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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the November issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* October brought good news to the Apple investor community and new products for Mac users around the globe. Apple is in a renaissance era. The company has raised product development and design to an art form with the user experience specifically in mind. This year's holiday season should be a celebratory one for members of the Apple product user community, as the iPhone continues its global rollout and Macintosh computers are being sold in numbers not seen before. Let's get started with a quick look at the company's most recent results.

Apple by the Numbers

For the three-month period ended in September, Apple reported GAAP revenue of $9.87 billion and a net quarterly GAAP profit of $1.67 billion, or $1.82 per diluted share. The non-GAAP results (eliminating the impact of subscription revenue accounting used for the Apple iPhone) were $12.25 billion of revenue and non-GAAP or adjusted net income of $2.85 billion.

During the September quarter (Apple's 4th fiscal quarter) the company sold 3.05 million Macs, 10.2 million iPods (including the popular iPod touch), and 7.4 million iPhones. The Mac numbers are all the more impressive because of the 17% increase in units sales over the prior-year period and an equally impressive 17% sequential gain in unit sales as well. Although reported iPhone unit sales rose only 7% over the prior-year period, sell through (or sales to consumers) was significantly higher this year than last year.

Last year's numbers included sales of two million handsets to fill what's called channel inventory—units considered sold when shipped to service providers but held in inventory for sales to consumers. This buildup occurred following the release of the original 3G handset to meet anticipated global demand. This year during the same calendar quarter ended in September, AT&T alone reported 3.2 million iPhones activated on its network in the United States.

The ".05" million Macs sold represent a 50,000 unit shipment of MacBooks to the state of Maine for use in their state-wide student computing initiative, extending the use of state-provided Macintosh computers from middle schools to high schools throughout the state. The program, called the Maine Technology Learning Initiative or MTLI, is designed to close what some call the Digital Divide among students and improve the computer literacy of all middle school and high school students in the state.

The iPod unit sales in the quarter reflect an 8% year-over-year decline in unit sales, as music playing smartphones (in particular the iPhone) reduce demand for standalone digital music players. No matter the drop in unit sales, the iPod remains the most popular digital music player in the world and the popular iPod touch muted a bit of the corresponding decline in revenue from iPod sales.

The New iMacs

It came as a bit of a surprise the day following Apple's quarterly conference call with Wall Street analysts to discuss the September quarter's results when the company announced new iMac desktop computers. Now in 27″ and 21.5″ screen sizes, the new iMacs offer a quad-core chip available in the 27″ model and a wireless keyboard and mouse as standard equipment.

During the conference call with analysts on October 19th, the company suggested product costs would rise during the company's first fiscal quarter (this quarter ending in December) due to an anticipated increase in air shipping costs for products as well as slightly lower gross margins (the difference between the sale price and the cost of manufacture) on products. The new iMacs resolved the mystery of the source of the increase in air shipping costs, and we expect the new iMacs to have slightly higher manufacturing costs than the iMacs they replaced. Feature for feature, the new iMacs are a value proposition for consumers in the market for a new computer.

AAPL Sets a New All-Time High

Investors responded positively to Apple's quarterly results, pushing the company's share price (ticker symbol: AAPL) to a new all-time high of $208.71 during intra-day activity on October 21st and a new all-time closing high of $205.20 on October 23rd. By the end of October, the share price had settled to a closing price of $188.50, following a broad market sell-off on the last trading day of the month.

Closing the Gap on Market Cap

No matter the late-month retreat in Apple's share price, at the closing price on October 30th Apple had earned the distinction of being among the three highest valued technology companies in the land. With a market capitalization (the sum value of all outstanding shares) of about $170 billion, Apple's market cap is on par with that of Google, as both companies trail their common nemesis Microsoft, which had a market capitalization of about $246 billion at the end of the same day of trading. Although the difference in market capitalization between Apple and Microsoft may at first seem large, Apple has been closing the market cap gap steadily over the past few years. It may not be long before both Apple and Google surpass Microsoft's market capitalization and duel with one another for the title of the most highly valued technology company traded on Wall Street.

Closing the Gap on GAAP

Because Apple offers iPhone owners free OS upgrades for two years from the time of purchase, the company has deferred recognition of iPhone revenue and costs of manufacture over the same period of time. This deferred revenue recognition is consistent with the GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) rules that had been in place.

Recent accounting rule changes will allow Apple to recognize all iPhone revenue at time of sale, with the exception of the cost of the OS that's included on the device. This will virtually close the gap between Apple's GAAP and non-GAAP quarterly results. As noted

at the top of this column, Apple had significantly more non-GAAP than GAAP revenue and earnings in the September quarter. The non-GAAP numbers reflect the company's performance had deferred revenue accounting not been in place.

Apple has until the beginning of its next fiscal year (beginning October 2010) to use the new rules in its financial reports. By closing the gap on GAAP and non-GAAP results, Apple may come closer to closing the market cap gap with Microsoft as Apple's total revenue and earnings are reflected in its earnings reports, boosting the company's reported performance.

Our November Issue

Each month the editors of ATPM seek to close a gap of another kind. Between issues of ATPM, much happens in the world of personal computing. We pride ourselves on providing the most interesting news and product reviews to assist our readers in closing the knowledge gap. Our mission is to celebrate what we call "the personal computing experience" with you, our readers.

Our November issue includes:

MacMuser: Chasing the Dragons

Mark Tennent compares broadband speeds to Formula One racing.

MacMuser: iPhoniness

Mark Tennent shares his iPhone acquisition tale.

How To: Making Your Own Speakable Items

Mac OS X has a rather powerful speech recognition tool built-in, and Sylvester Roque is here to tell you how to make the most of it.

Desktop Pictures: Mt. Shasta

This month's photos of Mt. Shasta were provided by GeekBrief.TV's Cali Lewis.

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.*

Review: AutoPower and ACpower

Lee Bennett weighs in on RadTech's contribution to the plethora of USB charger choices.

Review: LogTen Pro 5.1.4 and LogTen Mobile 2.4.1

Still an indispensable part of any pilot's electronic flight bag.

Review: Loop Leather Sleeve

A Texas-style leather belt case for your iPhone.

Review: ShareTool 1.3.1

With ShareTool, you can now enjoy being in two places at once with your Mac.

Review: Voyager Q

Provided that wear on a hard drive's connector pins don't become an issue, the Voyager Q is a useful tool for accessing data on hard drives without the need of buying dedicated enclosures for each of them.

E-Mail

PowerBook G4 Titanium

Greetings—writing this on an old G4 Titanium 1 GHz I picked up on eBay. It came to me a basket case but still working. I have replaced the DVD drive and the right hinge, which was broken. The case has been broken in several places, but a tube of epoxy and a few hours of putting it back together have left me with a great old machine that still performs its functions without a hitch. Guess it goes to show that not all old Ti's are junk. I do love the old machine, and as an amateur short story writer I find it a pleasure to write with. I used to use an old Compaq V2000, which is faster but not so comfortable, but now I have put away the Compaq and use this Titanium almost exclusively.

—Jerry Ericsson

Of Loud Fans and Broken Drives

Good commentary! It's nice to read about successful repairs. I've had nothing but good treatment from Apple over the years, including several things out of warranty that were taken care of for free.

—robinson

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I have taken my MacBook Pro to the Apple Store two times, plus my iPod nano (4th gen), also having Apple Care. Always timely, courteous service; excellent support. Best of any company I have encountered (and I am into my seventh decade).

—Rich

Macless Abroad

In my opinion, carrying around the small, thin, light, and even stylish Apple Bluetooth keyboard is by no means comparable to carrying around a laptop.

First of all, it's way smaller and lighter than a laptop, and also less prone to damage—so it's easier to transport; then it's inexpensive (if stolen, broken, or lost, it's a minor loss). Also, if stolen, it doesn't carry with it any valuable data or whatever—it's a dumb keyboard.

An iPhone plus a Bluetooth keyboard means you type efficiently, almost like having a laptop. A typical situation is that you leave the keyboard at the hotel, walking around with your iPhone only, and then, when you are back in your hotel room, you comfortably type your article or perform any task you need a keyboard for. By the way, personally it

would be kind of a reminiscence of the "dock experience" I had with my Duo: travel light, but work comfortably when back at your base.

—Roberto Giannotta

You're completely correct. If someone were going to carry either, the lighter keyboard would certainly seem to make sense. There may be a question of which is more prone to damage if you're talking about sliding it into a backpack. Seems to me that Apple's very slender keyboard would be more more likely to flex to the point of breaking than a laptop. Maybe not. I dunno.

But that wasn't really my point. What I was saying was, given my traveling circumstances, I didn't exactly have any extra room for either a laptop or a keyboard of any size, unless it was one of those fold-up styles. My ZÜCA bag was absolutely stuffed to the gills, and the backpack I purchased had two main compartments, one for the DSLR and one for cables. Neither compartment was large enough for even Apple's small wireless keyboard. Obviously mileage may vary depending on who you talk to, but for my travels, if I am carrying a bag large enough for a keyboard, I'd just as soon carry my Slappa backpack and simply take my regular laptop gear.

If Apple supported it, I believe I would indeed be interested in pairing a wireless keyboard with my iPhone. In terms of this particular U.K. trip, however, it wouldn't have come along because I absolutely did not have space for it. I'm sort of kicking myself for not taking a photo of how crammed my Zuca bag was, but here's a photo of how small the backpack I purchased was. Given the size of the Nikon D90 in the lower half, you can see that Apple's wireless keyboard would not have fit in the upper portion.

—Lee Bennett

Harman Kardon Soundsticks II

A very funny, well-written piece. Thank you for taking the time to write it.

I came across this while trying to find suggestions on how repair my 2001 Soundsticks. Like Lance, I dropped one while re-organizing my edit suite a couple of days ago. Exactly the same damage, which I didn't see at first. But I certainly knew about it the first time I got a Mac donk or hit some loud parts of the soundtrack. Unlike the Genesis 1.1s, my broken Soundstick sounded absolutely square-edged on anything approaching loud.

Although unable to find a solution to "How to repair your Soundsticks" on the World Wise Web thingy I have developed one that works perfectly: the knife from Heinz Baby Basics.

Yes, folks, baby's first knife. It's got a long, straight flat edged blade the same thickness as the groove joining back to front, and mine has a nice pink handle. Insert the blade flat edge to flat side of the Soundstick and then twist the handle. The long contact surface spreads the force, your Soundsticks pop open, and you can hot glue the back magnet into place. A couple of discreet dots of glue will keep it closed again.

If you have trouble making this work, try a hair dryer for a few minutes—I did at first and although I don't think it did anything perhaps it weakened the original glue a little.

—Philip Taylor

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.*

Chasing the Dragons

Broadband speed in Britain is like today's Formula One qualifying in Suzuka. Over in Japan, the F1 cars tried to set ever faster speeds on one of the world's most demanding circuits. Five drivers have crashed already, one is in hospital with a leg wound, and the race hasn't even started.

