of the color I thought I was clicking. This was especially the case in the second example photo, later in this review.

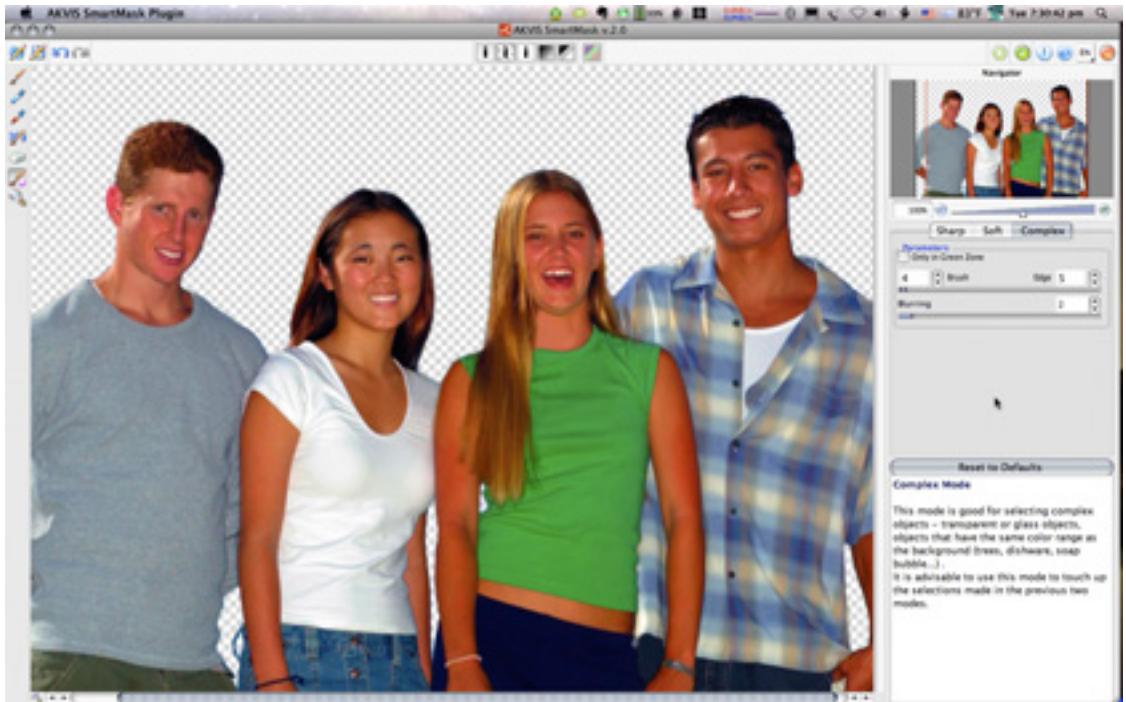


The mask's edge after using the Magic Brush. Better, but a little bit hard-edged. ([Click to enlarge.](#))

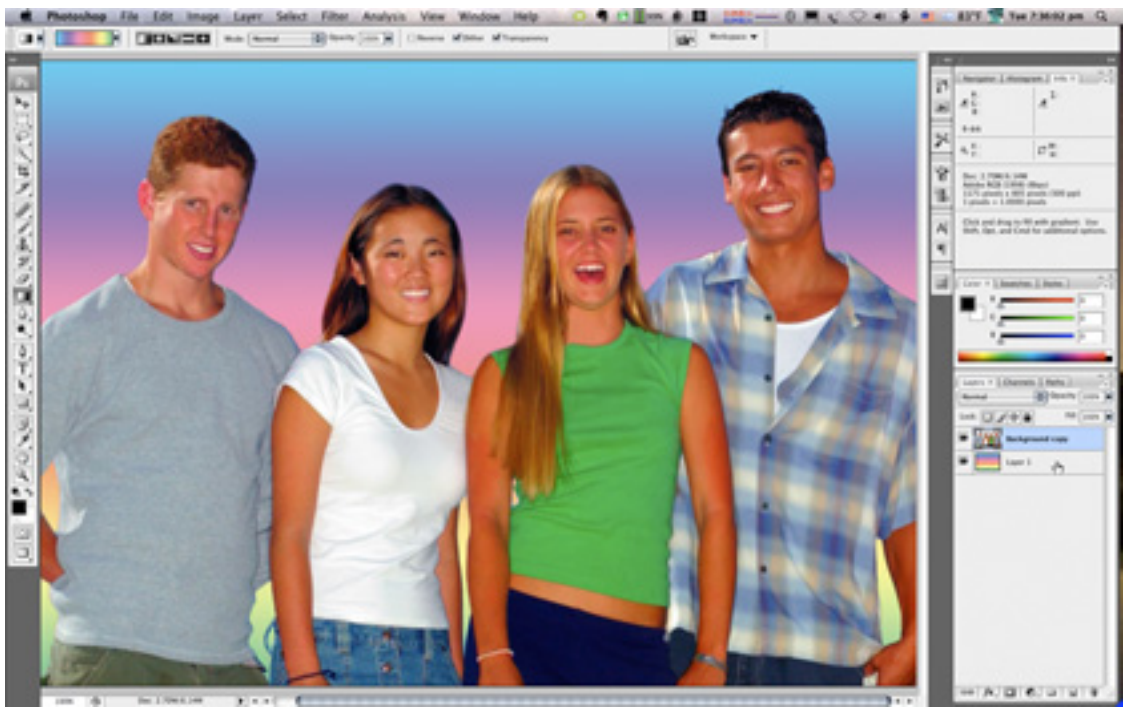
There are tools in Complex mode that can be used to manually erase and restore areas of the photo, along with a Blur tool. I ran the Blur tool with a low setting across the top of the model's head and got a result with which I was reasonably satisfied.



