ATPM

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

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Artwork & Design

Layout and Design	Michael Tsai
Web Design	Simon Griffee
Cartoonists	Matt Johnson, Linus Ly
Blue Apple Icons	Mark Robinson
Other Art	RD Novo
Graphics Director	*Vacant*

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About This Particular Macintosh has been free since 1995, and we intend to keep it that way. Our editors and staff are volunteers with *real* jobs who believe in the Macintosh way of computing. We don't make a profit, nor do we plan to. Our aim is to produce a fiercely independent magazine, with multiple formats designed for easy reading rather than showing ads. The views expressed in these pages have always been our own, and to help prove it we do not accept direct sponsorships or advertising. We do, however, need to pay for our Web site and other expenses, so we rely on minimal advertising, sold indirectly via Google and Yahoo, as well as the support of ATPM readers who shop using our links.

Welcome to the October issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We'll start this issue with a couple of green notes before we celebrate the beautiful colors and natural hues of autumn. October is a transitional month of warm days and cool nights. This month's *Welcome* offers a different look at Apple: a company itself in transition from an era of economic resurgence to an era of global dominance in its various product markets.

A Tree Grows in Cupertino

A popular 1940s book used a tree in its name and a tree as a metaphor in its story. As a metaphor, the tree represented a young girl's struggle to survive in a harsh, demanding, and often unjust early 20th Century urban jungle known more familiarly as Brooklyn, New York.

The tree depicted in the book is known commonly as a Tree of Heaven. While used frequently in urban environments during late 1800s and early 1900s due to its fast growth, it is now considered an invasive Asian species and has fallen from popularity due to its unpleasant aroma and its ability to suppress the growth of native plants and trees.

In a twist on that now-famous metaphor, perhaps Apple has planted a Tree of Truth. A tree that as it grows might be an invasive solution to a pervasive complacency and misunderstanding about efforts to create a greener corporate America. In a refreshing and comprehensive self-assessment, in late September Apple released an environmental impact audit that includes the effects of all aspects of the company's operations on the environment.

While much of corporate America is consumed with the environmental impact of office operations, Apple looks at the impact of the company's products from the moment of manufacture and through the product's anticipated use cycle until the time of recycle. It's no longer enough to be concerned just about turning out lights and conserving energy in the office. It's now about responsible use of resources in every product that's made and how those products are used and eventually recycled. Let's turn the lights on and look at all the major players in the PC and consumer electronics markets. How would the other major players in the PC and consumer electronics markets look under the glare of the bright environmental lights Apple has turned on itself? Green plans and proclaimed awareness are not an acceptable substitute for action in reducing the environmental impact of a company's manufactured products and a company's day-to-day operations.

Organic Growth, Greener Pastures

At press time, Apple's market capitalization (the sum value of all outstanding shares) is hovering within the top ten of publicly traded companies in the United States and the top twenty among publicly traded companies around the world. This is remarkable accomplishment for an enterprise that a dozen years was considered on the edge of oblivion. Years

ago the term "beleaguered" seemed to have been permanently attached as a prefix to the company's name.

Over the past dozen years the company successfully forged a resurgence in its PC sales with the introduction of the iMac, revolutionized the global music player market and music distribution business with the development of the iPod, and the iTunes store and is now reshaping the international landscape for cell phone sales with the popular iPhone.

What makes Apple's success even more pronounced is the fact each of the company's product lines was developed without large technology acquisitions, and the exponential increase in revenue and earnings over the past twelve years were not created in part by mergers with established companies that would otherwise provide Apple with a competitive head start in new markets. Apple's growth has occurred organically, and each of the company's major product lines demonstrates a high probability for continued sales growth. Greener pastures may await.

Although the Macintosh computer has returned to popularity in the US, the EU nations are fertile ground for gains in PC market share. The iPod line has seen a leveling of unit sales activity, but the iPod touch represents a new class of multi-use handheld devices and is being marketed as a competitor in the gaming market. The iPhone remains in its nascent stage of global sales growth, while the iTunes App Store now sports more than 75,000 titles for the iPhone and iPod touch. The iTunes Music Store is now the largest music retailer in the world, besting both Walmart and Amazon.com for the number one spot in music sales.

Apple has more years of strong growth ahead: a progressively greener company seeing green in all major areas of operation and in the prospects for all major product segments. Apple has migrated from challenger to champ. A company on top of the world and one that sets the new standards for product design and the ways we use personal technology. As our world continues to become smaller and bigger through advancements in technology, it becomes richer in opportunities to grow in knowledge, understanding, and sharing one's life and experiences with just about anyone, anywhere in this incredibly expanding and shrinking world.

Autumn Colors, Changing Hues

Autumn is a time of change. Deciduous trees shed the chlorophyll in their leaves to display an array of beautiful colors not seen at any other time of year. We move from the abundance of summer sunlight to early mornings absent of the sun's first rays. Each day grows shorter, and each night is progressively prolonged.

We welcome you to our October issue. Each month our editors cobble together a unique patchwork of news, views, and product reviews. Every issue of ATPM reflects not only the Apple product season but also the natural season in which it is written. As our natural world moves from trees garnished in green to leaves resplendent in natural hues of yellow and red, we hope you enjoy our latest issue.

Our October issue includes:

Segments: Of Loud Fans and Broken Drives

Frank Wu tells his tale of computer repair.

Desktop Pictures: United Kingdom, Part 2

More photos from the United Kingdom add to last month's collection, taken by Lee Bennett.

Out at Five

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

Qaptain Qwerty

From the Old Edge to the Bleeding Edge.

Review: Hydra 2.1.3

Blue skies are here again—in your digital pictures, that is—with the help of this easy-to-use HDR imaging application. But if you're not careful it can leave you seeing double.

Review: SpaceNavigator 3D

A lovely six-axis control device for CAD and Maya geeks has tremendous untapped potential for everyone else. Too bad the software won't let you use it that way.