This is only to be expected when all practice sessions had been washed out and races haven't been staged here for a couple of years while the track was "updated." These improvements would appear to be largely cosmetic to a circuit built in 1962 by Honda, for motorcycle races rather than modern F1 cars. It is tight, twisty, and action is close to the barriers all around the circuit, with only old-fashioned, narrow gravel traps at the corners to slow a car from 200mph.

Meanwhile in Britain, our current standing in broadband speed languishes in 25th place, a long way behind dragon economies such as Latvia, Slovenia, and Romania. In a similar predicament are counties with British Commonwealth or Empire links including Canada and Australia, presumably because they suffer from the same problem as the UK. Our infrastructure, like Suzuka's, was built for a different world and from the wrong materials.

Instead of fibre and cable, which will be reaching 1Gbps by 2012 in South Korea, we are stuck with aluminium and copper. Global average speeds at 4.75Mbps downloading are higher than the UK's; Korea's is currently ten times faster already.

Our own in-house ADSL line usually exceeds the download average, but we struggle to get more than 75% of the 1.3Mbps average global uploading even though we are relatively close to the telephone exchange and our lines fairly quiet. BT still plans to get a 24Mbps service across the country, which from our experience most households will find is a speed impossible to achieve.

But we are the lucky ones: 30 percent of the UK still hasn't got broadband. They have yet to experience the joys of social networking sites, choppy, blocky iTunes video, and sharing photos and music. Which on reflection, might not be a bad thing anyway.

iPhoniness

My heart isn't in my work at the moment, and it's for two reasons: 1) Windows XP, and 2) I'm not working from home.

The Dell I'm stuck with is the best in the office and about the equivalent of a Sinclair Spectrum. It's bearable purely because it fills in time between cups of coffee. I set it to do something really hard, such as open Lotus Notes, Word, and Excel, and I know I have ten minutes before I can do anything productive. That is assuming XP doesn't find an update and stop everything. Or Notes falls over after starting up, and the whole system has to be rebooted.

We have these ancient computers because earlier this year "head office" wanted to re-equip with new machines. As a recycling nut, our office administrator insisted we take the old computers being stripped out of HQ—then departed on maternity leave with no intention of returning to use the garbage we've been saddled with.

Meanwhile my Mac Pro sits at home controlled via the ancient Dell, using a Web browser and the brilliant LogMeIn to set it doing useful things. Every now and again I write a message and have TextEdit "speak" it to my wife. Usually important things such as "Please insert the next DVD for me" so I can get HandBrake to rip it. Or rude questions designed to spice up her solitary office now that I'm not there.

Then, in the space of one afternoon, I burned through £8 of PAYG cell phone calls and the joystick on my two-year-old Sony Ericsson packed up, leaving me with a very hard to use camera/phone.

Oh sod it!

So I bought an iPhone.

But not before prostrating my ignorance to the gurus of iPhoniness, one of whom works for Nokia and the other for Samsung. Both said it was a no brainer: get the iPhone.

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Making Your Own Speakable Items

If Mr. Scott had arrived on Earth a few years later he could have used Speakable Items rather than the keyboard.

Several times in the last few years I have mentioned to friends that I should write more often about the amazing things that can be done using only the software that ships with your Mac. I usually either have a hard time thinking of an idea or I end up thinking it's an idea everyone knows how to do. Sometimes I spot something interesting that someone else has done, and I am lucky enough to convince them to tell you about it.

As some of you know I became fascinated with Automator shortly after it was introduced in Mac OS X 10.4. It's one of my candidates for most under-used Mac features. Some time ago I began haunting Apple's discussion forums and periodically searching for all references to Automator. Most of the time I learn something new, and sometimes I actually know the answer to a question someone has asked. A few months ago, all of those things happened at once, and I started to wonder whether you could use the Speakable Items feature, which is still around in Mac OS X, to control Automator workflows. The short answer is that you can, so let's get right to work figuring out how it's done.

What Is Speakable Items?

At its heart, the concept of Speakable Items, Apple's basic speech recognition technology that ships with every Mac, is simple: you command your Mac verbally, and it does what you say. My first recollection of any encounter with this technology was some time well after it was introduced. My wife walked into our home office one day because she thought I was talking to someone. She was somewhat puzzled to discover that the computer was telling me knock knock jokes. When I asked "Who's there," the computer responded with the next line of the joke. Her reaction was priceless.

Speakable Items first shipped as part of Apple's PlainTalk speech recognition software. Initially available only on Quadra AV models, it was later included as part of System 7.1.2 and remains a part of the operating system to this day. Unfortunately, it didn't arrive in time to help Mr. Scott avoid using the keyboard.

You don't have to go out and purchase dedicated speech recognition hardware to make this work, though some users will need to add a microphone. In limited testing I have successfully used the internal microphone on my MacBook Pro as well as an external mic that I use regularly for podcasting. Both setups provide acceptable results, but I would probably get better results from any good headset microphone to help reduce interference from background noise. I have had a few instances of difficulty getting Speakable Items to

recognize my voice. It seems to occur more often when using the MacBook Pro's internal microphone in noisy environments—otherwise it has been a great experience.

If you would like a look at some of the pre-defined tasks that can be accomplished using this feature, open the Speech preference pane and select the Speech Recognition tab. Now select the Commands tab. When the window switches, choose the Open Speakable Items option. If a command you would like to carry out isn't there, don't worry. By the time we're done you'll know how to add your own commands.

How Do I Use It?

The first thing we need to do is launch and configure Speakable Items. Start the process by opening the Speech preference pane. Make sure that you are working in the Speech Recognition tab and that Speakable Items is On. Make sure that the microphone that you will be using is connected and select it in the microphone pop-up menu. Some external microphone connections may appear in this menu as simply "Line In." Many of the options are pretty self-explanatory, and the help files are well-written, so don't be afraid.

Configuring Speakable Items

The *Listening Key* is set to the Escape key by default. This can be changed by clicking "Change key…" and choosing a different key in the dialog that appears. This can be important depending upon which of the radio buttons you choose below that.

Using these radio buttons you can choose to have the computer only listen for commands when the listen key is pressed or listen for commands in association with a specific keyword. If you choose to have the computer listen for a keyword, the command that you speak is executed only if you say the command in conjunction with the keyword. Personally, I choose to have the computer listen for a keyword so I don't have to touch the keyboard just to issue a command.

The *Keyword is* pop-up has options for how the computer responds to your chosen keyword. The settings here allow the keyword to be optional, required before each command, or required either 15 or 30 seconds after the last command. Clicking inside the "keyword" field allows you to choose a new keyword.

Before leaving this window we must take a few minutes to calibrate the microphone. Be sure the microphone is connected and the right connection is chosen from the pop-up menu. The calibration process is simple, takes only a few minutes, and should improve speech recognition accuracy.

The calibration process consists of speaking into the microphone and adjusting the slider until your voice is consistently registering in the middle of the green area. If you are consistently registering in the blue area, gradually move the slider toward the High setting. If you are consistently in the red area, move the slider closer to the Low setting. Keep at it until you are consistently in the middle of the green area.

Microphone Calibration

The second part of the calibration process consists of speaking each of the commands in that window until the computer recognizes them. Try to speak in a natural voice and speak the commands as phrases rather than individual words. Apple's help files for the Speakable Items feature recommend speaking each command a second time. You will know that a command has been recognized because the text blinks momentarily. Now that you have the configuration process completed, choose Done. Now let's get down to making this a more useful feature.

Making Speakable Items More Useful

There are a number of pre-defined commands that get installed with the Speakable Items feature. A lot of these did not seem very helpful to me. Fortunately, Apple is famous for making applications and features that adapt to users rather than users adapting to the application. Why should the Speakable Item feature be any different? I did a little research and discovered that you can indeed add new items to the Speakable Items folder. In fact, Apple says that "you can use a command to open anything you can open by double-clicking, including applications, files, and Web sites. You can also write scripts and add them to the folder."

Now I am not really a good scripter but after reading that document a very neat idea occurred to me. Speakable Items can be used to activate applications, and Automator

workflows can be saved as applications. Why not combine the two and do something Apple didn't include as one of the pre-defined commands?

With Speakable Items configured, the next step is to create an Automator workflow that does something we want to do. Let's create an application that starts an Internet session by opening Safari, iChat, and Mail from a single command. While we are at it, let's open a series of pages in tabs within a single Safari window.

Before we do anything with Automator, launch iChat, Safari, and Mail to make sure that they are connecting properly and performing as you expect. If you are going to open Web pages in tabs within Safari, make sure that you have taken steps to enable this feature. Now it's time to launch Automator and have a little fun.

If you are new to Automator, check out my earlier Automator article for a review of the basics. It covers an earlier version of the program, but the basic principles remain the same. Pay particular attention to the "Getting Right Down to Work" section. The workflow described there is essentially the same one we will create today. I'll give an abbreviated description of the workflow here. It should be fine for anyone with a little Automator experience. Type the name of each action into Automator's search window, then drop the action into the rightmost pane of the Automator window. Click the small arrow on the upper left side of an action if you need to enter information.

1. *Connect to iChat.*

2. *Log Into iChat* and set the pop-up to log into all accounts, Bonjour, or just specific accounts.

3. *Set iChat Status* and set the pop-up menu to your preferred status.

4. *Get Specified URLs.* Expand the box to enter the names and URLs for the sites that you want to open each time the workflow runs.

5. *Display Webpages in Tabs.* This is a custom action, not one that is installed by default in Automator. Kudos to ATPM Contributing Editor Eric Blair for a nice bit of work on that action.

6. *Get New Mail.* Configure the pop-up menu to determine which accounts you would like to check

That's all it takes to build this workflow.
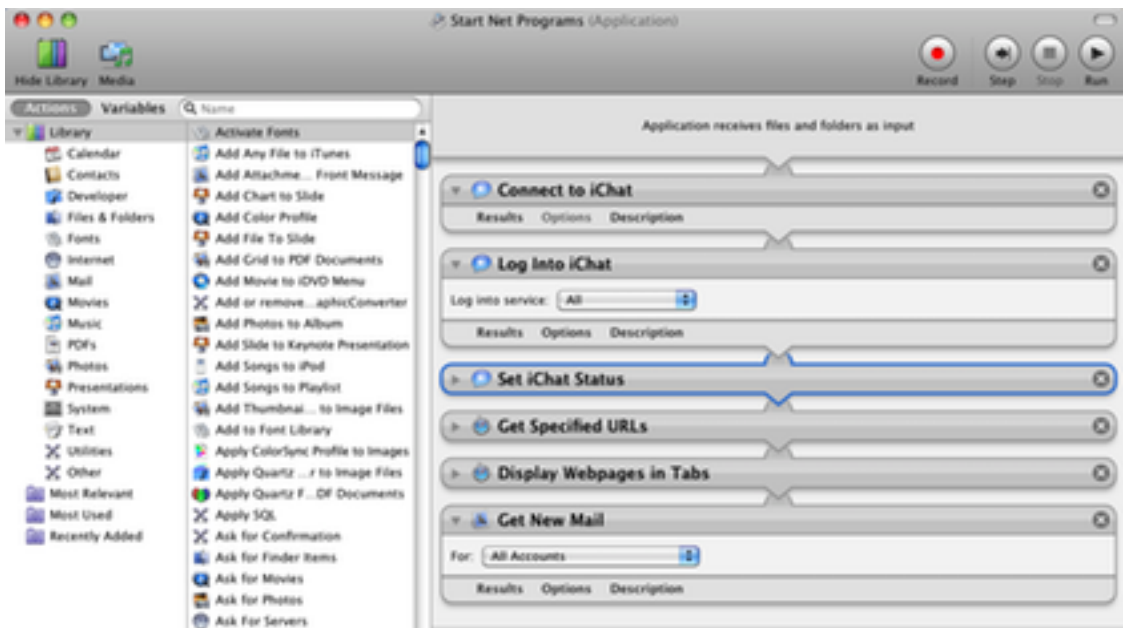
Completed Workflow

Time for a little testing to make sure everything works as anticipated. Close iChat, Safari, and Mail as a prelude to testing this workflow. Now click Automator's run button and watch to make sure that the workflow is functioning as you expect. If there is a problem, continue testing until you fix the problem. If all is well, choose Save As from Automator's File menu and save the workflow as an application.

