

ATPM

15.05 / May 2009

Volume 15, Number 5



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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the May issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* While our nation's citizens work through the somber and challenging economic conditions on the way to recovery, the editors of ATPM have been hard at work challenging themselves to bring you the best product reviews, the most thought-provoking views, and the unique ATPM slant on the latest Apple news. We have dubbed this issue the first official SOMBER issue of ATPM. In ATPMspeak SOMBER means "Sometimes Outrageous Methods Bear Extraordinary Results."

Ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they leave convention behind and choose to follow the melody of life as they hear it and individually interpret the rhythm and sound. Thank you for joining us this month as our contributors and editors explore pathways in the digital universe often left untraveled.

The Accidental Photo Set

Jessica Leitao, a senior at Bishop Alemany High School in Mission Hills, CA, is the photographer for this month's [desktop photo set](#). A winter trip to Yosemite National Park and a new camera yielded many attractive photos of one of our nation's most popular and most scenic wilderness areas.

Jessica's goal wasn't to create a photo set for ATPM but to meander along the pathways of Yosemite with camera in hand. The photos were taken with a Canon PowerShot as she slogged through the snow to experience many of Yosemite's most famous sites and a few locations off the beaten path. If you are interested in submitting a desktop photo collection for publication in ATPM, please e-mail us at editor@atpm.com.

The Accidental, Incidental Partner

AT&T, the exclusive Apple iPhone service provider in the US, took a material risk when it signed with Apple on the iPhone contract dotted line. AT&T's subsequent decision to subsidize iPhone purchases actually depressed the earnings of the nation's largest phone services provider in the months after the subsidy program began, in favor of future profits from iPhone service contracts and wireless data services revenue.

The company now called AT&T had its beginnings in 1983 following the consent decree that established Southwestern Bell Corporation. The company's ticker (SBC) later became its name. Upon the acquisition of what remained of the post-breakup AT&T in 2005, SBC took its former parent company's name. Over the past two decades, through mergers and acquisitions AT&T (the former SBC) has recomposed much of the service territory and industry leadership the old AT&T commanded prior to the breakup of its monopoly in 1982.

AT&T isn't the first company Apple pitched for the iPhone. But it is the company that best saw the product's potential. Though some thought this accidental partnership that

developed after Verizon (another company created by the breakup of the old AT&T) rejected the iPhone would be incidental to AT&T's revenue and earnings, the iPhone is becoming a revenue and earnings driver as landlines and residential phone services evaporate before the company's eyes. Conventional wisdom would have suggested the iPhone was too small a matter for a company as large and revenue growth aggressive as AT&T.

Why would the company that regained one of the oldest names in telecommunications, and has a record of ambitious growth through acquisition, tie much of its near-term profit prospects in cellular services to a product developed by the newest name in cellular phone handsets? Because the iPhone brand delivers a customer experience and satisfaction level AT&T can neither develop nor purchase on its own. Thanks to heavy data plan use by iPhone owners, AT&T saw its cellular data service revenue jump almost 39% to \$3.2 billion in its most recent fiscal quarter.

AT&T has aggressively purchased through acquisition the service revenue of the past. The company has smartly partnered with a handset newcomer for the service revenue of the future. Conventional wisdom turned upside down and inside out.

Front Row Seating

Every Mac comes Front Row-equipped. But how many of us use this feature? Sylvester Rogue sees Apple's Front Row as a conductor of sorts. A product designed to orchestrate the playback of music and movies. Front Row makes use of the remote that accompanies your new Mac rather than depend on a keyboard. But does the product really give you a front row seat to multimedia enjoyment? [Find out](#) in this month's issue.

Innovation Front and Center

For the three months ended March 28, 2009, Apple Inc. reported record results for a non-holiday fiscal quarter. Though reported Mac sales declined 3% over the prior-year period, company executives state Mac sell through remained virtually constant with year-earlier numbers. During a calendar quarter in which global computer shipments declined by more than 7% and saw continued migration to cheap netbook PCs, Apple's results are a standout.

The state of Mac sales needs to be set against the strength in iPhone and iPod touch sales, which company executives suggest is a top consumer choice for netbook alternatives. Still, it's not that consumers are purchasing fewer Macs, but that schools are delaying Mac purchases in a challenging economic time.

During the three-month period, Apple sold 2.216 million Macs, 3.793 million iPhones, and 11 million iPods, inclusive of the popular iPod touch. Apple defers recognition of iPhone handset sales over the anticipated economic life of the product (two years). Apple ended the period with almost \$10.5 billion in deferred revenue on its books and almost \$29 billion in cash and investments.

iPhone OS 3.0 is close to release, Snow Leopard will see a summer commercial debut, and the third iteration of the iPhone is expected by early July. So much for a cautious approach

in an economic downturn. Apple continues to innovate and invest in new products. Netbook sales kept the PC industry's unit sales reversal to under 10%, but they don't engender the innovation that will lead the industry forward. More than one billion iPhone apps served to date is a harbinger of the kinds of innovative products to come.

In a quarter in which Apple recognized \$8.13 billion in revenue, over \$4.23 billion of that revenue was derived from iPhone, iPod, and related product sales, including the company's revenue portion of iTunes Store activity. Much of the iPhone's handset revenue remains off the recognized revenue books, leading to higher recognized revenue and earnings in quarters to come.

What's the lesson to be learned? While many enterprises are lightening their proverbial loads for the journey through economic uncertainty, Apple is loading the company's innovation bandwagon in anticipation of even better times to come.

iWeb: Review From the Edge

At ATPM, product reviews aren't just a writer's task. They are an extreme sport. In our May issue we [explore iWeb '09](#), a component of Apple's iLife '09 suite of applications. In developing this review, which was two months in the making, we take you to another of California's scenic yet decidedly lesser known locations. Named for a 19th Century outlaw who hid among the striking rock formations to avoid capture by western posses, Vasquez Rocks comes to life in this month's iWeb '09 review.

If you are interested in joining our product review team, please contact us at editor@atpm.com. At ATPM we celebrate the "personal computing experience." Your experiences with new and updated products can enrich the computing lives of our readers and highlight the work of new and emerging Macintosh and iPhone software developers.



Each issue of ATPM is designed to give you the edge in exploring what we call the "personal computing experience." From a visual trek through Yosemite National Park to the use of Front Row in your living room, this issue of our monthly magazine has you in mind.

Our May issue includes:

MacMuser: Cisco Kids (Us)

Four days is a long time in narrowband hell.

MacMuser: Hedging and Ditching

Mark Tennent seemingly doesn't have a lot of love for his printers.

Next Actions: Master List, May 2009

Ed Eubanks Jr. updates his GTD Master List.

How To: Spending Time in the Front Row

Every orchestra needs a good conductor to perform at its best. Maybe your Mac media center needs Front Row to perform at its best.

Desktop Pictures: Winter in Yosemite

Jessica Leitao shares photos from a January 2009 trip to Yosemite National Park.

Qaptain Qwerty: Reading Not Done

How efficient can you be?

Review: Ballistix PTAC Laptop Cases

Slappa is back with a few new products, and Lee Bennett is back to put them through the paces.

Review: Core Case for iPhone 3G

The nicest metal iPhone case yet, but case perfection remains elusive.

Review: iWeb '09

Though the blogging component is still something of a disappointment, Robert Paul Leitao finds iWeb '09 a worthy Web site editor.

Review: Pogo Sketch for iPhone 3G

Probably your only option if you have to use an iPhone with gloved hands, though you still can't do multi-touch gestures and it's not as accurate as a finger.

Review: SoundClip for iPhone 3G

A nice idea for enhancing the iPhone's speaker that doesn't quite live up to its promises—and doesn't get along with iPhone cases, either.

Review: Transcriva 2.0

Ed Eubanks Jr. gives high marks to this audio transcription utility.



Showcase for iPhone 3G

It looks a lot like my Otter Box case. Same price range and should give the phone decent protection. I carry mine in my pocket...less chance of having it hit the floor or having someone swipe it.

—*G. Watson*



I can recommend this product. I've used it for over a year, and it has worked flawlessly. The density of the cover has protected the iPhone from a couple of nasty drops without any problem. I'd recommend a thin screen film for maximum protection. The belt clip can work as a stand on a level surface. Well made, very secure.

—*R*

Very Interesting...But Stupid

I like Safari 4. I use the Cover Flow feature and generally am very pleased with it. It's a grade up.

But I've noticed that people either hate it or love it. There are no in between!

—*John Davis*



The reload button is not gone. It's now a little "circular arrow" icon in the right of the address bar. It's been shrunk and moved, not taken away.

—*Jabrwock*

Facebook for iPhone 2.2

If event requests have been omitted in favour of friend requests because, as you say, the latter occurs more frequently, I put it to you that you merely represent an insignificant "subset" of people who have legions of cyber "friends," but never actually leave their computer to spend anytime with anyone in the real world.

—*Richie Montana*

I really can't speculate as to whether or not your comment is valid—it may very well be. But what I can do is assure you that I don't represent the subset you describe because I, personally, get away from my computer to spend time with friends in the real world to a high degree. In fact, right this very moment, I am typing to you having returned from an out-of-state trip to an event and catch up with friends I went to college with nearly 20 years ago. Moreover, with fewer exceptions than I can count on one hand, every one of the nearly 500 friends to whom I'm connected on Facebook are people I have at least met in person and, in most cases, have had a long-time relationship with in person. The few I've not met in person are essentially all professional contacts with whom I've interacted frequently—if only online or by telephone. But I digress. All I was trying to suggest was that it would be nice if I could, at best, be able to manage my friend group lists and see some information about events on the iPhone application. Or, at the least, be able to assign someone to an existing group list when I request a friend connection via the iPhone application.

—*Lee Bennett*

Freeway Pro and Freeway Express 5.3.1

Nice, fair, and balanced article. I created my first Web site in [iWeb](#) and my second in RapidWeaver. Both programs were very good at what they were trying to achieve and met my expectations, but I needed some flexibility in what I was doing although I am novice (to be sure). I found Dreamweaver was too much for the inexperienced amateur.

What I have found in Freeway 5 is that even with the limitations I bump into occasionally, it just does what I want, and if I don't know how to do it I read the well written manual and experiment without worrying about messing up the rest of my “creation.” This program almost makes me look like I know what I am doing. Software, after all, can only get one so far!

—*Robert*

Espionage 2.0.2

When a folder is locked via the contextual menu, only some Macs, and only some of the time, will that strange error message appear from the Finder. The problem appears to be an odd caching issue with the Finder, where it will simply assume the folder is inaccessible and will not even attempt to access it. It's easily fixable by moving the folder slightly or getting info on it. Most users don't experience this issue at all. A system-wide menu for locking and unlocking folders is coming very soon, which will make it even easier to avoid this Finder/Espionage bug.

If you get the password prompt randomly claiming that the Finder is trying to access the folder, check to make sure that none of Finder windows are set to “Calculate all folder sizes” in the view options.

We also have plans to make it even easier to restore backups (very similar to the suggestions in this review), we did not include them in 2.0 initially because it would have delayed the

release of 2.0, and restoring a folder is a rare operation, and the documentation makes it very clear on how to do so. We do agree though that this is a user-friendliness defect in the program, and it will be fixed in a free update soon.

—*Greg Slepak (developer of Espionage)*



Why would anyone need a \$25 application to do something that Disk Utility does for free? In place of secure folders you just create encrypted sparse bundle disk image files that require passwords before they will mount. If you find it necessary to hide the disk image files, there are free utilities or Finder contextual menu tools that let you change file visibility.

—*Gregory Tetrault*

As I see it, the main benefits are: (1) Espionage can mount the disk images inside your regular folder hierarchy (i.e. ~/Library/Mail) whereas Disk Utility can only mount in /Volumes, and (2) It can auto-mount the disk images when the folders are accessed.

—*Michael Tsai*



Indeed, as Michael mentions, this allows Espionage to do things that aren't possible with Disk Utility, like encrypting application data. That's actually a [FAQ item](#) on our support page.