E-Mail

Macless Abroad

The day Apple lets us use the Mac's Bluetooth keyboard with the iPhone is probably when I can just carry my iPhone around. Ironically, my ancient Palm PDAs using Documents To Go and foldable keyboards were more appropriate for editing (not just viewing) business documents on the road. I'm not sure if we really are going to see a tablet form factor from Cupertino anytime soon (despite rumors). But if so, maybe *that* would be the device Steve lets us use [i.e., feels is more appropriate] with the Bluetooth keyboard.

—Angus Wong

> I've sometimes wondered whether I'd enjoy being able to use a Bluetooth keyboard on the phone, but I realize now that I wouldn't have wanted to tote along a keyboard any more than I wanted to tote along my laptop.
> *—Lee Bennett*

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I've also thought about using my iPhone with a Bluetooth keyboard as an alternative computing device. I remarked only yesterday to a couple of colleagues that I used to do productive work on a Palm Pilot with an external keyboard.

If Apple would enable the keyboard profile in the Bluetooth stack, I think there are times I could forego carrying a larger computing device and get by with just my phone. I would like that.

—David Thompson

Anti-Time

I feel for you. After much effort, I've been able to find a way of using my MacBook in the office for 90% of my tasks these days, and the employer's Dell stays locked in a drawer until I absolutely need it for custom templates and so on. You're right about the inherently unproductive nature of working in an office, especially the time-sucks like commuting, etc.

—Stephen

• • •

I agree with you. I have to use Windows XP at work, and it is just so awful.

I think the point about aesthetics making for better productivity is important. It seems to me that Macs work easy, and I work much faster.

—*Andrew*

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I cannot agree more with Mark Tennent's views on working with Windows in an office environment propounded in the last couple of issues of ATPM.

I use a Mac at home and never have a need for a computer at work (I'm a miner), but we have recently had a rush computing job to complete for our Technical Services department.

Seconded to Technical Services from Mining because I "can use a computer," I have been given a team with the task of transferring 50+ years worth of mining records from paper to computer. 99% of the work is data entry on spreadsheets, and I wasn't surprised to be issued with a Dell laptop running XP.

Familiar with MS Excel on Office 2008 for the Mac I thought I'd be able to cope with Excel on a PC.

OK, the basics of spreadsheet work is the same—converting pounds of Black Tin per imperial ton to percentages of Sn per metric tonne was no problem but using the programme itself is a nightmare. On the Mac Save is Command-S and Save As is Command-Shift-S. Neat and logical. On XP Save is Control-S and Save As is F12! What is the logic in that? I have been reduced to using the mouse to click on a variety of large and clunky icons in the huge and cluttered toolbar.

I honestly believe that I could knock 30% of the total time off the job if we had Macs.

XP is pretty, as is Mac OS X, but it is far from elegant. Logical just doesn't come into it.

My colleagues must be getting sick of me grumbling away in the corner about how life would be so much easier if we had a better OS.

What is really sad is that here are millions of Windows users out there who think that using a computer saves them time and is making their productivity more efficient. To a certain extent it is, but they have no idea just how much easier their life could be with a Mac. They don't know any better.

Oh well, at least I am at home now using my five-year-old Power Mac (which has better specs than the brand new Dell I was issued) so I am at peace for a few hours.

—*Robin*

Cram 1.0.1

The name of the software says it all: Cram. A technique for jamming facts into your brain so you can regurgitate them during an exam and forget them immediately afterwards.

There is no true learning, no understanding, no conceptualization, no integration with prior knowledge, no creation of new ideas. Just cramming facts.

I'm an educator at the top of the chain: I teach residents, medical students, and graduate students. You don't become a good doctor or pharmacologist by cramming. Besides, there's so much information that cramming it all in is impossible: you have to learn concepts and then learn how to integrate old and new facts into those concepts.

The medical school applicant pool continually gets worse. You can imagine how thrilled I am that parents are buying Cram to turn potential doctors (or scientists, engineers, lawyers, etc.) into non-thinking drones.

—*Gregory Tetrault*

Photoshop: Conjuring Speech/Thought Bubbles

I'm trying to do this, but once I create the shape it doesn't allow me to edit it in the layers menu. In fact, it doesn't even appear there. I just see the background picture. Am I doing something wrong?

—*Kate*

> As for not seeing it, I suspect that you simply have no color applied to either the stroke or the fill, so the entire shape is transparent. To select the shape so you can work with it, you'll want to use the path selection tool, which is the black arrow cursor located a little ways down the tool palette. If you want to move specific anchor points rather than the entire path, click and hold that black arrow for a pop-up menu, then choose the white direct selection arrow instead. To change the color of either the fill or the stroke, access the Paths palette and use the buttons on the bottom—a hollow circle for the stroke and a solid circle for the fill.
>   —*Lee Bennett*

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.*

Of Loud Fans and Broken Drives

I thought I would share two reports of repairs to computers. I do so because both are generally positive and they serve to balance the stories generally found on the Internet, which are rather negative. That comment isn't to doubt the accuracy of the accounts or to impugn the motives of those who are angry, often rightly so, but it's to note the selective nature of our collective memory, which emphasizes what is abnormal. If all proceeds just fine, as it does most of the time, there is no particular need to document that fact.

Both my unibody MacBook Pro and my Modbook developed problems simultaneously.

The MacBook Pro had horrible sounds emanating from the fans. Initially, I thought it was the SuperDrive dying prematurely, but I soon realized it had to be one or both of the fans. They started running loudly when I put the unit to sleep, and they started spontaneously even with the lid down. A day later, they started running loudly and constantly, as soon as I booted up, with a rasping noise that suggested some sort of mechanical obstruction. After about three hours, when I had to finish some work and could not turn off everything, the fans became quieter—still much louder than normal, but not absurdly loud. They were so loud that on the call with Apple Care, the technician could hear them clearly, even with the phone at least a foot away. (I tried all the usual resets to firmware before I called. None worked.)