When saving the workflow choose a simple, descriptive name. This name is the command that you will use to launch it via Speakable Items. You can now place either your application or an alias to it in your Speakable Items folder. Apple's help files suggest waiting about 20 seconds before attempting to access your new command.

Final Thoughts

Most of the time I use full-featured dictation software to control my Mac, but it's nice to know that this option is available and so easily customized. In fairness, I should share credit for this article. The idea came to me after reading a question posted by EMH Mark I in the Apple Discussion Forum. I hadn't though of this project until I tried to answer his question.

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Desktop Pictures

by Cali Lewis, http://www.geekbrief.tv

Mt. Shasta

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos were provided by Cali Lewis of GeekBrief.TV. During a road trip from Las Vegas to Seattle, she stopped for the night in Mt. Shasta, northern California, and awoke the next morning to a gorgeous mountain covered with snow.

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.
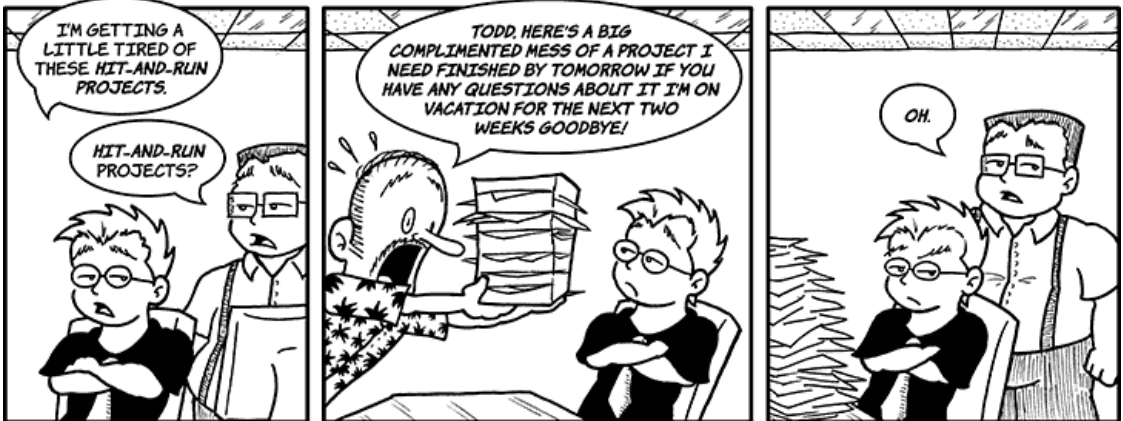
Remember MySpace?
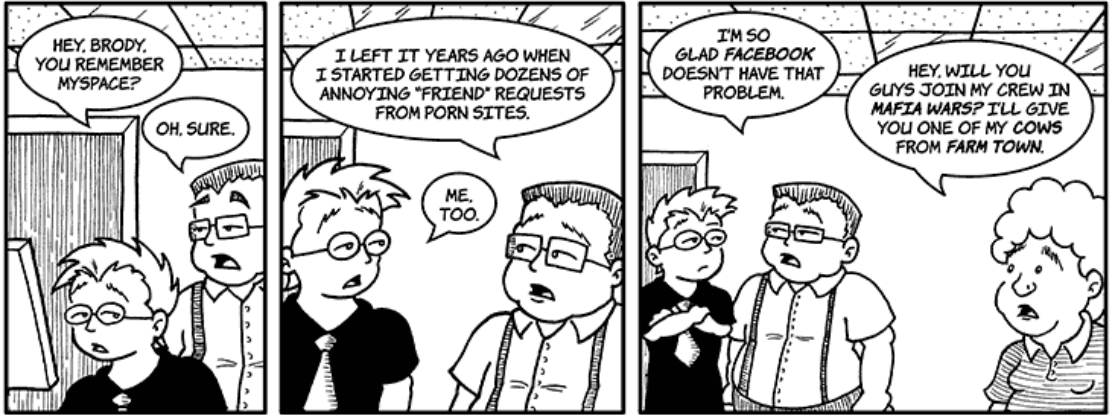
Hit and Run

Company Newsletter

GINA, I NEED YOU TO DESIGN OUR COMPANY NEWSLETTER. BUT I HAVEN'T GOTTEN ANY ARTICLES AND WE DON'T HAVE ANY PHOTOS YET.

THE COMMITTEE STILL WANTS TO SEE SOMETHING, THOUGH SO COULD YOU JUST GET STARTED AND COME UP WITH *SOMETHING*?

SURE. HERE'S THE LATEST COPY OF NEWSWEEK. JUST PRETEND THAT I DESIGNED IT.

TRY AGAIN, GINA.

You're No Fun Anymore

HEY, BOB, I JUST LEARNED ABOUT THAT TRADE SHOW NEXT MONTH YOU'RE PLANNING FOR US TO ATTEND.

I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF ORDERING BANNERS AND BROCHURES FOR THE EVENT, SIGNING UP FOR A BOOTH, AND RESERVING PLANE TICKETS AND HOTEL ROOMS FOR THE ENTIRE STAFF.

OR WERE YOU HOPING TO WAIT UNTIL THE *LAST MINUTE* AND THROW IT ALL ON ME AS A SURPRISE? AGAIN?

MUST YOU TAKE THE FUN OUT OF *EVERYTHING* I DO?

President and CEO

HI, I'M TOM, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF QUALITY MARKETING SOLUTIONS, LLC.

YEAH, RIGHT.

YOU HAVE A SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP RUNNING OUT OF YOUR PARENTS BASEMENT.

YOU MOVED IN WITH THEM AFTER GETTING LAID OFF *THREE* MONTHS AGO.

OH CRAP. DID I "FRIEND" YOU ON FACEBOOK?!

I LIKE THE DRESS YOU WORE TO THE KEGGER LAST NIGHT. WEB 2.0 OWNS YOUR ASS.

One-man Company

Living Like No One Else
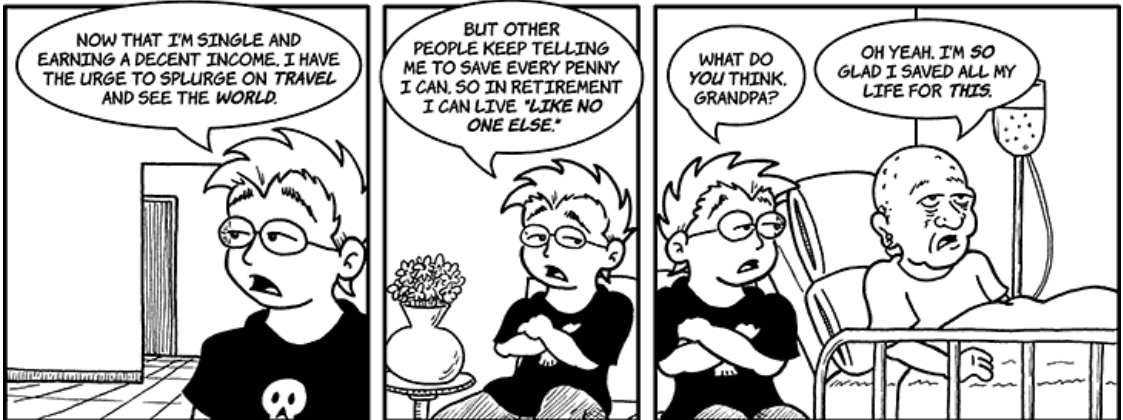
AC Adapter
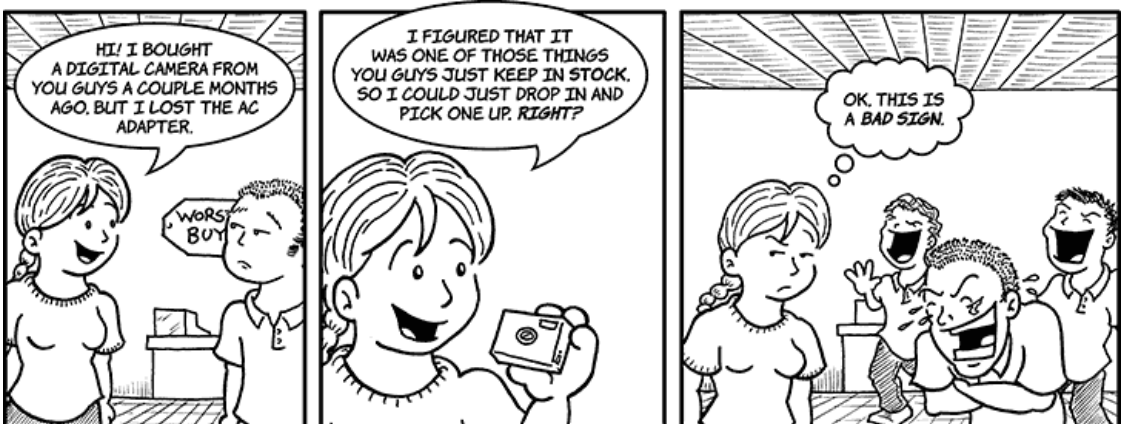
Mind Like Water
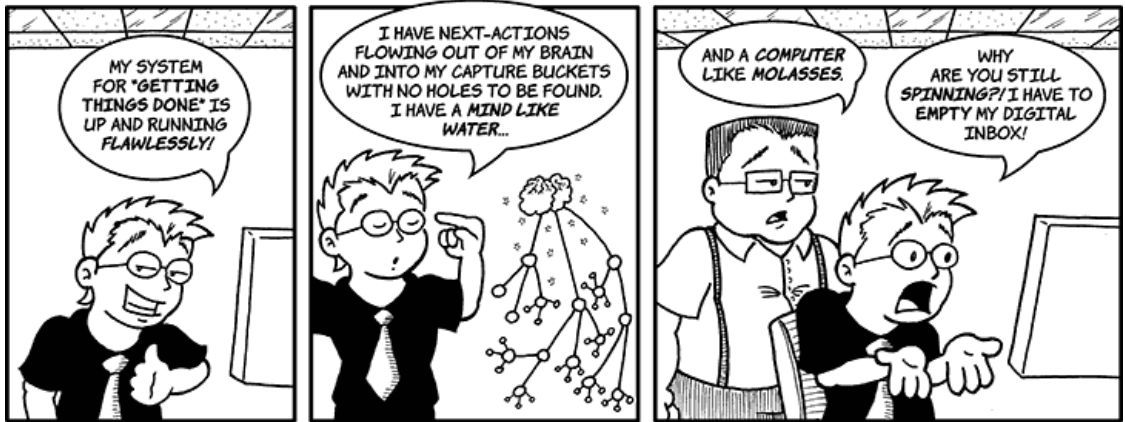
AutoPower and ACpower

AutoPower

Developer: RadTech
Price: $10
Requirements: Any device that charges via USB cable.
Trial: None

ACpower

Developer: RadTech
Price: $15
Requirements: Any device that charges via USB cable.
Trial: None

I have no doubt of the impossibility of counting how many different models
of USB chargers are now on the market. Once in awhile, you'll find one with a gimmick
that makes it a gotta-have charger. In most cases, however, a simple device that does its
job simply is the only thing that will do. RadTech's chargers for vehicles and AC plugs are
just the type of simple devices that should satisfy those who want no frills.