We just released version 2.0.4, which adds new features (including support for custom folder icons) and addresses a couple of the issues brought up in this review, including the Finder's "insufficient privileges" prompt, and probably most (if not all) of the situations that could cause the password prompt to appear randomly. Hopefully now we can really live up to the unobtrusive claim.

Full changes can be found [here](#).

—*Greg Slepak (developer of Espionage)*

OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things

Thank you for a great overview.

Thought I'd share my experience of the three programs.

I bought and worked with OmniFocus and TaskPaper. For my purposes, OmniFocus requires too much upkeep. On the other hand, with TaskPaper, I couldn't get an instant

overview of my workload whenever I completed a task. I want to know exactly what remains to be done for the day, and what's next.

Then I got Things, and I dumped the other two programs. Things is great, and I use it hourly; it's the backbone of my personal GTD system.

Over the past couple of weeks, however, I've added The Hit List to Things, essentially because I wanted the option to add sub-tasks for various tasks, and also because the card view is very useful for some tasks, where I need to open lots of files or add lots of information.

I'm very pleased with both Things and The Hit List, they're a pleasure to use.

—*Angela Booth*



I really like Things. I guess it's a matter of how your mind works. Things seems to parallel the way I think and turn a confused mess into a logical sequence. There is also an iPhone application that syncs with the desktop version.

This makes an excellent combination.

—*John Davis*



Excellent review. My experiences have been very similar.

—*Michael Ogilvie*



I'm a TaskPaper fan, mainly because of the fact it uses text files. This means I can use my TaskPaper files with any text editor. I often work in the Terminal, which means I can use VIM to edit my TaskPaper files. On Windows there is TodoPaper (a TaskPaper clone) or I can simply open Notepad++ for quick tasks. For people working on different systems/architectures, TaskPaper is a great solution. Jesse is also working on an iPhone version and a cloud service to sync up files. For the moment, I use the Dropbox service to sync files.

—*Nat*



I've never tried OmniFocus—too much emphasis on GTD (which I adopted, followed, then burned out on. . .I don't need that much structure). But Omni does make incredible software, particularly OmniGraffle and OmniOutliner.

I had used Remember The Milk for a long time but was looking for a desktop application on the Mac. I tried Things and was really happy with several of its aspects, mostly along the lines you point out. I also liked the iPhone application. But the syncing, which I find to be a critical feature, is too limited. . .I just wish it'd sync to a Web service so I could do it anytime, anywhere, as my MacBook Pro is often shut off and in its bag. If it had had that feature, I'd probably still be using it.

TaskPaper is my current choice. The mixture of outlining notes with tasks in a text-driven environment is incredibly satisfying. I find that my to-do lists often devolve into fragments of notes, details, ideas, suggestions, reminders. . .not simply tasks. And all the other apps require you to hang all of those extra details off a task (which is the GTD influence: make everything into next actions). Once the iPhone application is delivered I'm afraid I'll never look back!

Right before I found TaskPaper I encountered an in-beta Web application called Thymmer. If I was only looking to manage tasks I'd possibly consider it over TaskPaper as it has some very slick features. It'll definitely give Remember The Milk a run for its money.

—*Troy Gilbert*



I have used Things and OmniFocus and looked at TaskPaper. I agree with your assessment.

Taskpaper is great for a simple approach. Similar to Tudumo for Windows.

Things has a nice interface but is missing three things OmniFocus does very well:

1. Things does not have context for their iPhone application.
2. Things treats Areas of Focus and Projects differently.
3. Things does not allow you to view your tasks in different cuts easily like OmniFocus.

OmniFocus is *my* favorite because it has an iPhone application that actually has contexts and it has reoccurring tasks, and it can sort the information in different perspectives very well.

—*cloudrider*



Great review. Interestingly, the element you did not explore in OmniFocus—converting e-mails to tasks—has become my must-have feature.

Instead of dozens of e-mails which are, in reality, tasks, I now send them to OmniFocus. This is done by selecting the e-mail in Mail, going to the Services menu, and selecting “OmniFocus: Send to Inbox,” which starts the OmniFocus quick entry window.

End result—my average in box size is about 20 mails instead of 1,600. Priceless. Just need to complete some tasks now. . .

—*Mark Hubbard*



I have tried both OmniFocus and Things and have settled on OmniFocus. While I agree that the “features” of OmniFocus can quickly get in the way, once you learn the program it is pretty easy to use.

I *really* love the user interface of Things, and if they can ever get the connection between the desktop and iPhone version I would probably go back again. I really do love the user interface—it is very simple.

—*Mike Erickson*

We'd love to hear your thoughts about our publication. We always welcome your comments, criticisms, suggestions, and praise. Or, if you have an opinion or announcement about the Macintosh platform in general, that's OK too. Send your e-mail to editor@atpm.com. All mail becomes the property of ATPM and may be edited for publication.



Cisco Kids (Us)

At last we got the date for entry into faster broadband. Our 8 megabit BT Max line was ready for the 21st century, and we would be downloading at speeds unimaginable when we went online in 1991. On April 16, we should have been on a 24 megabit link via ADSL2+.

The big day came, and at mid-day our Internet link died as the BT engineers did whatever they do. The Linksys/Cisco router sat with all its lights on except for the last one: connection to our ISP. For some time, we thought it was installation glitches or that “The Internet” was down, as it had been recently when a cable was cut somewhere in Kingston.

We had already been through the lengthy process of upgrading the firmware in our router in readiness for ADSL2+, and Linksys had assured us before we bought it that ADSL2+ was one of its capabilities. Even the modulation drop-down options in the setup page shows ADSL2+ as a selection.

Some hours later, we called our ISP. They were “experiencing a high number of calls” and could we get back to them later. This semi-confirmed our belief “The Internet” was broken somewhere. At 5 PM, there was still no DSL service, and our ISP was closed. We called BT faults, who assured us “The Internet” was indeed working throughout most of the UK and especially in our local exchange. This prompted a call to our ISP’s telephone answering machine, and later an e-mail via our only computer with an analogue modem. It may be an old PowerBook G3, but it can still get online.

Blithering Binaries! Did we used to think surfing at 56K speed was fun?

Then Martin, our [friendly ISP](#), called us. He even knew to ring the other telephone number, since our main one was busy notching up more profits from BT as it transmitted a day’s worth of work and e-mails. Sending 20MB via dialup is a dread experience.

Martin had received our plaintive e-mail when he got home, and as soon as we explained our router was Cisco-based, he told us that was the problem. Our only route to ADSL2+ was a computer shop the next day, getting a Netgear alternative. However, in the meantime our ancient D-Link router would let us limp along.

By now it was evening, with no one in the UK to pester. We fired up the D-Link router and initiated a (slow) online chat with Alan300 at Cisco. He was as bemused as us for the lack of DSL service and told us to call the boffins in India on their 0800 number. The ever-so-nearly English speaker confirmed what we had been told by Martin—our Linksys/Cisco router was not able to use BT’s version of ADSL2+.

Day two, Netgear up and running, download speed is about the same as our slightly enhanced upload speed, both around 100KBps. This is, Martin assured us, only to be expected and will be sorted out in four days once the consistency of line has been verified. He checked with BT, who said we should get a very good service. If only Netgear's online help showed how to do Port Forwarding we might even have an FTP server again. Instead, it refers to an earlier version of the modem and even with the help of [PortForward](#) something is blocking access to our HTTP and FTP servers.

Meanwhile we limp along, our connection speed is higher than on BT's Max line, uploading is 10% faster, our flexible friend is 60 quid lighter, but downloads are pathetic. We had to get some images from the US Library of Congress today and at one point they were arriving slower than on dialup.

Four days is a long time in narrowband hell.

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Hedging and Ditching

Darn it and @\$%&£! Why didn't we stop when it was "nearly there"? Sigh!

Now, instead of an inkjet printer that used to work fine until a page needed cyan, we have a plastic box which blinks once when plugged in and then plays dead. Worse still, we nearly got cyan to print properly, and it was only the "one more try" that did it.

After reading various suggestions on the Net to unblock Canon inkjet heads, we took it out and soaked it in a little vinegar-based window cleaner. It seemed to work, too; cyan printed far better than it had for months, but there were still discernible lines running through blue solids. Which is more than can be said for our multi-coloured stained fingers.

At this point, we hedged our bets and investigated buying a new print head compared with a new printer. The replacement part will be over £70 plus another £30 for incredibly expensive pieces of foam, while a new Canon Pixma 4600 is around £80. It seemed a good time to try one more thing we read online: dismantling the print head altogether by removing two screws and levering up a little ceramic plate. We (the Royal We that is) tried this but chickened-out when the plate wouldn't lift up. We/I reassembled the print head, ink cartridges popped into place, and the printer powered up.

The carriage slid along, but then nothing: no lights, no noise, nothing. The fuse hadn't blown, and the power cable was securely in place. Nothing obvious had broken or got flooded, but on reconnecting the power, one lamp blinked then stayed off. And that's the current (or lack of) situation.

Luckily we have old Grumble Guts, a 15-year old Apple LaserWriter 8500 who sits in the corner gathering dust most of the time. Spare parts are as rare as rocking horse dung, and toner cartridges cost as much as a banker's pension, but it's a network printer that we can control via telnet and that Apple still supports with drivers.

Meanwhile, yet another inkjet printer seems destined for ditching because of some piddling fault that is more expensive to fix than buying a new machine.

Crazy!

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Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

Master List, May 2009

Thanks to all for the feedback on the [last column](#). I'll work on getting details out about my Hazel rules, and a couple of other notes, for those who asked.

I haven't added anything to the list this month; however, I will probably *remove* Action Tracker and ActionTastic next month, unless I see something different. Also, I've checked up on other things listed here to make sure they're still in the works, and everything seems to be fine (contrary to some comments)! Oh, and I got [The Hit List](#) in my MacHeist bundle, too, so look for it to be added in the near future.

There were a larger-than-average number of updates this month, so check to see if your favorite application (or one you've been watching) has a new version.

About the List

As usual, I welcome any feedback on my list or suggestions for additions. I won't always add every suggestion, but I'll look at them and evaluate whether they fit with what I'm trying to cover.

Locally Installed GTD Applications

[Action Tracker](#)



Developer: Mac Productive

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: None (FileMaker file)

Required Applications: FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

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

News: The Mac Productive Web site now contains an odd (and uncomfortably Windows-centric) message on its front page that, though dated almost 10 years ago, appears to be more recent and, sadly, seems to confirm the departure of Action Tracker from existence. Look for this one to be dropped from the list in the near future.

[ActionTastic](#)



Developer: Jon Crosby

Current Version: 0.9.3

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Beta

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Unknown

Required Applications: None

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

News: There is no way to download the current version (or *any* version!) at the Web site, as-is. I'll take it off the list if there isn't action (sorry about the pun) in the next month.

[EasyTask Manager](#)



Developer: Orionbelt.com

Current Version: 2.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (free); Web App (free)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.

[Frictionless](#)



Developer: Twin Forces

Current Version: 2.0d18

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

[Ghost Action](#)



Developer: Ghost Park Software

Current Version: 1.3

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

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

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: .Mac syncing (without iCal running); PDA/iPod syncing, two-way iCal syncing.

News: April brought a long-awaited upgrade for Ghost Action, improving syncing and adding [a handful of features](#); the release notes say that it works in Leopard, but the front page still says that it is for Tiger only. 1.2 was in beta for over a year, and suddenly the number jumped to 1.3...

[iGTD](#)



Developer: Bartek

Current Version: 1.4.5.6

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.



Developer: HensPace

Current Version: 1.90

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Unknown

Required Applications: Python 2.4 or later

Distinguishing Features: Compatible with any OS running Python (including Windows); very simple text-only utility.

News: A recent jump to version 1.9 includes a date bug fix and a Python maintenance issue. Plus, it adds support for plug-ins, thereby opening the door to user modifications.