The Modbook had a SuperDrive that went kaput. It did it in stages: at first, it would read a CD if I tried it three times or more. Then it took even more attempts, and finally, when I went to install Snow Leopard, it wouldn't read anything even though I tested various media I knew to be good.

In each case, there was no fuss about the return. The technicians were professional, courteous, and apologetic. The units came back in under a week, door-to-door, including the shipping both ways. Everything was clean. The software and data were unaffected. I had to make do with an older MacBook, which I borrowed back from my parents, having given it to them as a hand-me-down when I upgraded.

I have a quibble about each experience, though. As to the MacBook Pro, I was astonished that three separate people at AppleCare and one at the Apple Store with whom I spoke had no idea what ProCare was. I have bought a ProCare Card each of the past three years, because it just isn't fun to hang out in line at the Genius Bar waiting behind a dozen people, some of whose concerns are clearly user error, and some of whom are distraught because they failed to back up anything. It is apparent to me, however, that the corporation does not value ProCare, and it isn't training its employees about it.

As to the Modbook, perhaps I am too cautious, but I was surprised at how little padding Other World Computing put around it when they returned it to me. It was just a layer of bubble wrap with bubbles that were medium sized (about that of a quarter), and they left out a piece of foam I had used that ensured a snug fit. In the same box I had sent it in in, this $3,000-when-new product was loose.

All in all, I remain satisfied and loyal. I have had Macs and Windows PCs, including several IBM ThinkPads, which are about the top-of-the line if you are running a Wintel box. I know it isn't just the aura of Apple: my machines have been up for much longer with fewer problems, and the hardware issues have been resolved with greater attentiveness and more efficiency.

United Kingdom

We need new desktop pictures each month. Write to us!

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos are a few more selections from Lee Bennett's July vacation to the United Kingdom, added to the collection offered in the September 2009 issue of ATPM.

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.

Safari Use this Automator workflow.

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.

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 10.6.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Choose "System Preferences..." from the Apple menu. Click the Screen Saver (10.1.x) or Screen Effects (10.2.x) button. Then click on Custom Slide Show in the list of screen savers. If you put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, you're all set. Otherwise, click Configure to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.
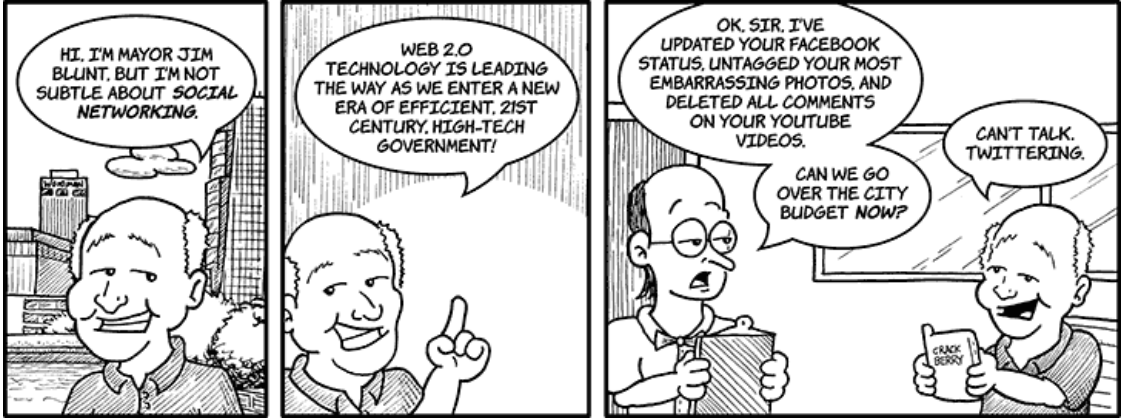
Mac OS X 10.0.x

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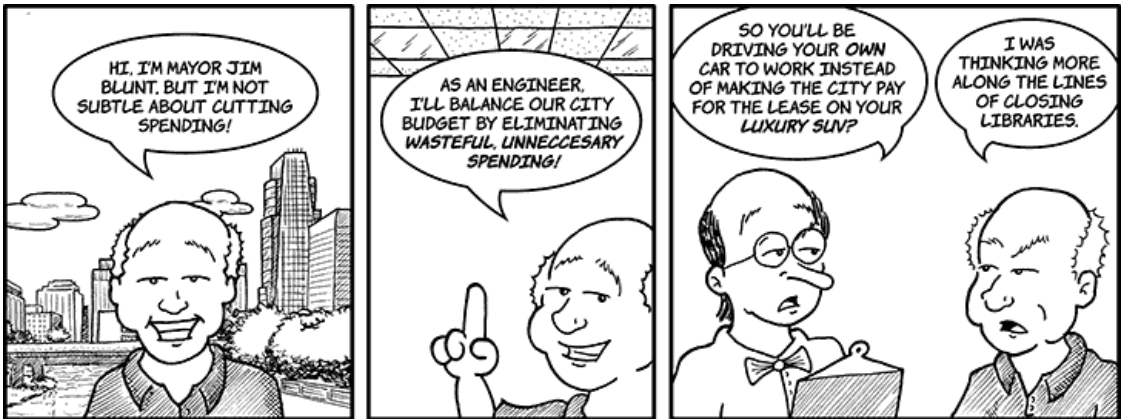
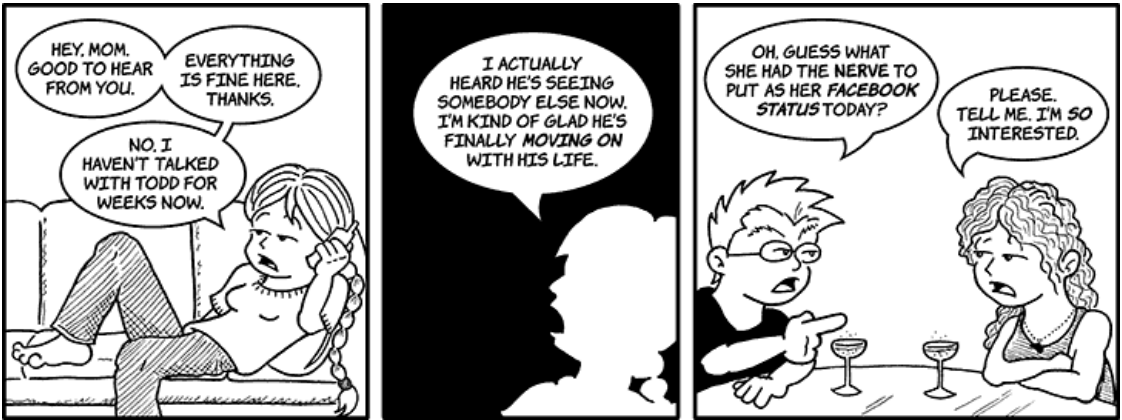# Out at Five