RadTech's AutoPower USB Charger

RadTech's ACpower USB Charger

ACpower Charger in Use

The lone plus side of these chargers is the dual USB ports instead of just a single port. They come at a reasonable price. Less expensive chargers can certainly be found with a

little online searching but may have only a single USB port. In the case of these RadTech devices, however, I don't really recall seeing AC wall chargers of any other brand costing more than an equivalent car charger. In fact, I usually see the other way around, if not a matching price.

Because these chargers do the job they're intended to do, I can't exactly *not* recommend them. The devices I was sent charge my iPod and iPhone just fine, yet they wouldn't have been my first choice. Both devices seem a little flimsy—especially the ACpower charger, which I feel *must* be removed from a plug while angled outward.

Angling the ACpower charger upward is advised before removing it from an outlet. Removing it while still angled down appears as though it could cause damage. I didn't pull all the way, but with just a gentle tug I could see the entire charger body bending.

The biggest nuisance of the AutoPower charger pertains to the lights on the device.
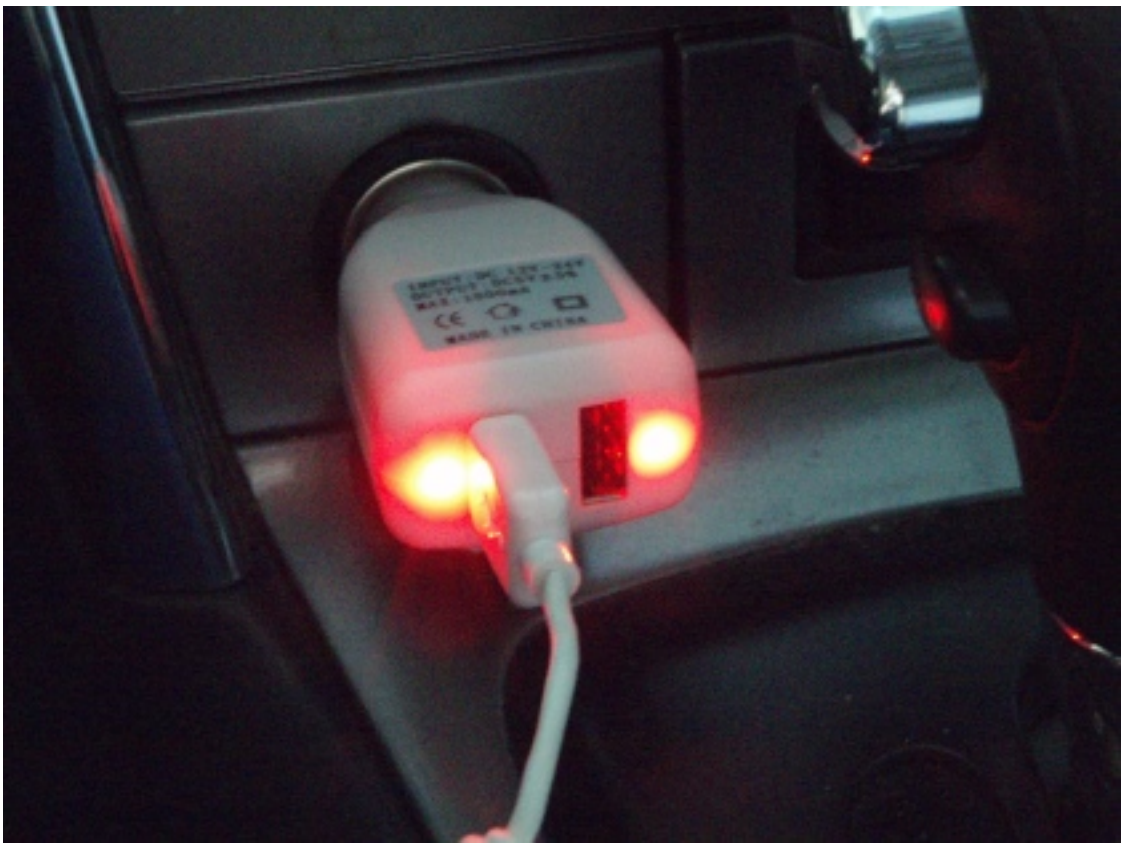
What do these lights represent, and why are they so bright?

Clearly, as the photo above shows, the LED lights do not indicate that a device is being charged since there is nothing plugged in to the right side. So, if the only purpose is to indicate that the entire device is receiving power from the car's power port, why have two LEDs next to each USB port? Furthermore, these LEDs are insanely bright. Even in this photo, taken in the daytime, spillover light is causing half the device to glow red. At night, I simply could not use the charger because the red glare disturbed my driving.

Looking at the RadTech catalog, which was sent along with the chargers, the company seems to offer quite a range of products that appear useful, well made, and unique, considering that some of them are in categories I've never seen from any other manufacturer. In the case of RadTech's USB chargers, the AutoPower and ACpower devices probably are neither my first nor my last choice.

LogTen Pro 5.1.4 and LogTen Mobile 2.4.1

LogTen Pro 5.1.4

Developer: Coradine Aviation Systems
Price: $100
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5.
Trial: Fully-featured (40 flights).

LogTen Mobile 2.4.1

Developer: Coradine Aviation Systems
Price: $40
Requirements: iPhone OS 2.2.
Trial: Feature-limited ("Basic" version free in App Store).

The last time ATPM looked at LogTen was five years and three major versions ago, back when Mac OS X 10.3 was the latest and greatest and the iPhone was just a pipe dream on rumor sites. While LogTen still works as a fantastic pilot logbook, enough has changed that it's worth another look.

The biggest change since the 2.5 era is that LogTen Pro is once again a single product. LogTen Express has disappeared, and with that disappearance the cost of entry has risen to $100. That's $10 more than LogTen Pro was five years ago, but the newest version is far more powerful than—and just as fast as—its predecessor.

The tremendous popularity of the iPhone made making a mobile version of LogTen a no-brainer. While there is a basic version available for free, the real functionality is in LogTen Mobile, a $40 application targeted primarily at professional pilots earning a paycheck from their flying.

Since the last review, when I was still a student, I have been both a flight instructor and an airline pilot. As my day job is now that of an airline first officer, the review is primarily from that perspective, although I've tried to be as universal as I can in my evaluation. For privacy reasons, some of the screenshot data has been blurred to protect the identities of my current employer and co-workers.

Getting Started

New pilots just starting off are greeted with a splash screen of sorts, offering a variety of different configurations for the user to select. As you can see from the screenshot, anyone from student pilots all the way up to airline captains is covered. Each of the various base configurations can be further customized to the user's liking later on.
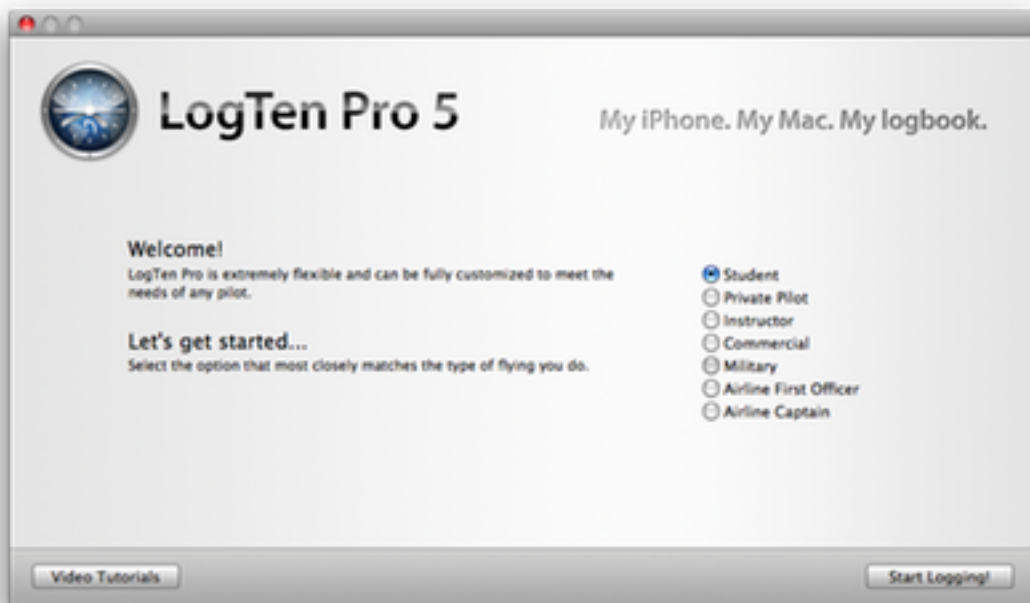
LogTen Intro

Once you've selected a configuration, the main window appears with your logbook laid out like a giant spreadsheet.
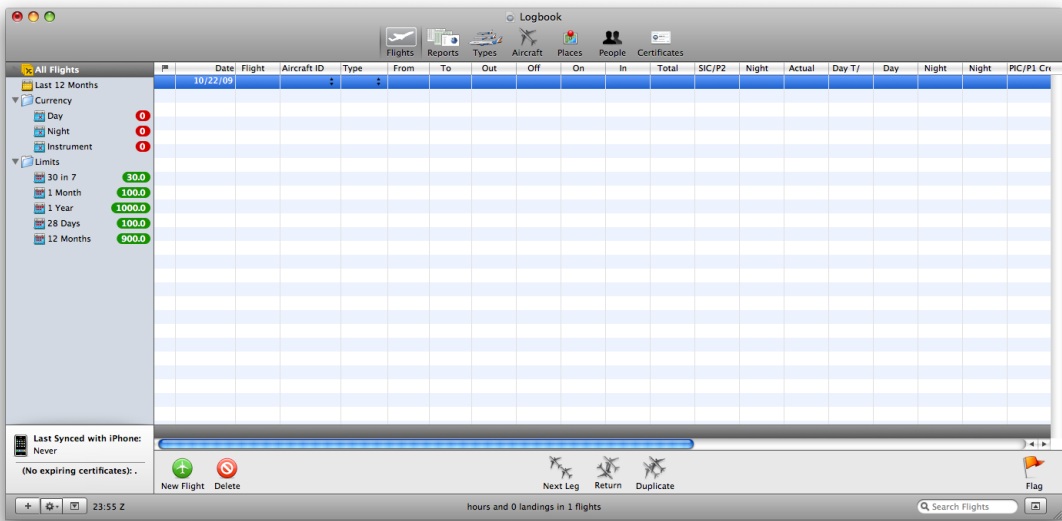
Main Table

Data can be entered directly in the table—and yes, the various columns can be customized or hidden entirely—or via a "details" view that can be shown with the widget in the bottom-right corner.