[mGTD](#)



Developer: Jeff Fisher

Current Version: 1.3

Price: Free

Development Status: Pre-final

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: None (Mori template)

Required Applications: Mori 1.6.11

Distinguishing Features: Expands Mori (digital notebook) functions to include GTD principles.

News: None

Midnight Inbox



Developer: Midnight Beep Softworks

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: \$35

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App coming soon

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

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

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

OmniFocus



Developer: Omni Group

Current Version: 1.6

Price: \$80

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$20)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.8

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.

[Pluto menubar](#)



Developer: MOApp Software Manufactory

Current Version: 4.1

Price: €12.00 (about \$16.40)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

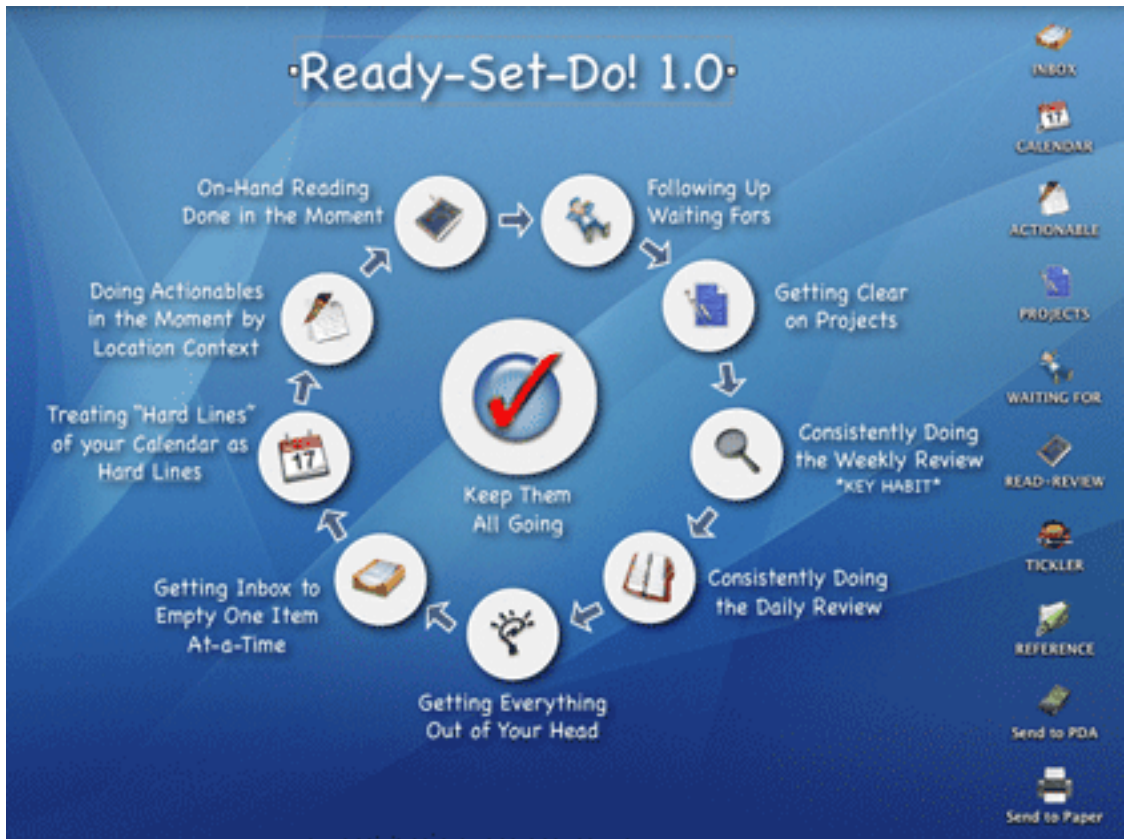
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Required Applications: None

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

News: Recently-released version 4.x brought major changes both on the surface and under the hood, including sync improvements, GUI upgrades, search and customization improvements, others. 4.1 fixed some bugs from the major upgrade.

Ready, Set, Do!



Developer: Todd Vasquez

Current Version: 1.3f

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

TaskPaper



Developer: Hog Bay Software

Current Version: 2.0

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.

Things



Developer: Cultured Code

Current Version: 1.0.4

Price: \$50

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$10)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.

Thinking Rock



Developer: Avente Pty Ltd

Current Version: 2.2.1

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

Required Applications: None

Distinguishing Features: Cross-platform compatibility through Java; interactive collection and processing; can be run off of a flash drive.

News: April brought version 2.2.1, with improved layout and interface, some better ways to gather, and some modules.

What To Do



Developer: Objective Satisfaction

Current Version: 1.3.2

Price: \$29

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.9
Required Applications: None
Distinguishing Features: Drag-and-drop intensive for easy reorganization; .Mac syncing for multiple computers; XML export.
News: None

Locally Installed General Task Managers

Anxiety

Developer: Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept
Current Version: 1.0
Price: Free/Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5
Distinguishing Features: A menu-bar utility that gives a HUD-like interface to iCal tasks; sorts by calendar; Mac OS X 10.5 only.
News: None

Chandler

Developer: The Chandler Project
Current Version: 1.0.3
Price: Open Source
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: Yes
Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)
iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3

Distinguishing Features: A good integrated calendar makes this one a fairly full-orbed PIM.

News: None

[Check Off](#)

Developer: Second Gear

Current Version: 3.8

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.2

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

News: None

[Dejumble](#)

Developer: Thinking Code Software, Inc.

Current Version: 1.2.1

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: App (\$8)

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

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

News: Version 1.2.1 returns iCal syncing to the mix, plus a few bug fixes.

[Docket](#)

Developer: Surprise Software
Current Version: 1.3
Price: \$20
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: No
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: Yes
iPhone Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.1
Distinguishing Features: A neat basic list management application. A Windows version is also available.
News: None

Dolt

Developer: Jim McGowan
Current Version: 2.6
Price: Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes
Web-app Sync: No
Print Lists: No
iPhone Presence: None
OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4
Distinguishing Features: .Mac support and AppleScriptability. Also supports file attachments and categories for lists.
News: None

FlexCal

Developer: flexgames
Current Version: 1.10
Price: Free/Donationware
Development Status: Release
iCal Sync: Yes
QuickSilver Plug-in: No
Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Distinguishing Features: A task and event creator for iCal—something of a collection bucket for GTD users.

News: None

High Priority

Developer: Aram Kudurshian

Current Version: 1.11 (Mac OS X 10.4 *only*)

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4 only

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

News: None

Hot Plan

Developer: Intuiware

Current Version: 1.4.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.9

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

News: None

[iClock](#)

Developer: Script Software

Current Version: 3.0.5

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

OS Requirements: Unknown

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

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

[Life Balance](#)

Developer: Llamagraphics

Current Version: 5.0.5

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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

News: None

[NoteBook](#)

Developer: Circus Ponies

Current Version: 3.0

Price: \$50 (academic and family pack pricing available)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.11

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

News: None

Organized

Developer: iSlayer

Current Version: 1.11

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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

News: None

Qu-s

Developer: Urban Design Limited

Current Version: 1.2

Price: \$17

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

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

News: None

Stapler

Developer: The Blue Technologies Group

Current Version: 1.1

Price: €7.50 (about \$10)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4

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

News: None

TaskMate

Developer: Ryan Conway

Current Version: 1.1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5

Distinguishing Features: Ultra-simple task list: remaining tasks in a simple list; completed tasks in a drawer (which can be hidden). Tasks are just single-line descriptions with a check box. Could be right for the super-simplified life.

News: None

ToDo X

Developer: Omicron Software Systems, Inc.

Current Version: 2.2

Price: \$15

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Import from iCal only

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Mac OS X 10.2

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

News: None

[ZooDo](#)

Developer: InterfaceThis

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

OS Requirements: Unknown

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

News: None

Browser and Web-based GTD Applications

[30 Boxes](#)

Price: Free

Description: Lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction.

Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface, too.

[43 Actions](#)

Price: Free (donations get extra features)

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

[GTDAgenda](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTDInbox](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTD-PHP](#)

Price: Free

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

[Neptune](#)

Price: \$10/year

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

[Next Action](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nexty](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nozbe](#)

Price: Free

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

[SimpleGTD](#)

Price: Free

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

[Task Writer](#)

Price: Free

Description: Easy keyboard navigation, good use of calendaring for tasks, and a useful set of attributes for tasks, as well as the ability to auto-hide unneeded list views, help Task Writer to stand out a bit.

[Toodledo](#)

Price: Free

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

Tracks

Price: Free

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

Vitalist

Price: \$5/month (premium)

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

Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

- [Backpack](#)
- [Basecamp](#)
- [CoMindWork](#)
- [HiTask](#)
- [Hiveminder](#)
- [Joe's Goals](#)
- [Mojonote](#)
- [Remember the Milk](#)
- [Scribe](#)
- [Sproutliner](#)

- [Task Freak!](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Tasktoy](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Tweeto](#)
- [Zenlists](#)
- [ZenPages](#)

GTD and Task Management Wikis

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

iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)

- [Chores](#),
- [Dejumble](#)
- [DoBot ToDos](#)
- [EasyTask Manager](#)
- [Firetask](#)
- [Life Balance](#)
- [Lists by MobilityWare](#)
- [Lists by Tynsoe.org](#)
- [My Lists](#)
- [OmniFocus](#)
- [Outliner by CarbonFin](#)
- [Tanjias Checklist](#)

- [Tasks](#)
- [Things](#)
- [ToDo by Appigo](#)
- [To Do by Erica Sadun](#)
- [ToodleDo](#)
- [Zenbe Lists](#)

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How To

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Spending Time in the Front Row

Other than checking the system requirements, I ignored the initial release of [Front Row](#). That's unusual for me. I usually pay attention when Apple releases a new piece of software. For better or worse, most of the time its software seems to work the way my brain does. This time, however, I didn't start downloading immediately. I'd love to say this was a sign of great restraint on my part, but it wasn't. I was running a G5 that didn't have an IR sensor to make use of the Apple Remote. If you are still in that situation, are running at least Mac OS X 10.4.8, and want to check out Front Row, here's [one solution](#).

The second reason I didn't try Front Row immediately is that I generally don't like watching video on the computer. I prefer to watch anything longer than a few minutes on a television rather than a monitor. At the time, we had an older television that [wouldn't have connected easily](#) to a computer. Now that the iTunes Store contains more programs that I might actually watch, we've started the process of interconnecting everything, and I am starting to experiment with Front Row. Along the way, I've found a few interesting quirks and a few solutions. Let's take take a look.

What Front Row Does and How It Does It

Think of Front Row as something of a media conductor following a musical score. The score is set by your iTunes and DVD Player preferences. Much of the actual playback (performance) is handled by QuickTime or one of its components ([codecs](#)). In essence, Front Row organizes things—with an assist from your iTunes library—and acts as the front end so you don't have to poke around in multiple programs just to shift from playing music to watching a movie.

When I launched Front Row for the first time I noticed that, unlike many other applications, there are no preferences to set. This makes running the program with a remote easier, but it's a tad confusing. However, it's also the first clue to knowing just how much Front Row depends on other programs for help. When it wants to know where your music files are and the settings to use to play them, Front Row consults your iTunes preferences. Tired of music and want to watch a movie? If you're watching a DVD, DVD Player's preferences write the score for the conductor to follow. Meanwhile, QuickTime is right at hand waiting to follow the conductor's instructions.

Front Row's Limitations—And a Few Solutions

I've only been using Front Row for a short time, but I've already discovered a few limitations. Some of its limitations present challenges that are easily met, while others have no easy

solutions. The limitations I've noticed are the ones that stand out when I use the program. You may notice others based upon your viewing and listening habits.

Content is Played Back on the Primary Monitor

As I mentioned recently when discussing [dual monitors](#), most of the time, your Mac won't care which display is the primary one, but sometimes it makes a difference. Front Row, for example, always displays its menus and content on whichever screen has been designated as the primary screen. This is a source of annoyance because unless you are running a dedicated media center, you probably don't want to use your TV as the primary monitor. At the moment, I don't have an easy fix for this problem. Designating the primary monitor requires a trip to the Displays preference pane.