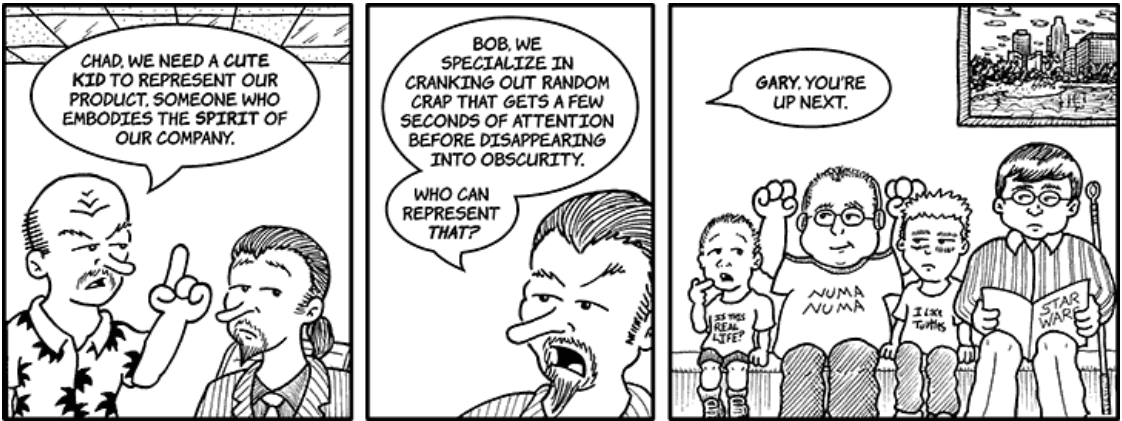**by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com**

Antisocial Media

Budget Priorities

Moving On

HEY, MOM, GOOD TO HEAR FROM YOU.

EVERYTHING IS FINE HERE, THANKS.

NO, I HAVEN'T TALKED WITH TODD FOR WEEKS NOW.

I ACTUALLY HEARD HE'S SEEING SOMEBODY ELSE NOW. I'M KIND OF GLAD HE'S FINALLY MOVING ON WITH HIS LIFE.

OH, GUESS WHAT SHE HAD THE NERVE TO PUT AS HER *FACEBOOK STATUS* TODAY?

PLEASE. TELL ME. I'M *SO* INTERESTED.

Company Spokesman

CHAD, WE NEED A CUTE KID TO REPRESENT OUR PRODUCT. SOMEONE WHO EMBODIES THE *SPIRIT* OF OUR COMPANY.

BOB, WE SPECIALIZE IN CRANKING OUT RANDOM CRAP THAT GETS A FEW SECONDS OF ATTENTION BEFORE DISAPPEARING INTO OBSCURITY.

WHO CAN REPRESENT THAT?

GARY, YOU'RE UP NEXT.

IS THIS REAL LIFE?

NUMA NUMA

I LIKE TURTLES

STAR WARS

Early One Morning

137

138

WILL YOU TURN OFF THAT DAMN VIVALDI?! IT'S EIGHT IN THE MORNING FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

SOME PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO SLEEP AROUND HERE!

COLLEGE

The Un-bank

Stupidity Assassin
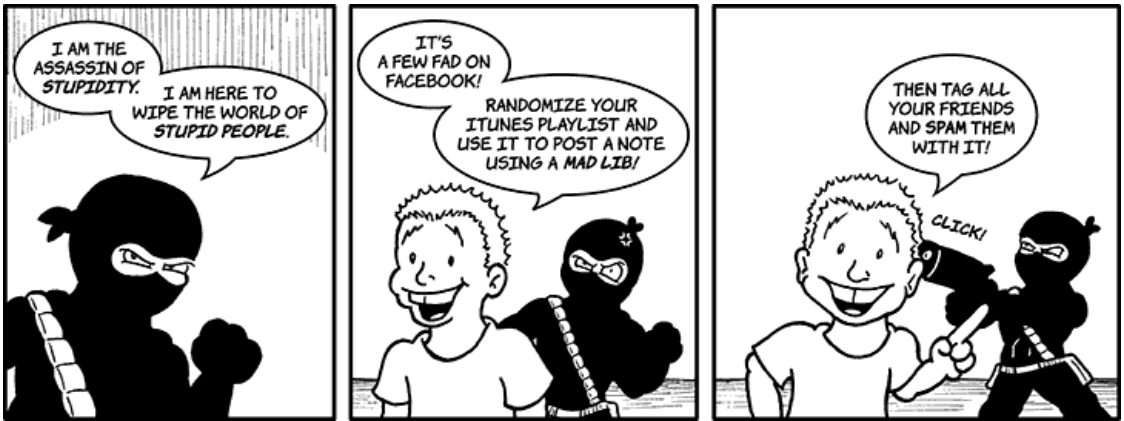
What Is a Meeting?
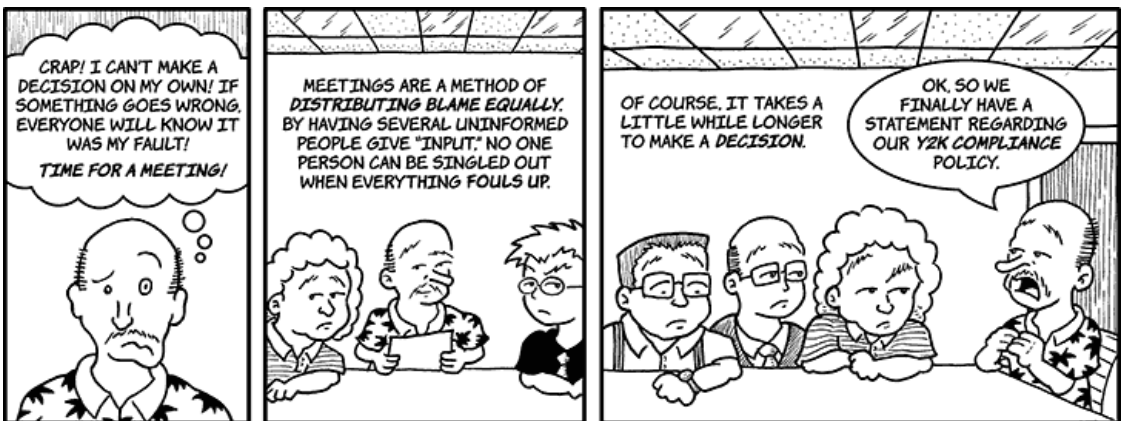
Qaptain Qwerty