Configure LogTen Pro

Select a base configuration as a starting point, then customize field names and choose columns to be displayed in the main window.

Base Configuration: Airline First Officer

| Flight | Landings | Operations | Time | Duties | Crew | Notes/Journal |

Date	☑ Aircraft ID	☐ Weight
☐ Flight #	☑ Type	☐ Make
☑ From	☐ Model	☐ Engine Type
☑ To	☐ Category	☐ Class
☐ Route		

| Departure Columns	Arrival Columns
☐ Distance	☐ Scheduled Out	☐ Scheduled In
☑ Total Time	☐ Out	☐ In
☐ Flight Time	☐ Off	☐ On
☐ Sched Total	☐ Hobbs Out	☐ Hobbs In
☐ Actual – Sched	☐ Tach Out	☐ Tach In
☐ On Time Performance		

Cancel   OK

Customize Columns
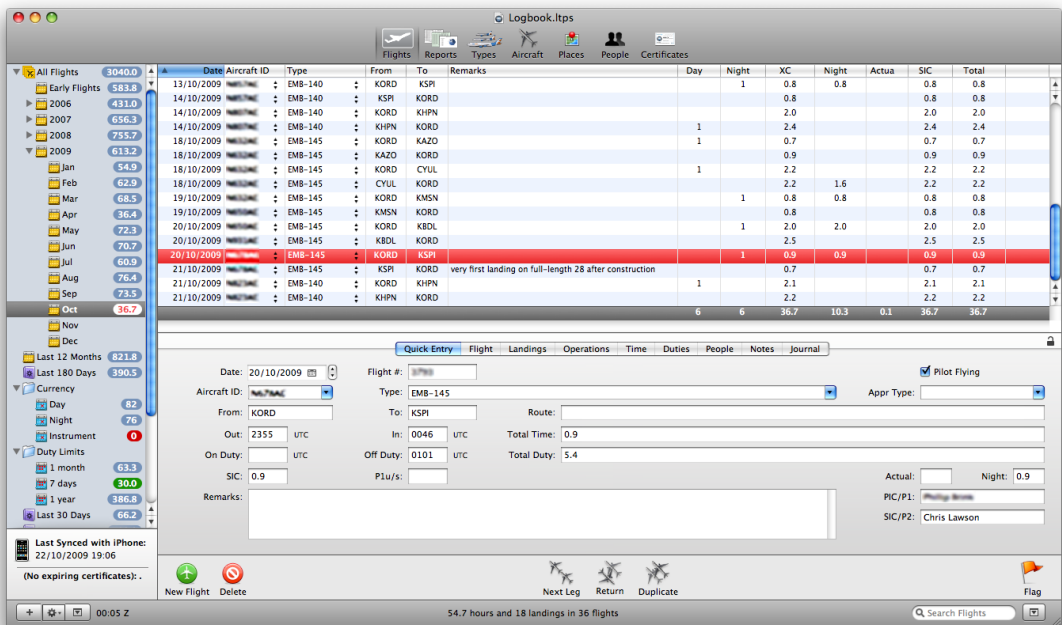
Main Table With Details and Data

Managing Data

LogTen Pro now has the ability to manage not only flight data, but also data pertaining to the aircraft you've flown, the airports you've visited, the people you've flown with (including, for airline types, cabin crewmembers, and for instructor types, students), and the certificates you hold. There was rudimentary certificate management in LogTen 2.5, but version 5 has the ability to associate specific certificates with individual flights.

The Aircraft manager allows you to see at a glance how much total time you have in any given aircraft. The Types manager (not shown) does the same for individual types.
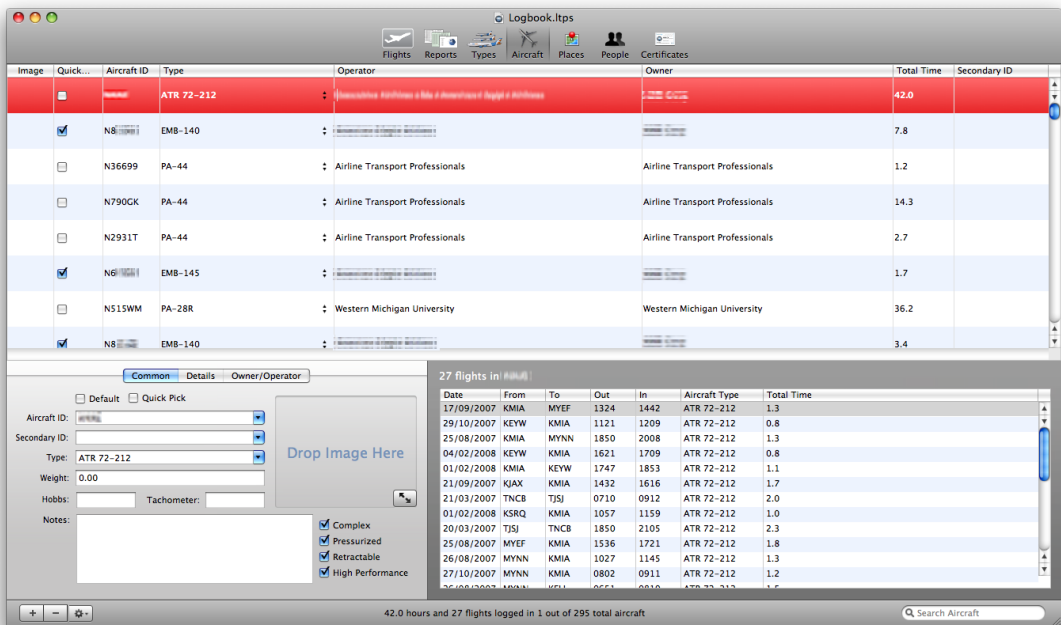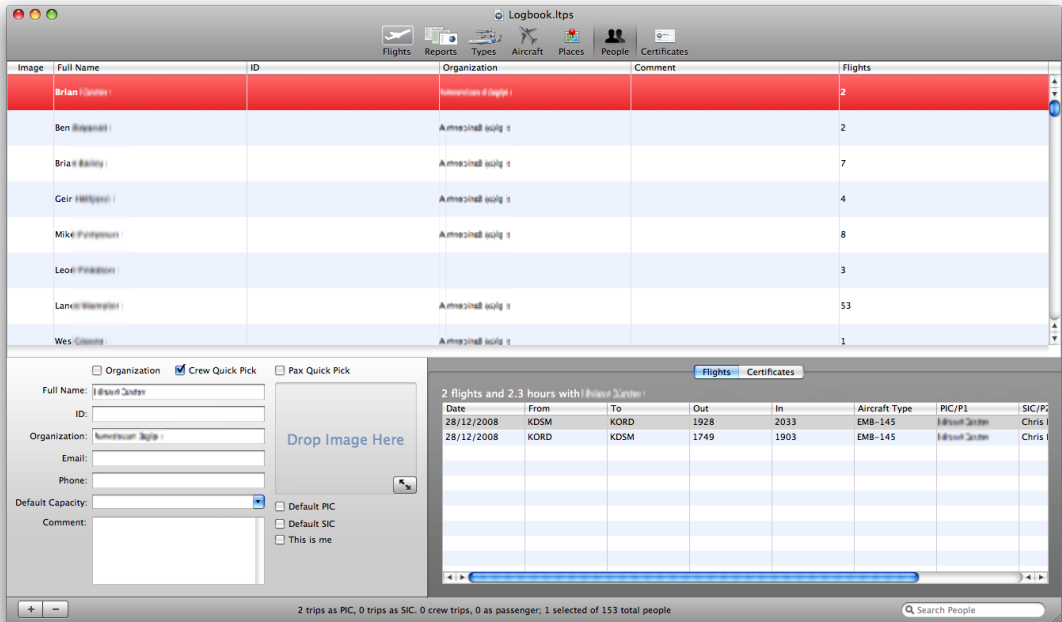
Aircraft View

The Places manager shows all the airports you've visited, along with far more data than you ever wanted to know about each one.
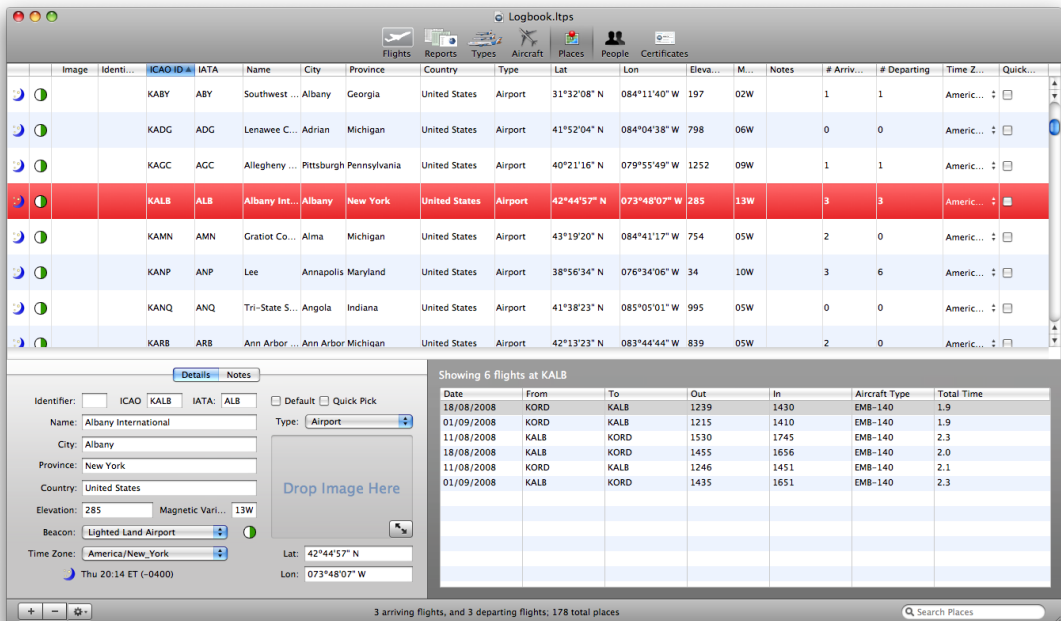

Places (Airports) View

The People manager allows you to track the other crewmembers, instructors, passengers, or students you've flown with, along with their capacities on each flight.