Limited Flexibility in Locating Content

I don't mind so much that Front Row expects music to be in the iTunes Music folder. After all, if that folder starts taking up too much space in your home folder, you can move it to an external drive and tell iTunes where it's located. Once you have the folder in a new location, go into iTunes' preferences and click the Advanced tab to choose the new location of your music folder. Since Front Row relies on the iTunes preference settings, it will know where to find the music.

Videos Must Be in Certain Places

Video files must be inside the Movies folder in your home folder or in the Movies subfolder of your iTunes Music folder—otherwise Front Row can't find them. Frankly, I don't like either location for storing longer videos. The Movies folder would quickly consume free space on my main drive, and I generally don't use iTunes to play longer videos. I prefer to keep that content on an external drive in a location that can be accessed by other user accounts on my Mac. In fact, I am currently moving much of this content to a Time Capsule.

Making Front Row see video content that is stored outside your Movies folder on an external drive is quite simple. (Actually, I'm rather annoyed that I did not think of this solution on my own.) Create an alias of the drive or location where your video files are stored and drop the alias into the Movies folder in your home folder. I am currently using an alias to point to a Recordings folder on an external drive.



Locating Content With an Alias

When you select the alias in Front Row, a list of the videos in that folder will appear. Simply click on the desired video to play.

Problems Organizing Content

Because it's designed to work from a remote, Front Row doesn't really have a search function. It doesn't even mimic the remote control-based search capabilities found on most cable set-top boxes. This limitation can become a major annoyance if you have a large collection. Scrolling through a long list could get tedious unless you take preventive action.

The only real solution is to keep the drive that contains your video collection organized. If you like searching videos by genre, create subfolders based on genres inside your recordings folder that will contain the videos.

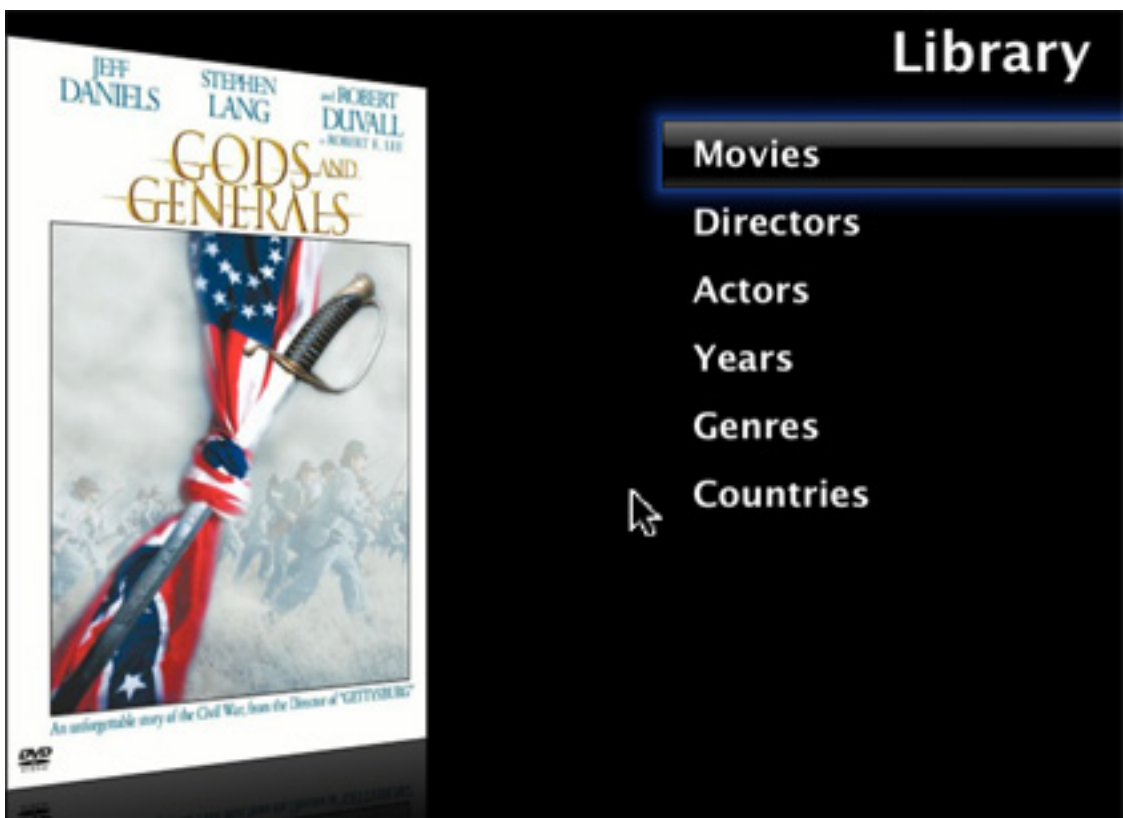


Organization by Movie Genre

Prefer an alphabetical search? Create separate subfolders inside the folder where your videos are housed. As you navigate through the menus, Front Row recognizes the subfolders and presents them as menu choices when you select the parent folder. No matter what type of organization you choose, create the subfolders inside the folder that contains your videos and move the videos into those subfolders. You don't need to duplicate the same structure inside your Movies folder.

Do not use smart folders for this task: Front Row does not recognize them. Fortunately, if you change the folder structure later you won't usually need to create a new alias.

If you are using the movie cataloging application [DVDpedia](#) , there is a [plug-in](#) available for Front Row that allows the information from your DVDpedia library to appear within Front Row. I began using this plug-in just before this article went to press. So far, I like what I see. I have only a few of my movies in a DVDpedia library at the moment, but as you can see from the screenshot it provides a variety of ways to access the information within Front Row and to watch linked movies.



DVDpedia Plug-in in Action

Front Row and Internet Radio

The text in Front Row displays better on my TV than the text in iTunes, so sometimes I use Front Row to play Internet radio stations. It's easier to read if I am sitting across the room. Initially, I couldn't get the radio stations listed in iTunes to appear in Front Row—perhaps because there are too many to navigate easily with a remote. Once again, the solution is simple and depends on integration with iTunes.

Launch iTunes and create a new playlist. When the new playlist appears, give it a descriptive name. Now go to Radio, select a favorite station, and let it play for a few moments to ensure the station is still operating. Drag the station into the playlist that you just created. When you have finished adding stations, quit iTunes. The next time you launch Front Row, select Music, then Playlists, followed by the name of the playlist that you created to hold your favorite stations. I am not sure if there is a limit to the number of items that Front Row can recognize, but if there is, it must be rather large. It handles large playlists of other music without any problems.

Problems Playing Certain Content

If you spend any time at all working with media files on your computer, you'll realize there is a veritable alphabet soup of file formats out there. Every time I think I have a handle on them, something new comes along. While QuickTime handles many of these formats

nicely, there are some it just cannot manage. Unfortunately, if QuickTime cannot handle a format, neither can Front Row.

The solution to this problem is to locate an appropriate codec for QuickTime. Once it can handle the file, Front Row should handle it as well. [Perian](#) and [Flip4Mac](#) meet most of my playback needs, but other codecs are available from several sources. If you are hungry for more options, check out the [QuickTime Components Page](#). I haven't tried it yet, but I have seen at least one report of plug-ins that allow Front Row to handle [Hulu and Netflix content](#). That ought to satisfy your appetite for content for the time being.

Final Act

Despite shortcomings such as the inability to easily dictate which monitor Front Row appears on, the more I use the program the more I like it. I'm sure there's more to learn, and by the time I do, there will probably be a new version out with new features. In the meantime, if you want even more tips for Front Row, check out this [EntertainMac page](#). In addition to a few more tips, the left side of the page contains a link to a few more Front Row plug-ins. (That's the article that gave me the idea to use an alias to point to other locations for movie files.)

In the near future, I plan to look at a few alternatives and supplements to Front Row. I would love to hear your suggestions. In the meantime, the curtains are going up. I'll see you next time.

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Desktop Pictures

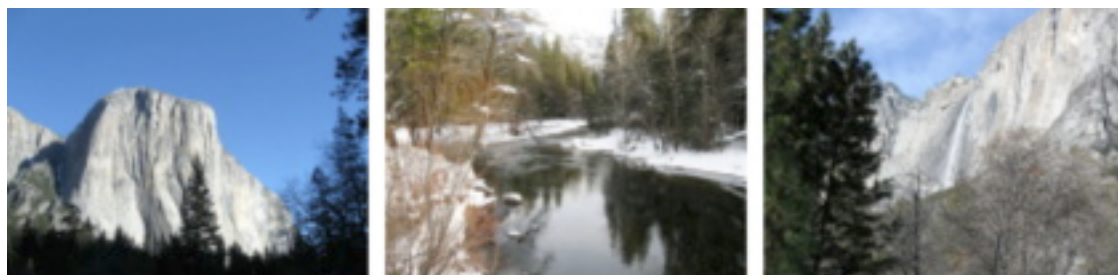
by Jessica Leitao, <http://gallery.me.com/simplyjes>

Winter in Yosemite

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos of [Yosemite National Park](#) were taken by Jessica Leitao in January 2009 using a Canon PowerShot A590 IS.



[View Pictures](#)

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

iCab Use the Download command to “Download all linked files in same folder” and configure the limits to download only the linked images.

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

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#).

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

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

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x Through 10.5.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

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



Captain Qwerty

by Linus Ly, <http://qaptainqwerty.blogspot.com>

Reading Not Done





As GTD is [regularly featured](#) in ATPM, I decided to give [GTD](#), the book, a try. I think it helps if one's mind is open to ideas while reading about GTD. My mind was not open, and I could not finish the book. I was convinced that the way things work in the typical corporation, one can be efficient only so much. At some point, the amount of work is just too overwhelming. A bad economy leads to job cuts, the remaining staff takes up the slack, all the while facing competition from cheaper labor elsewhere thanks to the global economy. The more load you complete, the more will be piled upon you. There usually is some surprise lurking around the corner.

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Accessory Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

Ballistix PTAC Laptop Cases

Ballistix PTAC Stealth Laptop Sleeve

Developer: [Slappa](#)

Price: \$30

Requirements: Laptop

Trial: None



Ballistix PTAC Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag

Developer: [Slappa](#)

Price: \$130

Requirements: Laptop

Trial: None



After a favorable review of the Slappa [Velocity Matrix](#) laptop backpack in October 2007, I was pleased to be contacted about reviewing a few new products from Slappa. For this month, I'm looking at two products that make a great pair: the Stealth Laptop Sleeve and the Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag from Slappa's Ballistix PTAC line.

Stealth Laptop Sleeve

I am a big fan of products that do one thing and do that one thing extremely well, and the Stealth Laptop Sleeve is just such a product.

Available in sizes for 15" and 17" laptop computers, this sleeve provides good protection with an adequate amount of padding that is not so thick as to add unnecessary bulk. The only additional "feature," if it can be called a feature, is a simple pouch on the back for holding a few documents or cables. It's made from ballistic nylon which, according to Slappa, is both water- and tear-resistant.

The Stealth Laptop Sleeve lacks any kind of handles or a strap, which may be a disappointment to some, but I do not see this as a negative point. To me, the purpose of a laptop sleeve is just to provide extra protection to the laptop and would otherwise be carried the same as the laptop itself—either cradling the bottom like one would hold books, or riding inside of a larger bag. There are two small metal rings to which a strap can be attached, available separately from Slappa for \$20.



The Ballistix PTAC Stealth Laptop Sleeve is a well-designed, no-frills pouch for laptops.

Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag

If I were reviewing the Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag based solely on the compartment arrangement and capacity, high marks would be deserved. Though it is roughly the size of a typical briefcase (or perhaps a smidge thicker), this bag feels cavernous inside. The main compartment is divided in two halves, each capable of accommodating a laptop up to 17", and it is especially well suited to hold laptops inside a Stealth Laptop Sleeve. Of course, most owners don't need to carry two laptops, so the second half of the main compartment is ideal for power adapters, cables, and/or books.



The Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag filled with all my computing gear.

Several more compartments are on the front of the bag. There's a zippered pouch for medium-sized equipment or more cables, plus three small compartments with their own flaps, perfect for things like pocket cameras, USB hubs, small multi-outlet power strips, battery chargers, etc., just to name a few of my own items that found a nice home in these compartments. At the top is a small, zippered pouch ideal for business cards. Two more compartments are located on each side of the bag, which I found perfect for a mouse on one side and my 3DConnexion Space Navigator knob in the other. One more compartment is incorporated into the flap and rests above the main, large compartment when the flap is closed. Then, on the back, is a zippered pouch similar to the one on the back of the Stealth Laptop Sleeve for carrying a few documents or file folders.

The inner lining is constructed the same as the Stealth Laptop Sleeve and provides a respectable amount of padding. The bag itself, like the sleeve, is constructed of water- and tear-resistant ballistic nylon.

Even though I am very pleased with the arrangement and capacity of the various compartments, I don't see this bag as the ideal tote for laptops. My issue with the bag lies almost entirely on the design of the flap and the position of the handle. Unfortunately, I have seen many bags—and this bag joins that group—commit what I consider to be a sin in bag design. The flap connects to the bag only along the top rear edge and via two clasps at the bottom when closed. Admittedly, both the stitching at the top and the quality of the clasps is very good. However, because the handle is on the top of the flap, the weight from whatever the bag is carrying ends up being supported almost entirely by the two clasps. In spite of being high quality clasps, I'm not sure I trust *that much* weight pulling on them. Moreover, even if the clasps can handle the weight with no problem, the flap rides in a very unsightly position when being carried by the handle.



This is what the front of the Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag looks like when the flap is clipped shut and the entire bag is carried by the handle.

Two additional quirks compound this problem. The handle, which is otherwise well stitched and comfortable to hold, rests rather tightly against the top side of the bag. Rather than effortlessly sliding my fingers under the handle, I have to wiggle a bit to work them under the handle. It simply needs a little bit of slack and possibly a half inch of extra length.

I'd have instead liked to use the included shoulder strap since it supports the bag's weight via the sides of the bag itself instead of the flap. Alas, the strap could also stand for a revisit. I found that it had a tendency to slide off my shoulder easily.



Carrying the bag with its strap.

At first, I might have been convinced it was just the shape of my shoulders, but a colleague whom I asked to give the bag a test carry agreed that the strap didn't seem very grippy. Plus, I've carried similar weights in other bags that either had a slip piece at the top with a better grip, or a slip piece with an inward curve that made for more surface contact with my shoulder, or both. Sure, I could lengthen the strap and run it diagonally to the

opposite shoulder, yet I don't generally need to do this with other bags, and it can be a little awkward to pull a bag's strap over my head to the other shoulder.

I love the compartment layout of the Matrix Laptop Shoulder Bag and the quality material used in its construction, but the flap/handle/strap issue makes this bag a secondary bag at best. If Slappa designers can come up with a way for the handle to support the weight through the bag's main sides instead of only by the flap, I'd feel entirely differently. I might even consider a bag designed exactly the same as this one, but with a flap that closes with zippers down the entire length and across the bottom instead of just the two clasps. Even though the trade-off would be a flap that might take an extra second or two to close, the weight would then be shared through the flap to the main bag, and the flap wouldn't poof out when being carried as the current design does.

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Accessory Review

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

Core Case for iPhone 3G

Developer: [Core Cases](#)

Price: \$30

Requirements: iPhone 3G

Trial: None



Plastic, leather, and rubber iPhone cases are a dime a dozen. Metal cases are a little harder to find, but they're out there. Core Cases makes one of the better-looking ones, and at an MSRP of just \$30, it's actually cheaper than a lot of less durable cases.



The Core Case for iPhone 3G is another slider design, like previous cases from the company.

The basic design has been around since Core Cases' iPod days (they started as an iPod case company in 2005). Two sheets of aluminum are stamped into a shape that allows them to slide together, encasing the iPhone 3G in a layer of protective metal. A screen protector is thoughtfully included with the case and covers the entire iPhone screen with cutouts for the Home button and speaker (earpiece). Three colors are available—black, reviewed here; purple, for Prince fans the world over; and brushed silver, which looks like it would match up well with a white iPhone.



The black case matches the iPhone's design superbly, although you can see that the fit in the upper left corner isn't quite perfect.

A slider design has some advantages over a hinged design. Core Cases touts the lack of added bulk from a hinge, though 1/8" of width or height (based on the hinge of the [PDO Aluminum V2 iPod case](#)) is hardly a deal-breaker in most scenarios. The slider design is probably less likely to pop completely open if you happen to drop your phone, too, although I'll touch on that point more in a moment. It's marginally more difficult to remove the phone from a slider case than from a hinged case, but that's probably not an issue unless you're swapping cases often.



The inside of the case is lined with soft [EVA](#) “foam rubber” to prevent scratches.

The Core Case works well and looks great. The soft foam-rubber lining keeps the aluminum from scratching the plastic parts of the iPhone, yet it’s easy to remove the phone from the case if you need to. The fit and finish of the case aren’t perfect, though—the slider had a tendency to open up when removing it from my shirt pocket. This can be a recipe for disaster if you grab the phone out of a pocket quickly and the slider pops open, leaving the phone’s screen especially vulnerable. Fortunately, it’s easy to fix by squeezing the sides of the top case inward slightly to give it a tighter fit.



The deep headphone jack cutout is highly protective yet big enough for even the largest headphone plugs.

The top left corner of the case is also slightly deeper than the top right corner, leaving a noticeable gap between the screen and case in that corner. Again, you can gently bend the corner of the case inward to help alleviate the problem, but it doesn't totally fix it. Aluminum is a soft metal, and without an iPhone in it, the Core Case—especially the faceplate—feels fragile. This and the previous problem could be issues with the stamping process being slightly out of whack, or they might just be indicative of a mildly defective case that slipped past QA at the factory. I don't think the corner fit, in particular, is a big deal at all, but it's a bit of a visual distraction when you start noticing that your iPhone looks slightly crooked all the time.



The dock connector area is sort of exposed, but there's not a lot more you could cover without making it impossible to connect a sync cable.

The Core Case allows easy access to all the buttons and ports on the iPhone 3G, including the camera. The cutout for the volume and silent buttons is a little bigger than it probably needs to be, leaving that area of the phone somewhat exposed. While discussing this with a friend, the thought came up that this might be to preserve phone reception, but the iPhone 3G's antenna is actually near the dock connector. Since the Core Case is metal, it's worth mentioning that it doesn't seem to have any effect at all on 3G, EDGE, or Wi-Fi reception. Continuing around the case, the headphone jack cutout is large enough to accommodate almost any headphone plug but definitely deep enough to protect the area around the headphone jack.



The cutout for the volume and silent buttons is a little bigger than it really needs to be.

Anodized aluminum is a fairly smooth substance, so it can be a bit of a challenge to grab the Core Case out of a tight shirt pocket, and the case has a tendency to slide around the car or one's lap if it's left out. On the flip side, it's far easier to remove from a pants pocket than any silicone "skin" case, the latter having the unfortunate tendency to turn pockets inside-out. Another virtue of the smooth surface is its compatibility with accessories such as the [iFlyz](#) that use suction cups to mount the iPhone.



The Core Case has a smooth back, ideal for engraving or for sliding around your dashboard.

Overall, the Core Case is a really nice case. It's a great value. It's well thought-out and fairly elegant in its design. There are some minor flaws and room for improvement, however, which hold it back from the highly coveted and rare Excellent rating.

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Software Review

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

iWeb '09: Review From the Edge

Developer: [Apple](#)

Price: Included on new Macs. A component of the \$79 iLife '09.

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.6. [Universal](#). [Requirements](#) for other iLife components vary.

Recommended: MobileMe Subscription for page hosting (\$99 per year).

Trial: None



The focus of this review is the iWeb component of Apple's iLife '09 application suite. To review the product I created a test site to gauge how easily and effectively a Mac user could use iWeb to tell a personal story or highlight an important life event.

To illustrate iWeb's features and the usefulness of its widgets and add-ins, the four-page test site is designed to make use of iWeb's features and functionality using MobileMe to host the content. Apple states that iWeb can be used to create pages to be hosted on other servers and with other hosting services. However, it's clear iWeb '09 is a complement to Apple's MobileMe subscription service. Mac users with a MobileMe account can setup a Web presence on the me.com server with little effort, and the process is fairly intuitive. Configuring MobileMe site publishing takes only a moment via iWeb's New Site selection under the File menu.

Santa Clarita, CA

For this review I chose Santa Clarita, CA and its unique geography as the subject of the site. Please visit the [test site](#) to view the pages.

Life At The Edge...



Welcome to the test site for the **ATPM** review of Apple's iWeb component of iLife '09. For the purpose of creating a review site we've focused on "life at the edge." At the edge of America's largest metropolis and at the edge of where the Pacific and North American tectonic plates collide.

Santa Clarita, CA

I'm a resident of **Santa Clarita**, California. It's a newer California city (incorporated in 1987) and a city that is consistently ranked high on national lists for the quality of life provided to its residents. The city's "family friendly" culture, low crime rate and beautiful city parks and pathways are among its hallmarks. We also have "**Mayor Dude**" Frank Ferry currently occupying the municipal top spot.



Highlife and Hazards



However, the city's proximity to major fault lines, the scorching summer heat and high desert-like conditions pose a near-constant peril. The 2007 **Buckweed Fire** came within 100 yards of my back door and this accompanying photo taken last fall with an iPhone from my front door shows that "life at the edge" is never dull. For those of us who commute south from Santa Clarita via of the Interstate 5 and SR 14 freeways, driving through the **Newhall Pass Interchange** can be a daily adventure.

Still, the city's quality of life and beautiful Southern California surroundings makes it an attractive place to live and raise a family. The communities that comprise the City of Santa Clarita – Canyon Country, Newhall, Saugus and Valencia – have many locales that have been used throughout the years as backdrops or settings for feature films and television shows.

The Trains

Depending on where one lives in Santa Clarita, hearing the sounds of trains moving along the tracks can be a regular occurrence. Freight trains and commuter trains frequently pass by shuttling people and goods to and through what had been remote communities but now comprise one of the largest cities in Los Angeles County. Though dwarfed by the population of the internationally famous city to the south that shares its name with the county, Santa Clarita has very much come into its own. The annual **Santa Clarita Cowboy Festival** pays homage to the area's history and heritage.



Education and Recreation



Santa Clarita is home to the renowned **California Institute of the Arts** as well as **College of the Canyons**, one of the best community colleges in the state. The city is placing a priority on creating attractive **parks** while building indoor and outdoor **recreation centers** for its citizens. In late March the city officially opened its new **outdoor skatepark** and offers more than sixty miles of walking, hiking and biking trails. To reduce the impact of urban sprawl, Santa Clarita is using voter-approved funds to purchase undeveloped land for permanent preservation as open space.

[Review Site Home Page](#)

Santa Clarita is my current area of residence. The city is situated at the northern edge of America's largest metropolitan area and near the edge of where the Pacific and North American tectonic plates collide, a massive transform fault stretching for hundreds of miles in a northwesterly direction and known globally as the great San Andreas Fault.

Santa Clarita was incorporated as a city as recently as 1987, yet its history is rooted in the original Spanish and Mexican land grants, and it was the site of one of the first known California gold strikes in the early 1840s. For decades, the area has served as a popular backdrop or setting for motion pictures and television shows.