Tech Support
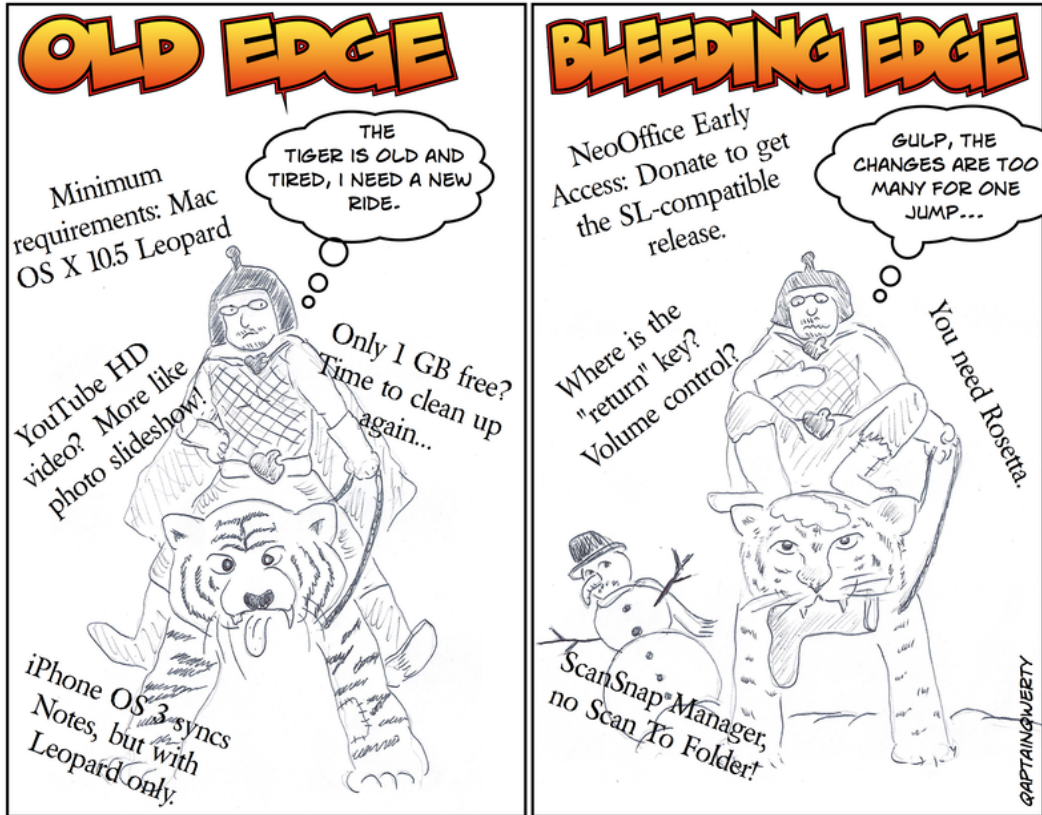
Hydra 2.1.3

Developer: Creaceed
Price: $80
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5. Universal.
Trial: Feature-limited ("Unregistered copy" appears on saved images.)

Digital photography, for me, is a hobby. I do very little post-processing of my images, in part because I'm usually satisfied with how they look out of the camera and in part because I just don't enjoy it. One common source of disappointment, though, is washed-out skies. Or, if I correct the exposure to allow the camera to capture the bright blue sky, the details of the foreground are lost in darkness. While software tools exist to help bring some detail out of the dark, they can't restore what the camera didn't capture.

High Dynamic Range (HDR) imaging combines the best parts of several differently exposed pictures of the same scene, so that you don't have to sacrifice some parts of the frame to get good color and detail in other parts. Sounds like just what I need, but also sounds complicated to execute. That's where the cleverly named Hydra comes in. Hydra is a stand-alone application (also available as an Aperture plug-in) that simplifies the creation of HDR images.