Each of the various managers has a miniature version of the main table filled with data applicable to whatever is selected in the manager. For instance, in the screenshot of the Aircraft manager above, you can see a table of all the flights I've done in that particular aircraft. A minor annoyance is that these mini-tables do not retain their sort state across launches of LogTen Pro. A larger annoyance is that the tables in the various managers don't, either. The main Flights table, which is where most of the action happens anyway, does, so it's not a big deal for most people, and the developer, who remains extremely responsive to user feedback, has promised he'll look into this.

Importing Data

The whole point of an electronic logbook is to simplify data entry and analysis. To this end, one of the biggest new features in LogTen Pro 5 is schedule importing for most airlines. While having a direct connection to a company database is still essentially impossible for most airline pilots, there's a versatile importer that allows for copy-and-paste input of the vast majority of airline schedule formats.
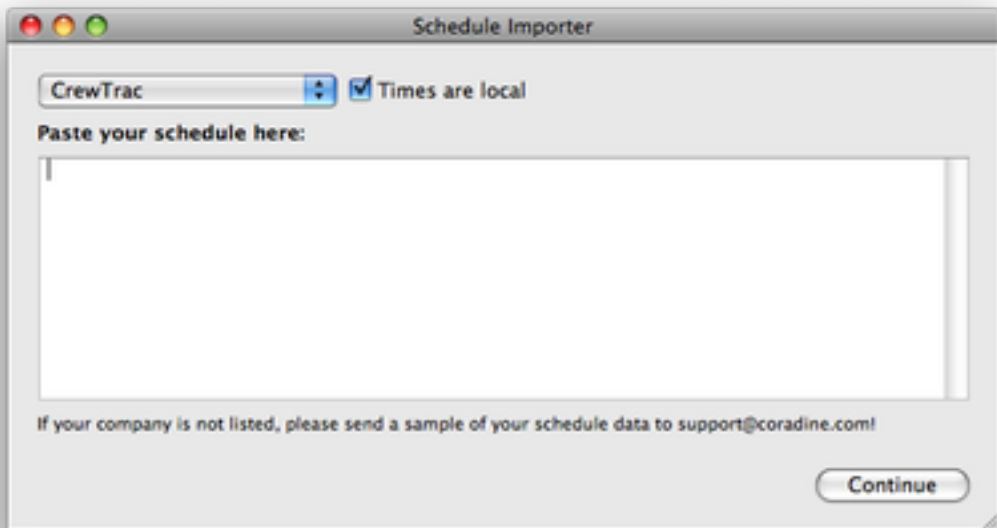
Schedule Importer — Main Window

There are a few electronic formats still unsupported, but the team at Coradine has done an excellent job of adding support for unrecognized formats in minor updates.

Importing data from other logbook programs has also been greatly improved since the last review. Both CSV and tab-separated formats are supported, and with a few exceptions, other logbook programs—even those on Windows—can be coerced into providing data in these formats.

Reports and Smart Groups

While the new schedule importer simplifies the data entry half of the equation, the report generator and smart groups are even better than before. The report generator is still the means by which a paper logbook can be generated, but now there are options to fill nearly every possible need. WebKit is still the brains behind the report generator, so if you need a logbook format that isn't included in the application, it's easy to create one with some basic knowledge of HTML and CSS.

Got a checkride coming up? Your FAA 8710 report is just a few seconds away.

FAA 8710

FAA Form 8710-1, Airman Certificate and/or Rating Application

III RECORD OF PILOT TIME (04/10/2009 through 22/10/2009)

		Total	Instruction Received	Solo	Pilot in Command (PIC)	Cross Country Instruction Received	Cross Country Solo	Cross Country PIC	Instrument	Night Instruction Received	Night Take-off/ Landings	Night PIC	Night Take-off/ Landing PIC	Number of Flights	Number of Aero-Tows	Number of Ground Launches	Number of Powered Launches
Airplane	PIC	3008.0	195.5	12.1	869.3	95.0	11.3	314.1	235.9	30.1	225	125.6	84	2132			
	SIC				2065.5			2059.4				332.4	129				
Rotorcraft	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Powered Lift	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Glider	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Lighter-Than-Air	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Simulator	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Training Device	PIC	50.0	50.0											19			
	SIC																
PCATD	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Powered Parachute	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Weight-Shift-Control	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Untitled	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Untitled	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Untitled	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Untitled	PIC													0			
	SIC																
Untitled	PIC													0			
	SIC																

Save As...   Print

Report — FAA 8710

Need to update your résumé or fill out a job application? Total flight experience and time by type reports are easy to generate, too.

Report — Flight Experience

Flight Time by Aircraft Type (detailed)

Type	Total Time	Pilot in Command	Second in Command	Night	Dual Received	Dual Given	Sim
ATR 42, ATR 72							
ATR 72-212	458.0		457.9	69.7			
ATR 72-212A	351.1		351.1	43.9			
C-172	623.4	547.9	24.0	100.3	94.7	483.3	
C-172R							
CE-501	3.5				3.5		
EMB-135	32.8		32.8	6.5			
EMB-140	176.7		176.7	36.3			
EMB-145	1023.0		1023.0	164.0			
FTD	50.0				50.0		
PA-18	10.2	1.0			9.2		
PA-28R	58.1	58.1		5.9	7.1	51.0	
PA-44	169.9	161.0		18.6	54.6	31.6	
SR-20	95.6	95.6		4.0	21.2	72.1	
SR-22	5.7	5.7			5.2	0.5	
Total	3058.0	869.3	2065.5	449.2	245.5	638.5	

Save As... Print

Report — Time by Type

LogTen Pro has dispensed entirely with the custom (and FAA-specific) currency tracker that was incorporated into version 2.5 and now uses Smart Groups for everything. It ships with a set of Smart Groups that address landings and instrument currency. For airline pilots, tracking flight- and duty-time limitations is similarly easy; there are Smart Groups for 30-in-7, 100-in-30, and 1000/year that keep you apprised of any limitations you're approaching.

Day

Dynamic Date Range   Fixed Date Range

Flight is in the last: 90   Days

And flight is in the next: 0   Hours

Match   All   of the following criteria.

Landings   Total Ldgs   >=   3   ⊖ ⊕

Landings   Total T/Os   >=   3   ⊖ ⊕

☑ Treat criteria as   Minimums   for the period.

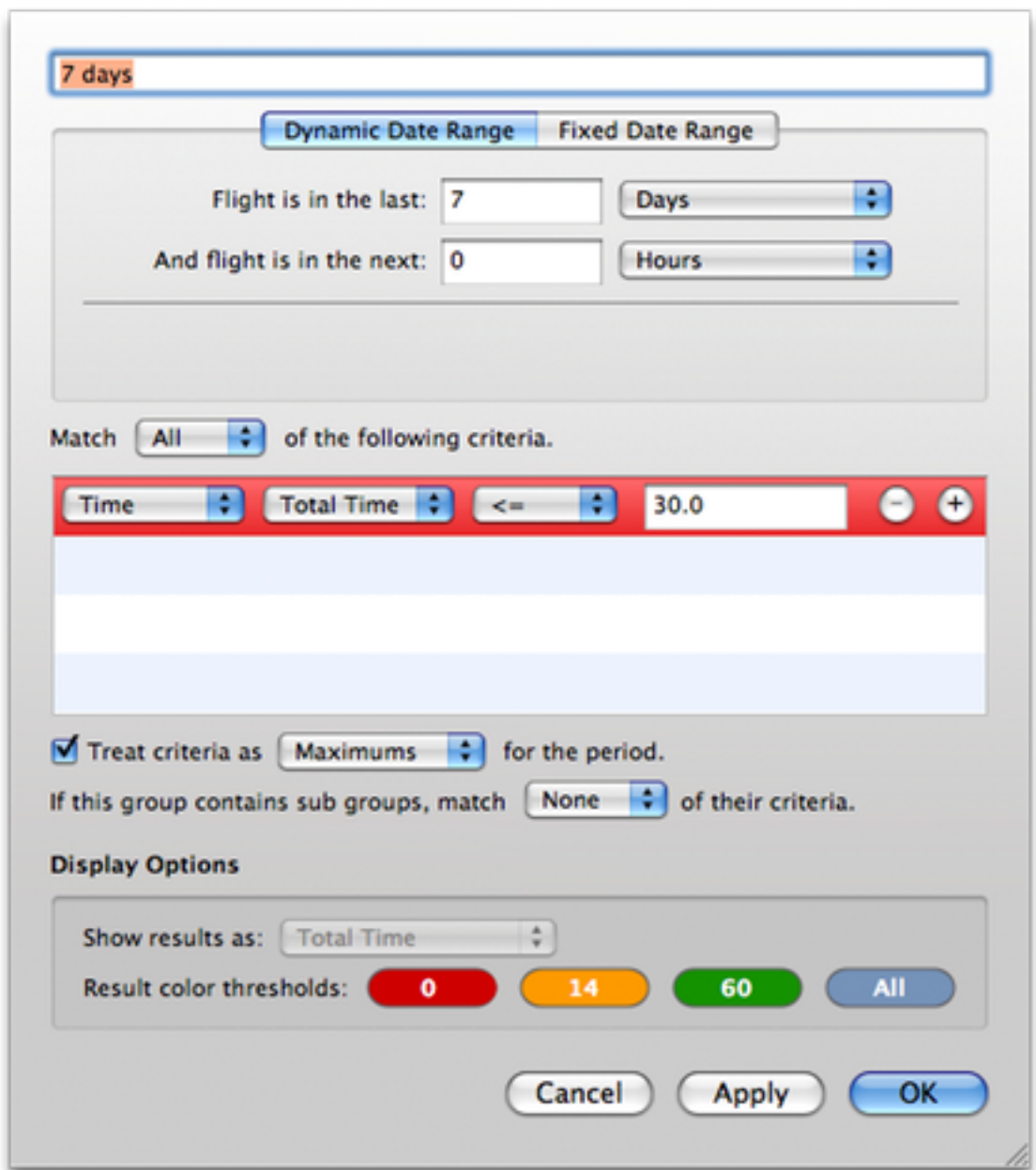If this group contains sub groups, match   None   of their criteria.

Display Options

Show results as: Total Time

Result color thresholds: 0   14   60   All

Cancel   Apply   OK

Smart Group — Day Landings Currency

Smart Group — 30-in-7 Limits

Making custom Smart Groups is easy, too, if you have other needs, and all the default groups can be customized if your regulating authority has different limitations.