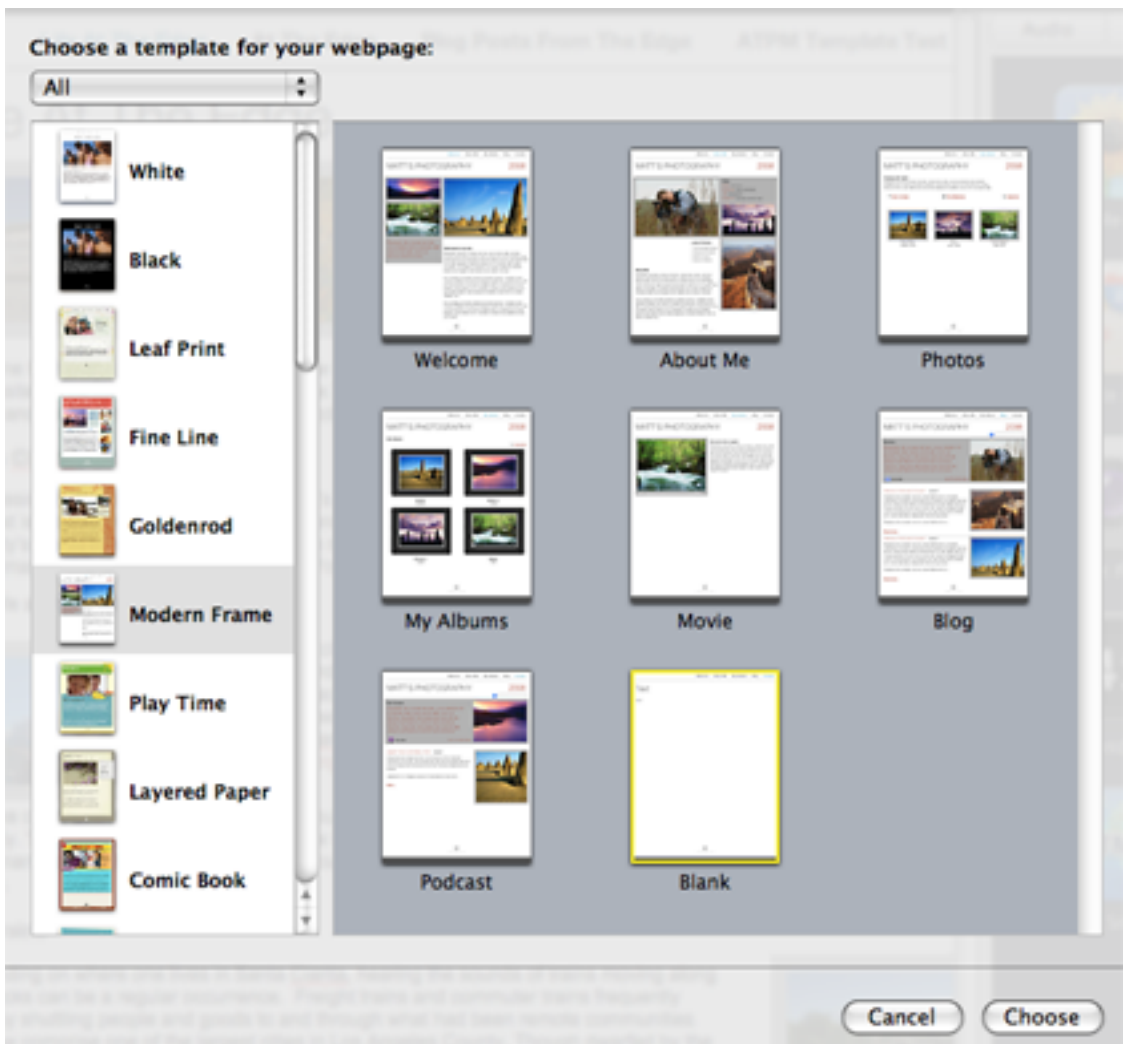
Vasquez Rocks

The area's unique topography provides for an interesting photo study to incorporate into an iWeb review site. Vasquez Rocks and its dramatic rock formations are located not far from the city's boundaries in an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County called Agua Dulce ("Sweet Water") that may soon be annexed by this fast-growing city.

Photos from our weekend hiking trips to Vasquez Rocks are featured in an accompanying MobileMe gallery and are used throughout the test site. Select photos from Vasquez Rocks can also be found in the [desktop pictures](#) section of the April issue of ATPM.

Getting Started

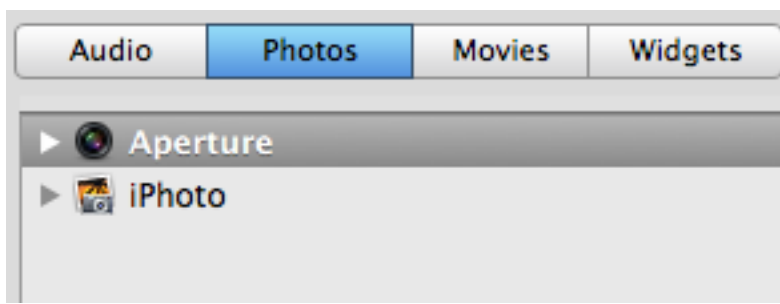
To create an iWeb-based site you must select a theme from among the abundant choices Apple makes available. For this review I used the Modern Frame theme throughout the test site.



Template Selection

Working with iWeb's page templates is similar to working with Pages, Apple's word processing component of iWork. In creating the test site and in projects in which I have incorporated iWeb and MobileMe into the mix, I've often used Pages and iWeb interchangeably for creating styled text and as common tools for developing page elements for print and the Web.

Amateur photographers will be pleased to know that iWeb makes photo libraries available inside its photo portal from both iPhoto and Aperture libraries. Photos can be added with drag-and-drop ease.



Photos Menu

Integration with the other components of iLife '09 and other Apple software solutions is where iWeb demonstrates its strengths and unique usability. Multimedia elements can be added quickly and easily to help you tell a story, announce an event, or showcase photos and homespun movies.

iWeb depends heavily on page elements from text and photo boxes to JavaScript created by the product. iWeb does not conform to convention of creating HTML page headers with metadata for search engine indexing, nor does it have the means to provide alternative text for photos and graphics. This makes iWeb less suitable for the building of commercial Web sites and diminishes page accessibility. iWeb is designed for personal Web sites only. To see the drawbacks of iWeb's JavaScript dependency, you need only visit the [test site](#) with JavaScript turned off in your browser preferences.

In iWeb's structured world, movies belong on a movies template page, podcasts on a podcasts template page, etc. After becoming familiar with iWeb and in an effort to streamline page making, I made use of the "blank" page available from the template choices. To work around iWeb's structured template environment, the Insert menu comes in handy. Using the toolbar and the features available from the Insert menu, work can be done quickly, and in my case more effectively, with the "blank" template page than through modifying or removing elements on a pre-designed page.

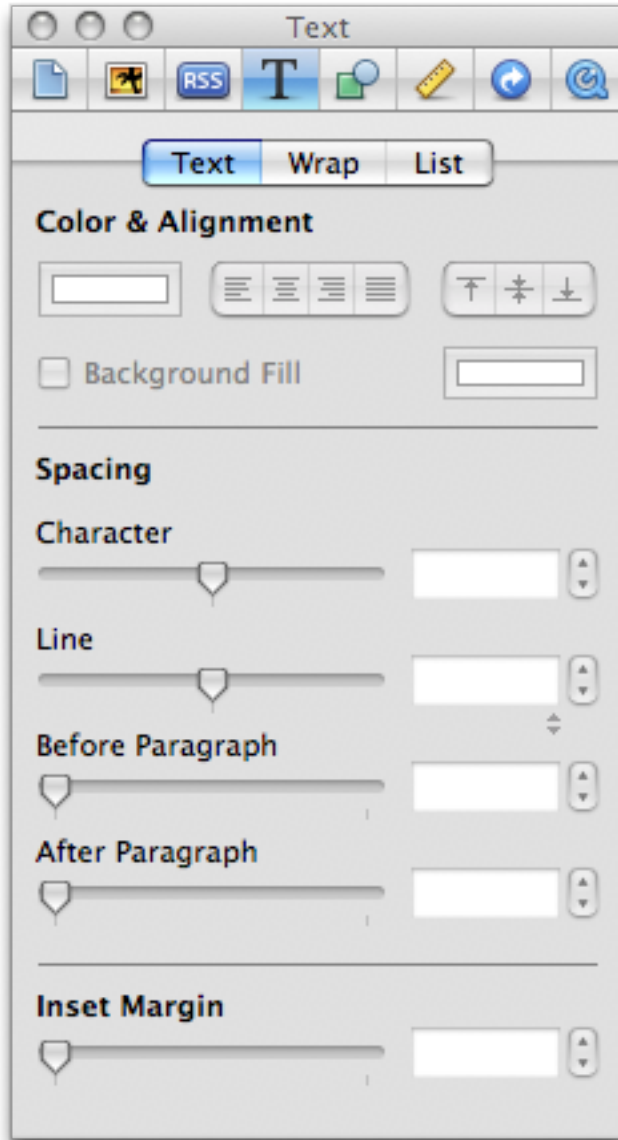
I created a page called [ATPM Template Test](#) to demonstrate that by using the blank template and different positioning of the text and other content boxes, a page can be created with a decidedly different appearance and content structure. Please visit the review site to see and compare the pages.

iWeb suffers from what I'll call "template tedium." An iWeb blog page, for example, reintroduces the template text and graphics on every added blog entry. In the case of the Modern Template, the default template example from "Matt's Photography" reappears whenever a new entry is added. This works against ease-of-use and makes adding entries a chore. Removing these template elements takes needless time and becomes quite tiresome. While helpful as a starting point for those unfamiliar with the product and its uses, the pre-formatted templates soon become more of an annoyance than an aid.

iWeb Authoring Tools

The Inspector

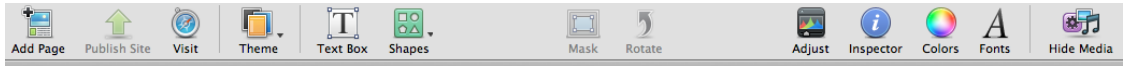
Similar to Apple's Pages and Numbers productivity products, iWeb offers an inspector to assist with content placement and control. From precision placement of content boxes and management of hyperlinks to text wrapping and blog formatting, the inspector provides the user with the means to conveniently manage the placement and appearance of content. Once familiar with iWeb, the inspector is where I did much of the page formatting work.



Inspector

The Toolbar

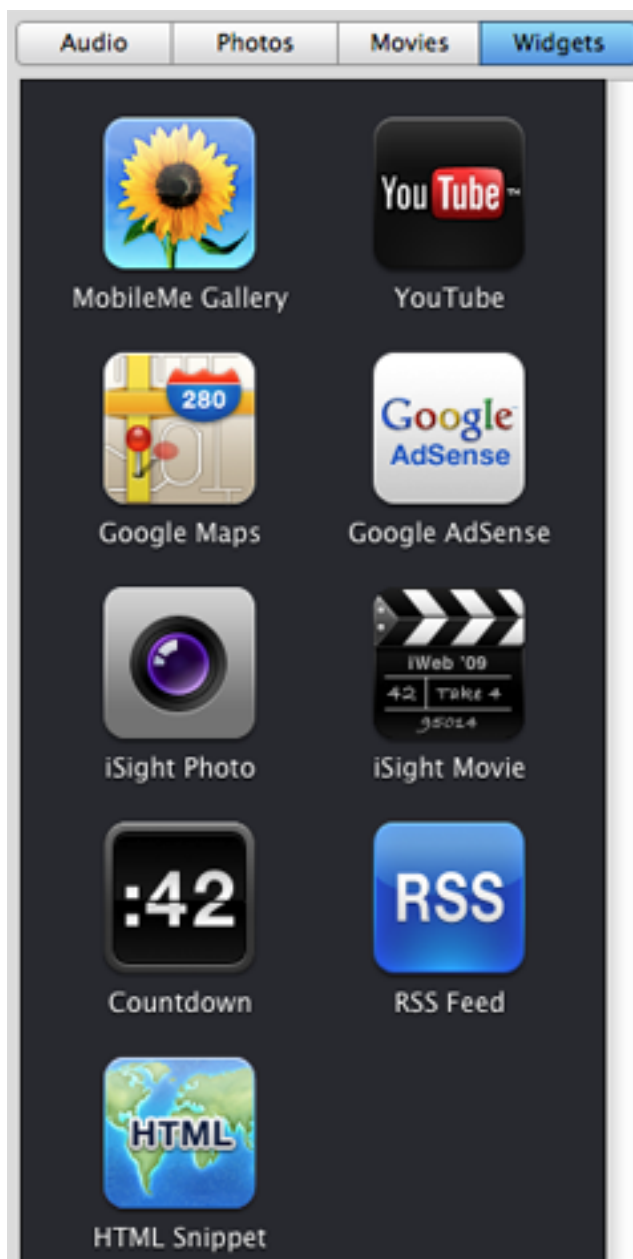
Reversing the placement from Pages and Numbers, iWeb offers an icon-based set of tools running horizontally at the bottom of the user's window. Among its features, the toolbar allows you to quickly to add page features, adjust text, and make adjustments to photos. For users seeking to move beyond the templates and work fluidly with iWeb, both the inspector and the toolbar are effective tools for creating and designing pages.