Alignment

The first basic step in creating an HDR image is aligning the source images, so that the same things are in exactly the same place when the images are layered on top of one another. With a solid tripod and a remote control (or a good exposure value bracketing feature), this step would be pretty trivial, but most of us are not so equipped. Hydra is designed to work with hand-held shots (in which the framing is bound to vary a bit from picture to picture, especially if you have to manually change the exposure settings between shots).
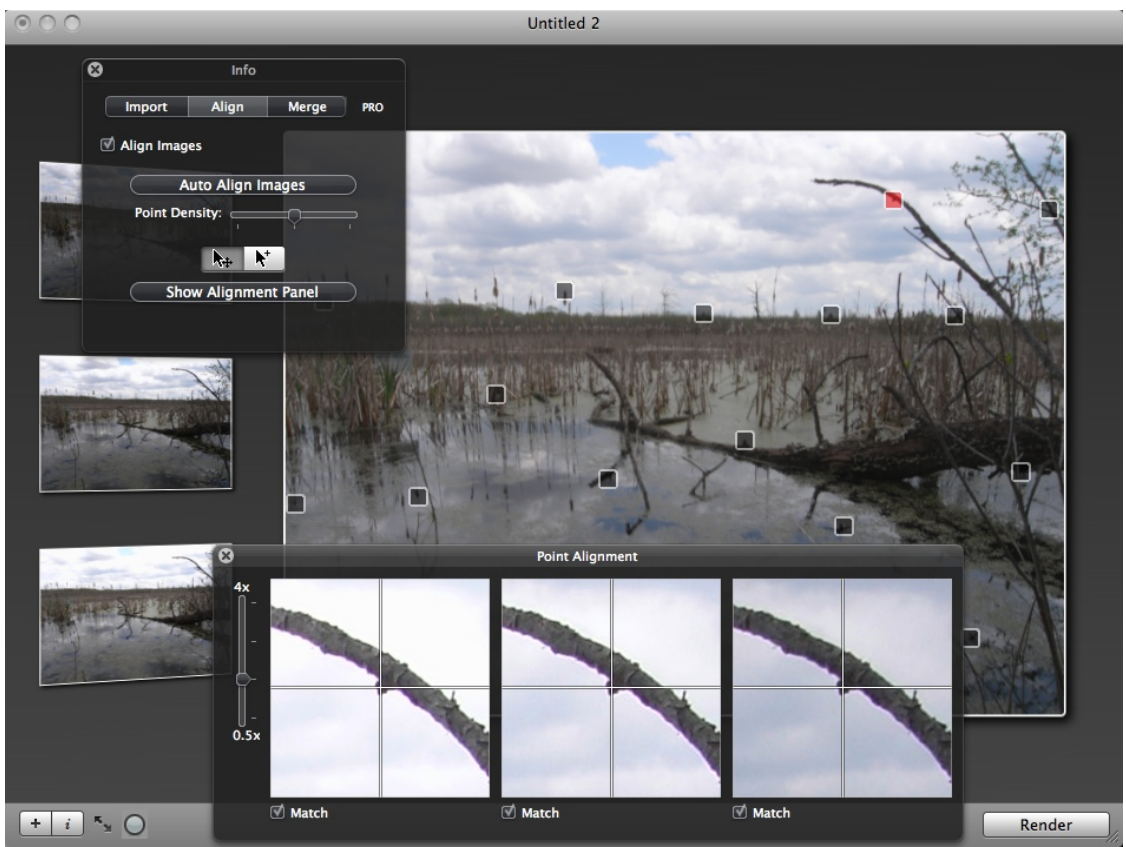
This twig looks well aligned.

With the click of a button, Hydra aligns the source images for you by choosing a number of points on the images and matching them up at those points. It can move the images around or even warp them if necessary in order to achieve alignment. You can control the point density (though the number of points will vary with the image) or specify additional points to be used for alignment. An alignment panel and a loupe tool are there to let you check Hydra's work and make corrections as necessary. Keep in mind that what Hydra aims to do is compensate for camera motion between shots; it cannot help you if, for example, there's a breeze.

Even in cases of a perfectly still subject, though, Hydra can have trouble automatically aligning images. I took several (hand-held) pictures of the Salem Evangelical Church in Quincy, IL, and let Hydra automatically align the images, using the maximum number of alignment points. Much of the resulting HDR image was surprisingly sharp: zooming in on the image in Preview revealed individual bricks. And yet most of the church's peaks were ghosted; in the case of the steeple, the ghosting was plain even at screen size or in a 4×6 print.

An aligned image? Note the doubled peaks.

When I went back and checked Hydra's alignment point at the top of the steeple, I saw that Hydra had been completely unable to align one image at that point (the "match" box was unchecked), and another image, which it thought was aligned, was noticeably off. When I tried to manually fix the alignment, I encountered a bizarre bug: suddenly, several different points were selected, and there was a gaping rectangular hole in the middle of my image! Telling Hydra to align the images again removed the hole, but my repeated attempt to fix the steeple's alignment yielded the same error.

Only after I restarted Hydra was I able to manually align the points. Once I had the steeple tips lined up in the Alignment Panel, I checked my work with the loupe. It was better but still wrong. Oddly, it was necessary to make one image look badly misaligned in the Alignment Panel in order for it to appear aligned under the loupe. The new rendered image confirmed that the loupe was to be trusted; several other peaks were less ghosted as well, following the manual adjustment (though still imperfect on a close look). The steeple no longer looked ghosted in a 4×6 print. At 8×10 some alignment flaws were clearly visible, but much of the church was tack-sharp.

The Alignment panel thinks the rightmost image is badly misaligned, but the loupe shows it's aligned correctly.