Smart Group — Seaplane Time

LogTen Mobile

Accompanying LogTen Pro and making the airline pilot's life even easier is the LogTen Mobile application for the iPhone. While it's primarily useful for airline pilots, I would have found it valuable as an instructor as well. It's easier to carry an iPhone than a Mac, and updating flight times is just a matter of a few taps on the screen no matter what sort of aviating you do.
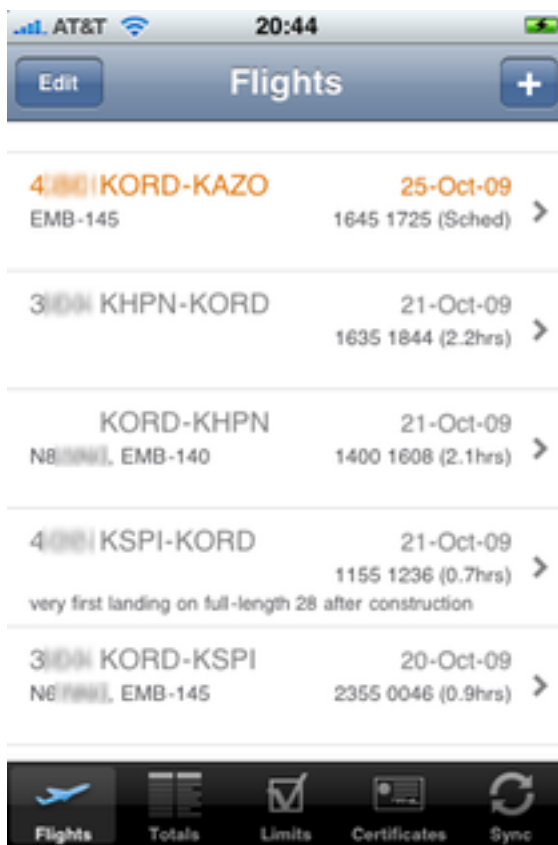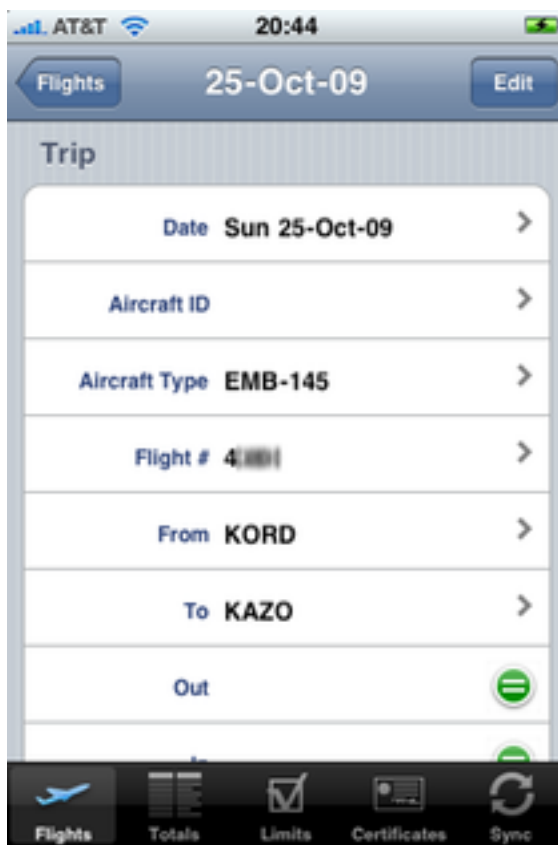
Mobile — Flights View

The main flights view in LogTen Mobile shows your most recent completed flights in grey (the default is the last 20, though you can make this larger at the expense of speed in launching the application on the phone) and future scheduled flights in orange. Tapping on a flight brings up a detail view where you can review and edit the details of a particular flight. The editing isn't as full-featured as it is in the desktop application—you can't manage aircraft, airports, or crewmembers—but it gets the job done, and all the important stuff is covered. You can easily add flights from the phone itself if need be, though I personally greatly prefer adding flights via LogTen Pro and a regular keyboard. (Deleting flights is easy in both applications.)
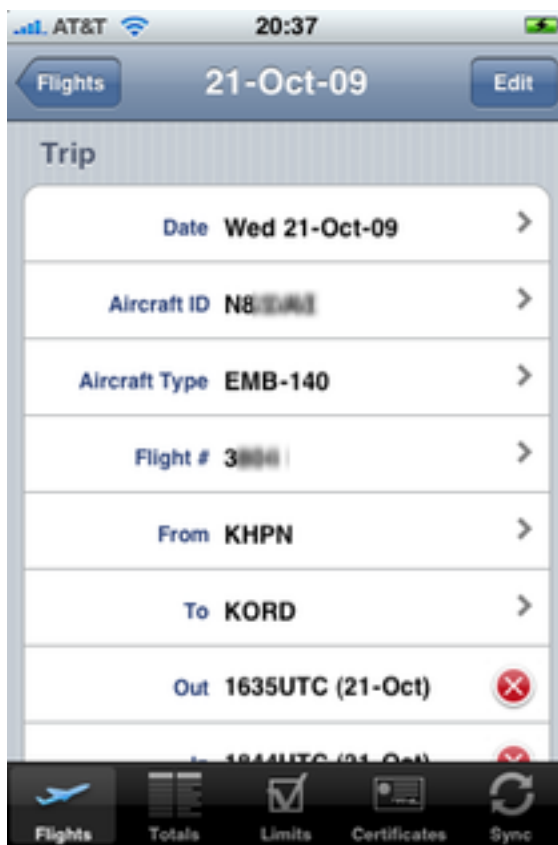
Mobile — Current Flight View

Mobile — Future Flight View

LogTen Mobile also allows you to see, at a glance, a Totals report similar to the résumé report in LogTen Pro, an overview of common duty- and flight-time limitations, and the status of your various pilot, instructor, and medical certificates.
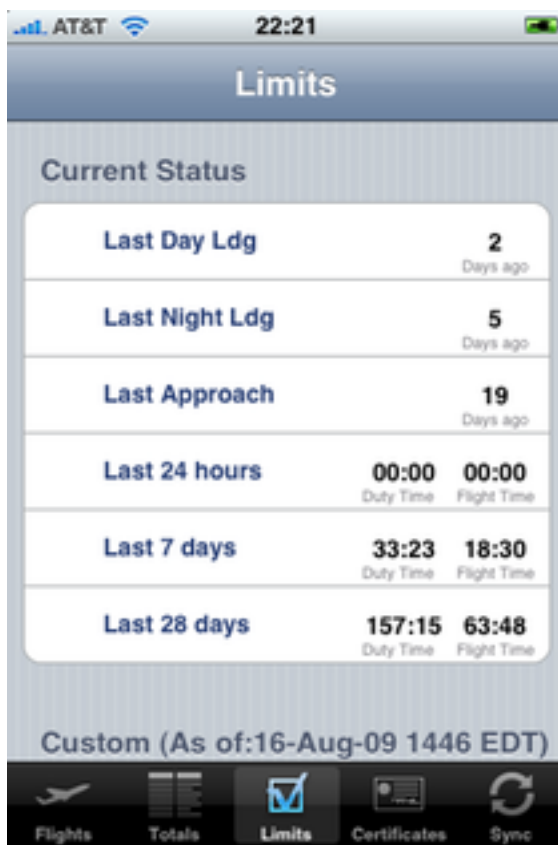
Mobile — Totals View

Mobile — Limits View

Finally, and most importantly, LogTen Mobile supports syncing with LogTen Pro so that the data on both is always current. Syncing is only supported via WiFi (Apple has yet to open up the USB sync API on the iPhone to third-party developers, so the only thing that happens when you connect the iPhone to your Mac is a normal backup of LogTen Mobile's application data), and some users have found WiFi sync to be problematic. I've been using it without issue for several months, however.
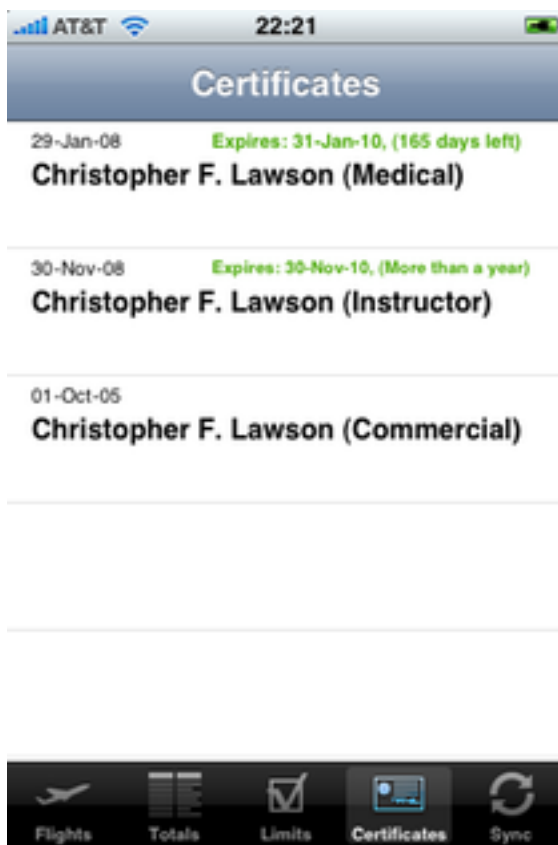
Mobile — Certificates View

Mobile — Syncing

The Bottom Line

The value proposition is pretty much the same as it's always been. Neither LogTen Pro or Mobile is priced to be an "impulse buy," but neither are they too expensive for the abilities they provide. Much has been made of pricing in the App Store, but $40 seems reasonable for an iPhone application primarily targeted at professionals. The $99 price of LogTen Pro is on par with Windows-based logbook software, though still a high price to pay for many instructors (or underpaid regional first officers).

Both applications are good Mac citizens, although the complexity of LogTen Pro has certainly increased dramatically since the last review, and with that complexity has come a marginal decrease in ease of use. First-time users may be somewhat intimidated by the degree of complexity in the application, but the development team has done a good job trying to keep things as simple as possible. Unfortunately, the level of flight experience and the level of comfort with computers don't always correspond, so, paradoxically, new users who are extremely experienced aviators are probably the most likely to struggle with the complexity of the application. This would be a big knock against LogTen if it weren't for the fantastic level of support provided on the company's Web forum. In addition to the official support from the development staff, there's a small community of users who are willing to help out if anyone gets stuck.

For professional pilots, I really can't recommend these two applications highly enough. LogTen Mobile is something the hobbyist or private pilot can certainly do without, but LogTen Pro is a valuable tool for pilots at all levels.

Loop Leather Sleeve

Developer: Rivet
Price: $25
Requirements: iPhone 3G or 3GS (although I'm not sure why an original iPhone wouldn't work); a belt.
Trial: None

Hard cases, soft cases, simple screen protectors, sleeves—iPhone cases come in a mind-numbing variety of shapes and styles. Rivet's Loop is a stylish leather case for those of you who like sleeve cases and enjoy carrying things on your belt.

In stylish reddish-orange and dark grey leather, the Rivet Loop is eye-catching and classy without being loud.