Toolbar

Widget Wonderland

Inside the site authoring window, iWeb offers a number of nifty widgets and the means to easily add photos and movie snippets from your iLife collection. Used creatively, the widgets and multimedia add-ins can add much to the site. In developing the test site for this review, I made use of the MobileMe Gallery, Countdown, Google AdSense, and Google Map widgets to add content and depth to the pages.



Widgets

Google AdSense

The Google AdSense widget is an enticing feature to add to your Web site. Visions of easy and fast-flowing money from the clicks of thousands of happy surfers visiting your site are easy to conjure. But think again. The folks at Google have built an industrial empire selling and serving up ads. But ad revenue requires site traffic. For most amateur Web authors, a quick fortune from Google ad placements is most likely not in the proverbial cards. Still, adding a few well-positioned ads might create some chump change over time.

Signing up with Google as a site partner is fairly easy. The AdSense widget offers a variety of ad sizes and configurations. The ad content is essentially beyond the user's direct control, with the ads "sensing" content on the pages. This is among the reasons the ads on the test site will vary in subject from page to page. From local real estate to discounts offers for iLife '09, the ads will change depending on page content.

Google Maps

Vasquez Rocks and its interesting formations span beyond the limits of a local street address. To pinpoint the area, we used a Google map and geographic coordinates to center the location. Google maps are almost as ubiquitous on the Web as Google ads, and they provide a helpful complement to an iWeb-based site focused on a geographic spot or event location.

MobileMe Gallery

The widget I found most eye-catching is the one for the MobileMe Gallery. The widget creates a portal to a personal photo collection hosted on the MobileMe server via the user's MobileMe account. The image in the portal on the iWeb page changes periodically, enticing the visitor to explore the entire photo gallery to view more images. Placement of the MobileMe Gallery widget can be found under the Widget Wonderland heading on the [At The Edge](#) page of the test site.



Vasquez Rocks Gallery

Again, while iWeb can be used to create pages for hosting on other servers, it's obvious the product is designed to complement a MobileMe subscription. Amateur photographers and movie makers with site hosting arrangements can make use of iWeb for creating content with iWeb's structural controls for display on personal domains including MobileMe or other content hosting services.

Movies, Music and More

iWeb's widgets and add-ins aren't limited to the ones used on the test site. Adding music from one's iTunes library or home movie snippets in iMovie is relatively easy. It's a matter of designing the content into the pages by dragging and dropping the selection from the


associated content into the page, whether that be a song in the user's iTunes library or a movie in the user's iMovie library.

iWeb's Blog Page Feature

If there's one feature in iWeb that's not up to snuff, it's the blog page feature. Plain and simple, it's not designed for heavy use of the kind for which most active bloggers use a blog product or service today. iWeb's blogging component is best suited for occasional use as a means of updating site visitors about an event, or in my case, as a chronicle of site-building for this review. It's the one feature of iWeb that keeps me from ranking the product as "Excellent" for ATPM readers. The early-mentioned template tedium, encountered with each new entry, is another major drawback of the blog component. Duplicating existing blog entries and changing the content for new entries is an awkward workaround for the template blog entry problem.

Life At The Edge At The Edge **Blog Posts From The Edge** ATPM Template Test

MATT'S PHOTOGRAPHY

2008


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TRAVELS THROUGH THE EAST 4/11/09

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Blog Template

Conclusion

iWeb provides an easy-to-use structure and format for a Mac user desiring to tell a story or highlight an important life event. It integrates well with other iLife '09 components and is a complement to MobileMe. The included templates are a quick-start means to setting

up a personal Web presence, and the widgets and other add-ins provide you with the tools to add depth, richness, and a bit of flair to a personal Web site.

Strengths: Easy-to-use, integrates seamlessly with other iLife '09 components and MobileMe.

Weaknesses: For personal Web sites only, high JavaScript dependency, tedious templates.

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Hardware Review

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

Pogo Sketch for iPhone 3G

Developer: [Ten One Design](#)

Price: \$15

Requirements: iPhone 3G, iPod touch, MacBook with multi-touch-capable trackpad, or other capacitive touch interface.

Trial: None



When the iPhone and iPod touch were first introduced, a lot of pundits decried the touch-only interface (four physical buttons notwithstanding) and lack of a stylus, since pretty much every other PDA-like device up to that point—including the iPhone’s spiritual predecessor, the Newton—shipped with a stylus. Two years later, the two iPhone OS devices are a smashing success despite the lack of an included pointing device.

Apple’s philosophy on this is fairly straightforward: if you can use the device with your finger, there’s no stylus to misplace or forget. After all, when was the last time you left your fingers at home or forgot to put them back on your hand?

That mindset works very well for most people in most scenarios. Perfecting an interface for the masses is something Apple has always excelled at. The iPhone uses what’s called a [capacitive touch interface](#). The theory behind it isn’t important, but its major limitation is that you can’t use a capacitive interface with gloved fingers. Longtime iPod users will probably recall the various accessories, such as [Burton’s AMP Jacket](#) that provided physical buttons to control the iPod when used while engaging in winter sports such as snowboarding, so this idea—or problem—isn’t exactly new.

A second major drawback to putting your fingers all over a shiny surface like the iPhone’s screen is the rapid accumulation of fingerprints, which then need to be wiped off with a soft cloth. Ten One Design has introduced the \$15 Pogo Sketch to address both problems.



The Pogo Sketch looks a lot like a short pen with a severely overdeveloped felt tip.

The Pogo Sketch looks like most other styli, but with one important difference: the tip is made of soft foam so it won't scratch your screen. It has a pocket clip built in, which is handy for office types. There's no provision for keeping the Sketch with the iPhone, though, making it easy to fall victim to the "where's my stylus" problem. Ten One actually makes an accessory universal clip pack (another \$15) that provides a clip for the Pogo Sketch on the side of the phone or with a variety of tested and recommended [third-party cases](#).



Ten One's proprietary tip material looks foam-like.

Using the iPhone with the Pogo Sketch is pretty much the same as using it with your finger. Pointing with the Sketch can be somewhat more finicky—I found myself having to double-tap from time to time, and accuracy isn't as good as it usually is with a fingertip. Using the iPhone with gloves on, however, is actually possible with the Sketch. Just try that with a gloved hand!



Here's a shot of the Sketch and my iPhone getting cozy. Fingerprints on the iPhone's screen are from the pre-Sketch period.

After forcing myself to use the Sketch for a whole day, I have to say the iPhone's screen stays much cleaner, especially if you do a lot of typing or other activities that involve lots of pointing at different places on the screen. (Swipes don't seem to dirty the screen as much as pointing does.) Of course, the Sketch has only a single point of contact with the screen, making it impossible to perform multi-touch gestures unless you're (a) not wearing gloves, and (b) capable of minor feats of acrobatics with your fingers.



Here's another shot of the Pogo Sketch tip area.

Fifteen dollars is an okay price for the stylus itself, but I'd like to see one clip (of the buyer's choice) included with it. I don't think there are a whole lot of people out there willing to spend \$30 just to add a stylus to their encased iPhone and not worry about losing the stylus. I also don't think there are too many people out there still using their iPhones without a case, if my workplace is any reflection of iPhone customers as a whole.



Touching the iPhone's screen with the Sketch feels quite natural, like writing on glass with a marker.

I don't find the Sketch indispensable, but being able to use the phone while wearing gloves is handy in the winter. I prefer the "finger stylus" and find it to be more accurate and faster. Sometimes, however, that's just not an option, and the Pogo Sketch does a perfectly acceptable job of turning the impossible into the possible. For people who need that capability, it's perfect.

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Hardware Review

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

SoundClip for iPhone 3G

Developer: [Ten One Design](#)

Price: \$8

Requirements: iPhone 3G

Trial: None



The iPhone 3G has a fairly amazing speaker, but there's only so much a quarter-inch driver can do. The usual method of getting better sound is through headphones or a docking device that has external speakers, but Ten One Design's SoundClip has other ideas.



SoundClip (yes, it's upside-down) by itself. Note the cable clip on the right, for retaining SoundClip on the sync cable while docked or charging.

SoundClip is a glossy black plastic device roughly an inch and a half long that “plugs” into the dock connector on an iPhone 3G. Ten One claims that SoundClip’s “tuned conical deflection chamber” will make your phone’s speaker audio clearer and slightly louder. While the demo on the Web site certainly sounds dramatic, real-world results are nowhere near as obvious.



The back side (dock connector side) of SoundClip, showing detail of the “tuned conical deflection chamber” that does the dirty work.

Music might be slightly clearer with SoundClip installed, depending on where the iPhone’s speaker is pointed relative to your ears. If you set the phone on a desk with the speaker pointed in the general direction of your face, there’s basically no difference at all. If you’re holding it in your hand as if you’re about to make a call, there’s a noticeable difference in the higher frequencies, as if someone added an extra tweeter to the system. Whether this sounds “better” is at least somewhat a matter of personal taste. Audiophiles are probably decrying the idea of listening to any sort of compressed music in the first place, and the average listener probably won’t notice unless you point it out.



SoundClip installed on a bare iPhone 3G. Unfortunately, none of the cases I've used so far allow SoundClip to be installed.

Ten One thoughtfully included a cord clip on SoundClip so that it can be attached easily to your sync cable. This is particularly nice since SoundClip must be removed to sync and it's small enough to get lost easily if your desk is a mess. (It fits firmly enough into the dock connector, so don't worry about it falling out while in use on the phone.)



This shot of the phone looks down into the business end of SoundClip. If this is pointing at you while you're listening to the phone's speaker, the difference in sound is noticeable. Otherwise, not so much.

You'll have the most to gain if you do a lot of listening with the iPhone's screen facing you, since SoundClip points the output toward the viewer. For hard-core iPhone gamers, that's a double bonus because it also keeps your finger or hand from settling over the speaker and muffling the sound. I play very few games on my phone, but I noticed this right away, and I appreciate it more than any other feature.

Unfortunately, SoundClip is pretty much incompatible with any case for the iPhone. The only one (of five different designs) that I've managed to force it to work with so far is a silicon skin-style case. It would be possible to make a case that integrated a SoundClip-like feature, but nobody's done that yet. (Hint, hint, Ten One.)

Eight bucks is a fair price for such a simple accessory—after all, it does work pretty much as advertised—but it would be a lot more interesting if it were compatible with iPhone cases and provided a more perceptible improvement in music playback. As it is, SoundClip is probably destined to be a niche product for the iPhone gamer market.

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Software Review

by Ed Eubanks Jr.

Transcriva 2.0

Developer: [Bartas Technologies](#)

Price: \$30

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

Recommended: Intel processor.