Rendering

Once the images are aligned, they can be merged using either HDR or a (legacy) 8-bit method. The manual recommends using HDR "because the rendered images are usually of better quality." HDR is also rather less complicated to use. An exposure slider is available to make the image lighter or darker; the displayed image responds to the slider in real time. A pair of histograms can aid you in choosing the best exposure, and you can move among the individual images to see how they compare to the HDR image being created.
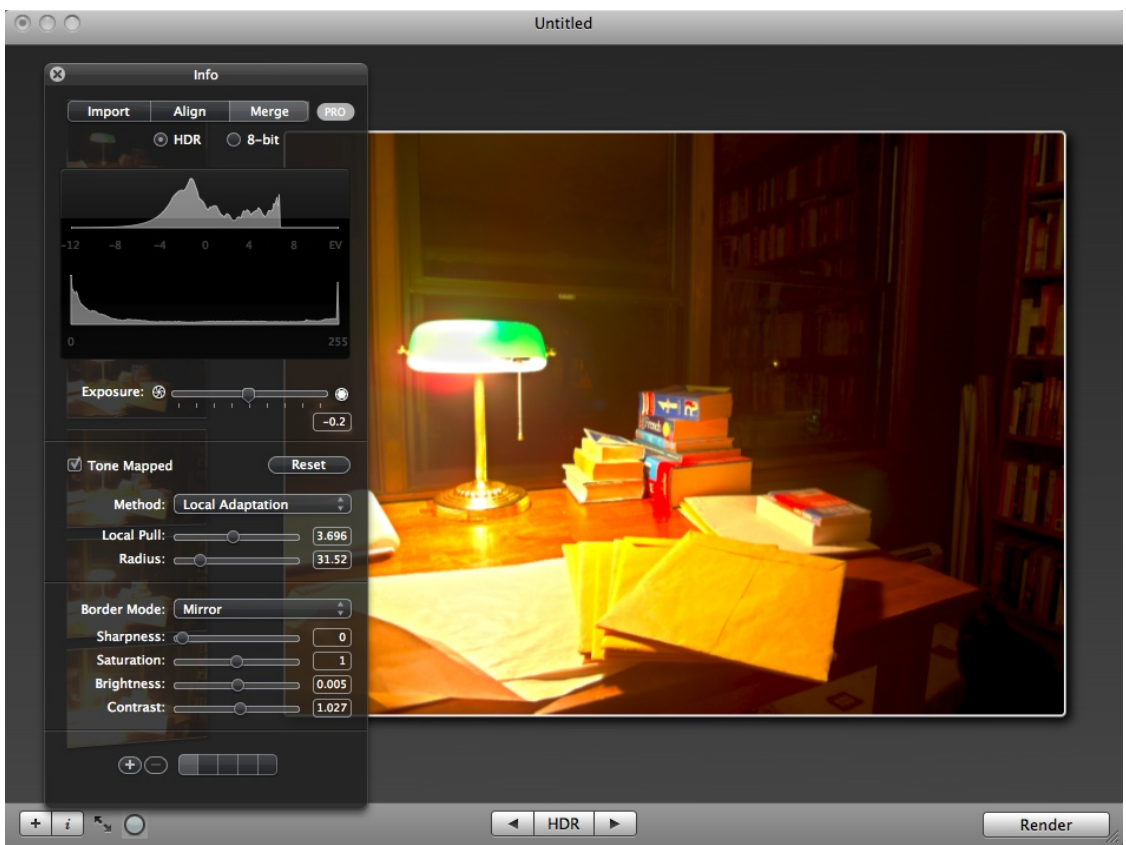
Merging six images into an HDR image.

When creating an HDR image, you also have a choice between three different sorts of tone mapping. Each of the three yields quite different results: Perceptive is almost always the best choice, but in one case—an otherwise dark room lit by a single small lamp—Local Adaptation gave the best result. You've got to play with it a bit; Hydra makes this easy. Depending on the tone mapping method, you'll have one or two sliders to use to adjust the effect. "Pro" options allow you to adjust sharpness, saturation, brightness, and contrast: it's pretty basic, but that's a feature in Hydra, not a flaw. I wish the documentation explained Border Mode, though, and I'm not sure what to make of the five little boxes at the bottom of the Info window.

Once you've adjusted the displayed image to your liking, click the Render button. Surprisingly slowly—sometimes it takes several minutes on my 2.4 GHz MacBook Pro—an HDR image is created and saved in JPG, TIFF, or OpenEXR format. Options are also available to export the image to iPhoto or Aperture.

Quirks

There are a few minor flaws to Hydra's interface that keep getting in my way as I use the program. Hydra doesn't, by default, save the rendered HDR image to the folder that the source images came from. I don't know how standard my desired behavior is—GraphicConverter

does it, and I've come to rely on it. In Hydra, after saving an image, I have to hunt for it. Another quirk comes when aligning images. I click on an alignment point I'd like to inspect in the alignment panel, then click the button to open the panel. Hydra opens the panel but changes back to a different alignment point, so I have to re-click my selection.

Conclusion

Of the HDR images I've created with Hydra, I've had more failures than successes. In many cases, that's my fault (or I can try to blame the camera): I didn't notice a breeze moving through a line of trees in the background, or one of the source images wasn't focused quite right. I mention this not to criticize Hydra, but to emphasize that the hardest part of taking good HDR pictures is taking good pictures. Hydra offers ease-of-use, but you're still going to hit a learning curve before you achieve good results.

Like its users, Hydra is not without its flaws. Sometimes it doesn't align source images correctly, and its tools for manual alignment need improvement: the alignment panel and the loupe should not disagree. That said, Hydra can produce good quality images with better dynamic range than your camera can manage alone, with a minimum of user effort. If you tend to think of post-processing digital images as more of a pain than a pleasure, Hydra may well be your least painful route to HDR images.

Hardware Review

by Chris Lawson, http://chrislawson.net

SpaceNavigator 3D

Developer: 3DConnexion (Logitech)
Price: $59–$99 (depending on software license)
Requirements: Intel-based Mac with Mac OS X 10.4.6.
Trial: None

I stumbled across 3DConnexion's SpaceNavigator 3D "mouse" in the process of some of my usual surfing a few months back and was immediately struck by the possibilities it presented. After using it for about a month, I can say it's a fine device but much more of a niche product than I had envisioned.

Let's start with what the SpaceNavigator is not. First, it's not a traditional cursor-control device like a mouse, so it won't replace your regular mouse. Second, it isn't a joystick, or

at least not in most applications—more on that in a minute. Third, the SpaceNavigator isn't a general-purpose "wheel device" like Griffin's PowerMate.

With the caveat that the SpaceNavigator doesn't spin freely about the vertical axis as the PowerMate does, all three of these limitations are, as far as I can tell, entirely in software. If someone wanted to write a third-party driver for it, or if Logitech (parent company of 3DConnexion) wanted to support these sorts of things (hint, hint!), there's little reason the SpaceNavigator couldn't be a giant and greatly improved version of one of those pencil eraser-style pointing devices found on a multitude of Windows laptops as well as a PowerMate replacement. For instance, there's no reason the driver couldn't translate twist motions to scroll events in applications that weren't "3D" apps (and in fact it does do this in QuickTime Player), and it could likewise easily translate movement in the x- and y-axis into normal cursor movement.