A better mask edge after using the Blur tool. ([Click to enlarge.](#))



The complete picture after cleanup. ([Click to enlarge.](#))



Replacing the transparent background with some color shows me that the mask holds up rather well. ([Click to enlarge.](#))

Once again, let me emphasize that this first sample photo was practically tailor-made for masking. Any steps for building a mask on it should find this photo an easy challenge.

The Missing Mask

Here is where I realized a very significant downside to SmartMask. Looking at the Layers palette in the lower left corner of the figure above, two layers are visible—one that holds the photo and another for the gradient color swash I created to place behind the models. The glaring omission is that the photo layer has no alpha channel applied that represents the mask. After accepting the final result from the SmartMask plug-in, the end result is a layer with the masked area completely erased—not masked. As far as I'm concerned, this makes SmartMask's name a lie. More accurate would have been to name it SmartErase.

A *very* small redemption is that SmartMask has a function to save a file that can be loaded in order to revisit the mask work that was done, provided a copy of the unmasked...er, unerased photo is still available upon which the saved mask file can be applied.

Even if SmartMask did apply an alpha channel instead of erasing, the ability to save a file of all the blue, green, and red mask definition areas (which obviously would not be stored in the mask channel) is a nice feature. However, not having an alpha channel as the end result seems *postposterous*.

Less Stellar Results With Complicated Backgrounds

Naturally, my next task was to give SmartMask a chance to show off when using a photo with a background less conducive to masking.



I could imagine wanting to mask out and replace the background of this photo because the tree stump behind the middle woman's head is distracting. ([Click to enlarge.](#))

Since I immediately recognized the soft, wispy hair in this photo, my deduction was that I should head straight to SmartMask's Soft mode. I said above that every mask should start with Sharp mode, and here's why. I began with the blue and red pen tools, then indicated the mask transition area with the green pen tool.



Same scenario as the first photo, only this time defining the mask transition area with the green pen tool in advance. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

I clicked the button to apply my markup and waited for the result.

And waited.

The progress bar crept across top of the plug-in window for approximately 15 minutes. All the prior adjustments I've described up to this point took place in just a few moments. This time, however, something was requiring *a lot* of CPU time. I'm working on a 2.2 GHz MacBook Pro, so an inadequate processor wasn't a factor.

Once the mask preview was complete, my hopes for redemption of the "Smart" part of SmartMask's name were crushed.



I don't even know what to say about this! ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

After a hasty Undo, I was back to the Sharp mode to get started on this photo all over again. As with the first photo, I set up simple definitions with the blue and red pen tools alone.



Initial result of the second try on this sample photo. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

The above result is essentially what I expected, which is why I thought I could save time by just starting in Soft mode.



Defining transition areas, this time at the correct point in the sequence. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

Once my brain accepted the need to always start in Sharp mode, I felt confident that using the green pen tool would do well at figuring out which areas were trees in the background and which areas were hair.



Take two of Soft mode's mask preview. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

In spite of obvious areas in need of work, I considered the above result to be pretty good. So, as with the first photo, it was time to break out the Keep and Drop color function in Complex mode to put the final touches on this mask.

Deciphering Complex Mode

This particular review was being a bear for me to complete. Here's why: I experimented, tinkered, twiddled, adjusted, revisited, ad nauseam, for several hours on four different evenings to become proficient at using SmartMask's Magic Brush function. Here's the best I could produce:



Where, oh where, is the edge of your hair? ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

In this figure, I enabled the Color Background mode that shows the areas to be masked. It reveals the problem that I could not escape in trying to define the edge of the model's hair. I tried using only a few Keep and Drop colors in the lists (visible to the right), and I tried a dozen or more. I tried all manner of Brush and Edge sizes and other settings available in the plug-in—some as educated guesses for results, others as random attempts.

Try as I might, the SmartMask results demonstrated in the [samples on AKVIS' Web site](#) were out of my reach. Perhaps more than just several hours of training and experimentation can lead to acceptable results, but I hoped that nice masks on complex photos were attainable with less effort.

Summary

Even if I somehow failed to grasp key tidbits for using SmartMask's Complex tools mode to greater success, it's still unfortunate that, at a \$120 price point, developers couldn't be bothered to build a true Macintosh application, choosing instead (I speculate) to port the Windows version to Macintosh like an afterthought. More unfortunate is that SmartMask does not take advantage of a significant strength in Photoshop by applying the the finished work into an alpha channel.

AKVIS SmartMask is a usable tool for a Photoshop arsenal, but I intend to keep looking at other mask creation plug-ins to learn what other workflows are possible.

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