Trial: Feature-limited (two transcripts max, audio controls disabled after 20 minutes (reset upon quit), exported/printed transcripts watermarked).



I work with audio a lot. I record a lot of speaking and teaching events by audio, I record interviews, I listen to podcasts heavily. I often encounter something on a recording and think, “I wish I had a transcript of that.”

Bartas Technologies’ Transcriva makes this as easy as it can be—which is to say, it’s still a bit of work, but not nearly as much as the alternative.

I confess that, when I first encountered Transcriva, I was under the impression that this application would *create transcripts for me* from audio files. Has Bartas stumbled onto a speech-to-text tool that will convert any spoken audio into typed text? Not exactly. After I got over my unreasonable disappointment, I gave Transcriva a run-through and found a nice utility that does what it is *supposed* to do.

The Old Way

Whenever I needed a transcript before, there were only a couple of options. If I could, I loaded the audio into my iPod (or iPhone) and used that for playback. If not, I would open it in iTunes, QuickTime Player, or some other software player. Then the work began.

Using Command-Tab and keyboard commands for iTunes, for example, I could generally get the job done in a slow-but-steady pace. I’d type as fast as I could, quickly Command-Tab over to pause the audio, Command-Tab back and type some more, switch again, mouse up to jump back a few seconds in the audio...and so on.

This method worked, but it wasn’t fun. And it typically took an excruciatingly long time. Faster typists and special hardware configurations might help this out a bit, but using this sort of process, it seems like the best it will ever get is still drudgery.

Combine It All

Transcriva’s biggest asset is that it combines the media player with a text editor, allowing you to keep a single window in front of you. Add to that a well-planned set of hot-key combinations to control both media and text creation, and you’re well on your way to a much

more pleasant transcribing workflow. And since Transcriba works with any QuickTime-compatible media, it facilitates transcription of audio and video of many kinds (particularly when you add in the expansion that [Flip4Mac](#) and [Perian](#) bring, both of which are compatible with Transcriba as well).

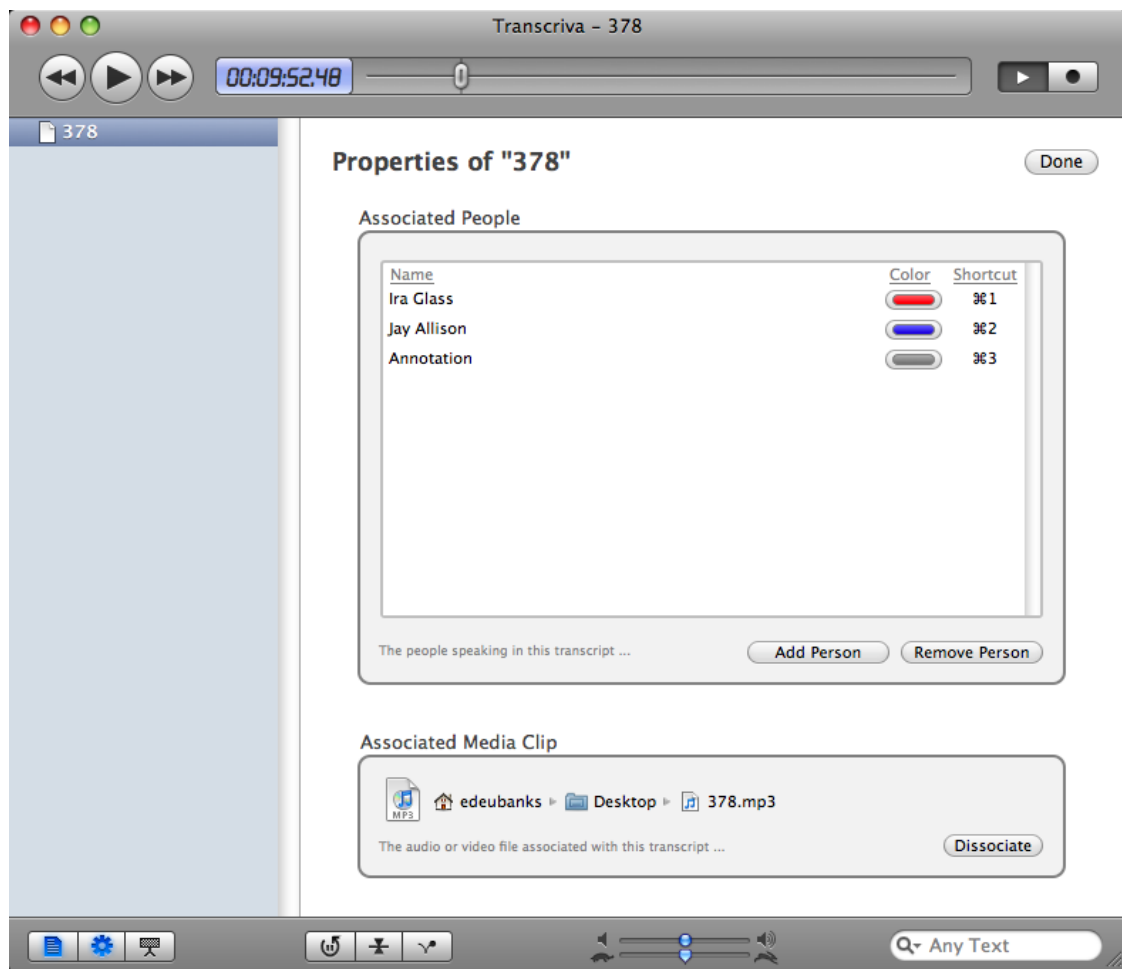


Transcriba combines a media player with a transcription-customized text editor.

Transcriba has included more than simply this, however. On the media side, Transcriba gives a well-rounded collection of audio control tools that are useful for transcribing. It is easy to jump forward or backward by a couple of seconds, by button or hot-key. You can speed up playback or slow it down. And there's a "Backtrack" mode that will automatically rewind a few seconds every time you pause the audio. Settings for how many seconds make a single jump are editable in the Preferences window. Awesome!

Transcriba includes a few nice touches on the text side, as well. For starters, you can set up as many different "Associated People" as you wish, giving each a label, a color code, and a hot-key (typically Command-1, Command-2, etc.). When you hit this combination, it creates a new "bubble" for text entry, labeled and coded as you have chosen, with a

time-stamp for when (in the course of the audio playback) the entry was created. You just keep typing, as the cursor is activated in the new bubble by default.



Adding associations, including people and audio or video files, is easily handled in the Transcription Properties window.

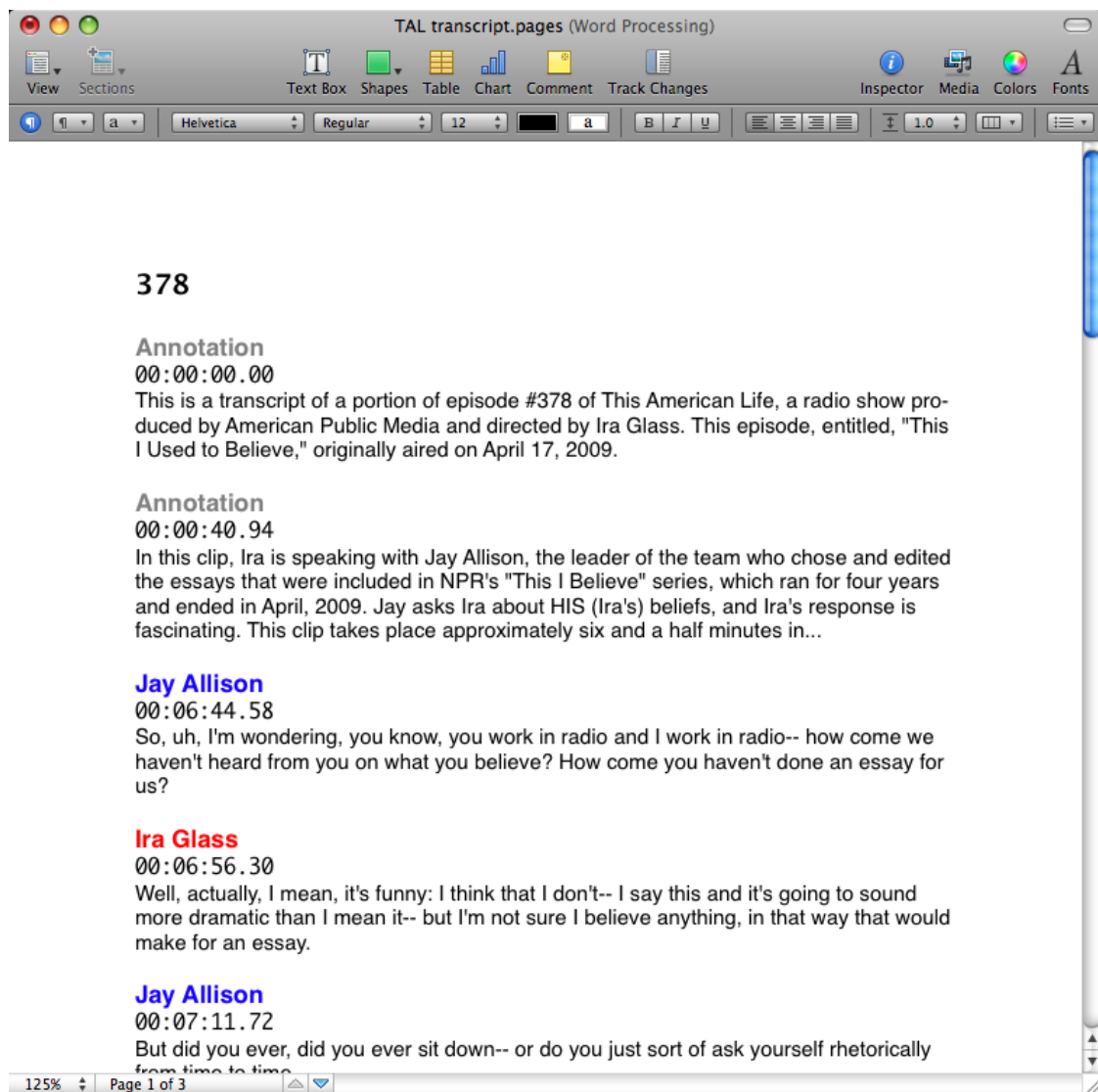
Miss something? Pause and rewind, pause (and auto-rewind using Backtrack), or just keep going. If you go back and create a new entry later, Transcriba will automatically place it according to the time-stamp. Oh yeah—you can edit the time-stamp, as well, in case you were a little slow on creating a new entry. And you can toggle a view for markers that coordinate with the entries/time-stamps, including color-coding. This makes it easy to go back and find the holes.

As a basic transcription tool, Transcriba is quite capable.

What Next?

Transcriptions are only useful if you can do something with them. Transcriba prints transcripts handsomely, with labels, color-codes, and time-stamps above each entry. Alterna-

tively, you may export the transcript as plain text, rich text, or in Microsoft Word format, with options to include or exclude names/labels, color codes, and time-stamps.



A Transcriba transcript, exported to Pages.

And there are plenty of other small/secondary touches that make this application a winner. Transcriba can function as a recording tool as well, allowing you to annotate recordings in real-time. Foot-pedal control compatibility is built-in, since many transcriptionists prefer these for pause/play control. There are hot-keys for navigating anywhere in a transcript, so you can do anything without removing your hands from the keyboard. Transcripts are searchable, too, using Spotlight technology. And they are all stored in an iTunes/iPhoto-like library fashion, which makes it easy to keep track of your transcripts.

Quirks

Transcriva has few problems, but there are a few quirks. For example, you can edit what font transcriptions are printed/exported in, but that option is found in the general Preferences window, not in a menu or toolbar option (as is more conventional). Similarly, the option of toggling labels, color-codes, and timestamps for print output is present, but in order to select them, you must use the Export dialog box!

Beyond these, though, there is little to complain about. Until fully-automated transcripts are available, Transcriva is as good as it gets.

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