So if you were expecting this mouse to do any of the above, you'll be disappointed. However, in fairness to Logitech, the 3DConnexion products aren't marketed to the general computer user. I happen to think they're missing a golden opportunity here—look how well the PowerMate has sold.

If you work with 3D modeling applications like Maya, CAD software, Google SketchUp, or anything similar on a regular basis, the SpaceNavigator is fantastic. It's much faster to be able to move one hand very little and have the other hand free to execute keyboard shortcuts or work a second mousing device.

Take Google Earth, for example. Navigating through Google Earth using the SpaceNavigator is extremely intuitive, to the point that, within five minutes of playing around with it, I could achieve a level of smoothness sufficient to believe I could make a survivable (though probably not exactly comfortable) landing in an airplane at Grand Junction, Colorado (KGJT), using only the SpaceNavigator as a controller. Doing this with a regular mouse and modifier keys is darn near impossible because of the difficulty of transitioning from one axis to another on the fly.

The action of the three-axis controller is very pleasant. Push or pull (or twist) harder and the movement in that axis speeds up; back off with the pressure and the movement slows down. The machined steel base is heavy enough—just over one pound—to keep the device firmly planted on your desk, though I caught myself wishing it were a tiny bit heavier a couple of times when zooming out wasn't quite going fast enough. The solution to this is probably to play with the software acceleration curves (which you can do) rather than making the SpaceNavigator heavier.

Speaking of the software, there are two levels of licensing available. The Personal Edition, which is for "non-commercial" use and includes only online support, is included with the $59 version of the SpaceNavigator. If you're going to use it in a commercial setting and/or want telephone support, you'll need to pay $40 more for the Standard Edition. There is no difference in functionality between the two editions.

The software consists of a preference pane, framework, and kernel extension (along with a pile of application-specific plug-ins and a couple of accessory applications), and the user interface lives in the preference pane, where you can adjust almost every setting you could think of on a global or application-specific basis. The toggle for the blue LEDs (thankfully, there is one) inexplicably lives in the "Configure:" pop-up menu, and the preference pane could stand to spend some quality time with some of Apple's interface experts, but in general it can configure everything you'd want it to in a reasonably intuitive manner.
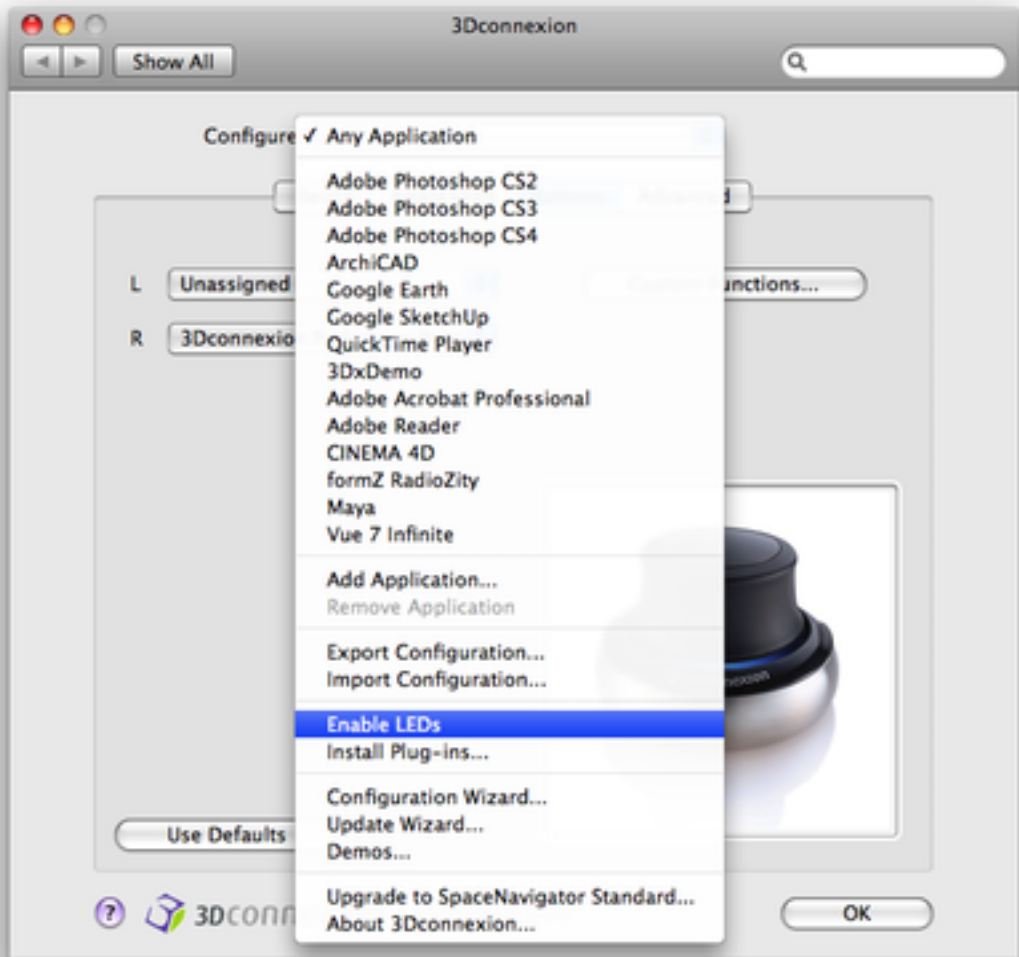
For people who spend a large portion of the workday in 3D applications, the SpaceNavigator is surely a very helpful tool and well worth the money. I'm not yet convinced of its utility for everyone else. Logitech is missing out on a great opportunity here, though, as this device has a tremendous amount of potential just waiting to be tapped by the right driver software.

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