The Loop's white stitching presents a fine contrast to the distressed black and burnt orange-red of the case, which almost looks as if it belongs on the belt of a Texas Longhorns fan.

The Rivet Loop just oozes Texas style.

In the unlikely event that the Loop is too loose, there's a Velcro tab over the opening to hold your iPhone securely in place. I say "unlikely" because the case is quite a snug fit for the phone and, for most people, it's probably going to take several weeks of daily use to break it in. The leather should eventually stretch to be more accommodating, but until it does, retrieving the phone from the Loop is tougher than it should be, and fully inserting the phone into the case is similarly difficult.

This is the view your phone sees just before it's inserted into the sleeve.

The level of protection offered is quite good, though the tightness of the Loop prevents its use as a belt holster for a cased iPhone. About the only secondary protection you'd be able to use is a stick-on screen protector, and even that might start to work its way off after a few trips in and out of the Loop.

These holes appear to be audio ports or liquid drains. They're useless in both departments.

Cut-outs near the top of the case allow for easy access to the silent switch, the power button, and the headphone jack, while the perforations at the bottom allow sound to travel from the speaker and to the microphone. Their inclusion, however, seems to be almost purely stylistic, because I can't imagine how you would carry on a conversation with the phone in the case and the screen completely inaccessible. Yes, you can use the phone as an iPod while in the case with no perceptible loss of fidelity, but I'm not convinced the perforations make any difference, and the screen remains inaccessible.

Only a small portion of the top of the iPhone is exposed when fully inserted into the Loop.

A $25 price tag is on par with other leather cases, so you're getting good value if the Loop appeals to you. I prefer not feeling like a carpenter or a police officer or Batman when I'm walking around, so I'm not a huge fan of the belt-mounted cases. If I were, however, the Rivet Loop is one of the more stylish ones I've seen and would be on my short list. I just wish it didn't require a break-in period to loosen up enough for easy use.

You can insert the iPhone facing outwards, as shown, or inwards. Facing the screen toward your body makes the phone fit slightly better.

ShareTool 1.3.1

Developer: Yazsoft
Price: $20 (one license); $30 (two licenses); $75 (five licenses)—two licenses minimum required for operation.
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9
Trial: Fully-featured (maximum of 15 minutes per session).

The Macintosh's ability to share information with other computers in your home or office is superb. Apple repeatedly touts how simple it is to move files, browse an iTunes library, share printers, and even look at the screens on other computers—provided those computers are on the same local network.

One means of making a remote computer behave as though it is on a local network is through a Virtual Private Network, or VPN. However, creating and using a VPN is not exactly a click-and-forget process, and many services that use Apple's Bonjour sharing will not work through a VPN anyway.

Apple offers a service called Back to My Mac which allows you to connect to your Mac at home from any Internet connection, but it only supports file and screen sharing, and is part of the MobileMe service which costs $100 per year.

Enter ShareTool. For less than a third of the cost of only one year of MobileMe service, ShareTool enables not only file and screen sharing, but essentially any service, including Bonjour, available on the host computer.

Getting started with ShareTool was virtually effortless. The default preferences are acceptable for most people. I only made three adjustments to the preferences: (1) I configured ShareTool to automatically launch and begin sharing mode on my Mac Pro in the event of a restart, (2) I defined a specific port number to use instead of the default random selection, (3) I configured ShareTool with my No-IP.com account to make use of a domain name instead of an IP address.

ShareTool is compatible with three different dynamic DNS services to enable connection by a domain name instead of an IP address.

Dynamic DNS services are typically free if you are willing to use a domain the service provides instead of your own custom domain. Either way, using dynamic DNS means never being unable to connect to the host computer due to the host's IP address changing. Just use the small application provided by the DNS service to update records if the IP changes, and you'll only have to remember the domain name.

I also defined a manual port number because if my computer at home ever shuts down due to an extended power outage and reboots upon power restoration (which I have configured in my Energy System Preferences), the restart would cause ShareTool to select a new

random port number. Although ShareTool can be configured to send an e-mail whenever this information changes, I see little reason to not just use a manually chosen port.

Once any other desired setup adjustments have been made, it takes just a single click to either begin sharing or connect to a computer that is already sharing.

Once configuration, if any, is completed, you're just one click away from sharing or connecting.

ShareTool's hosting status window.

When running in hosting mode, a small window is all that's needed to keep tabs on Share-Tool. The first pane reveals the IP address and port number needed to connect from a remote location. The Address field displays a domain name instead of an IP if a dynamic DNS account was configured, and the Port field displays either the randomly generated port number or the manually specified port number.

The second pane in the hosting status window grants access to all Bonjour services by default. Optionally, you can specify only those services you wish to share.

The third pane serves as a log of remote connections to the host computer.
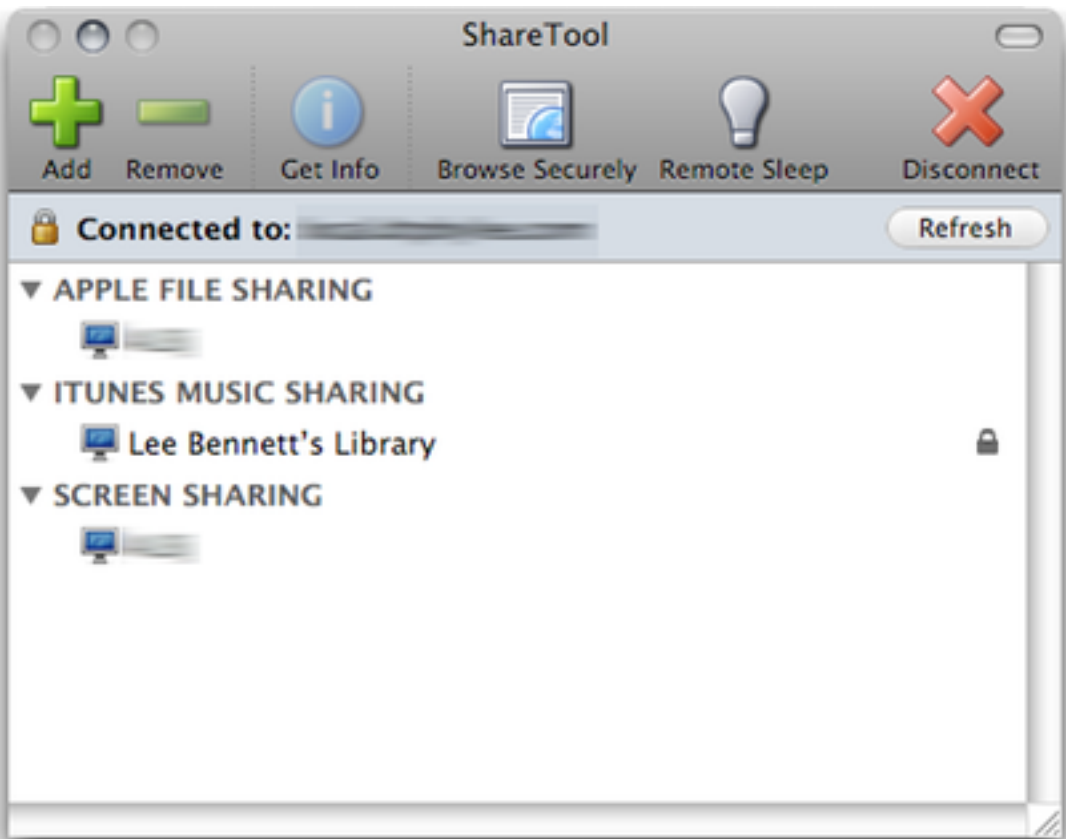
ShareTool's available connections window.

When a remote computer connects to a host, ShareTool displays a window listing most commonly used services that are available from the host. Additional services not listed are available with the Add button in the toolbar. Using a service is as simple as double-clicking the desired service. Alternatively, since ShareTool is designed to make the remote computer behave as if it is on your local network, you'll also find services listed in their usual locations. For example, File Sharing drives will appear in the sidebar in a Finder window, as will the Screen Sharing option. The host computer's iTunes library will appear in the remote computer's iTunes as a shared library that can be streamed, working exactly the same is if you were at home.
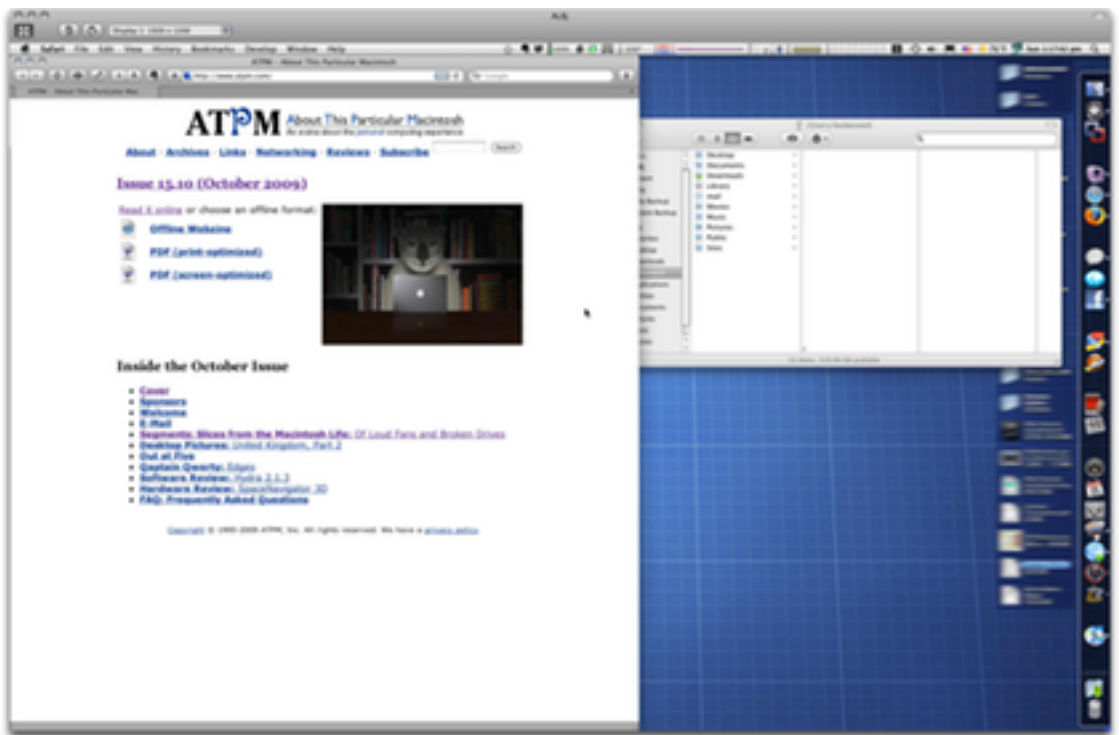
Screen Sharing can normally only be done inside of a local network or by using Apple's MobileMe service. Thanks to ShareTool, I'm accessing my computer at home from my work computer using the Screen Sharing application.
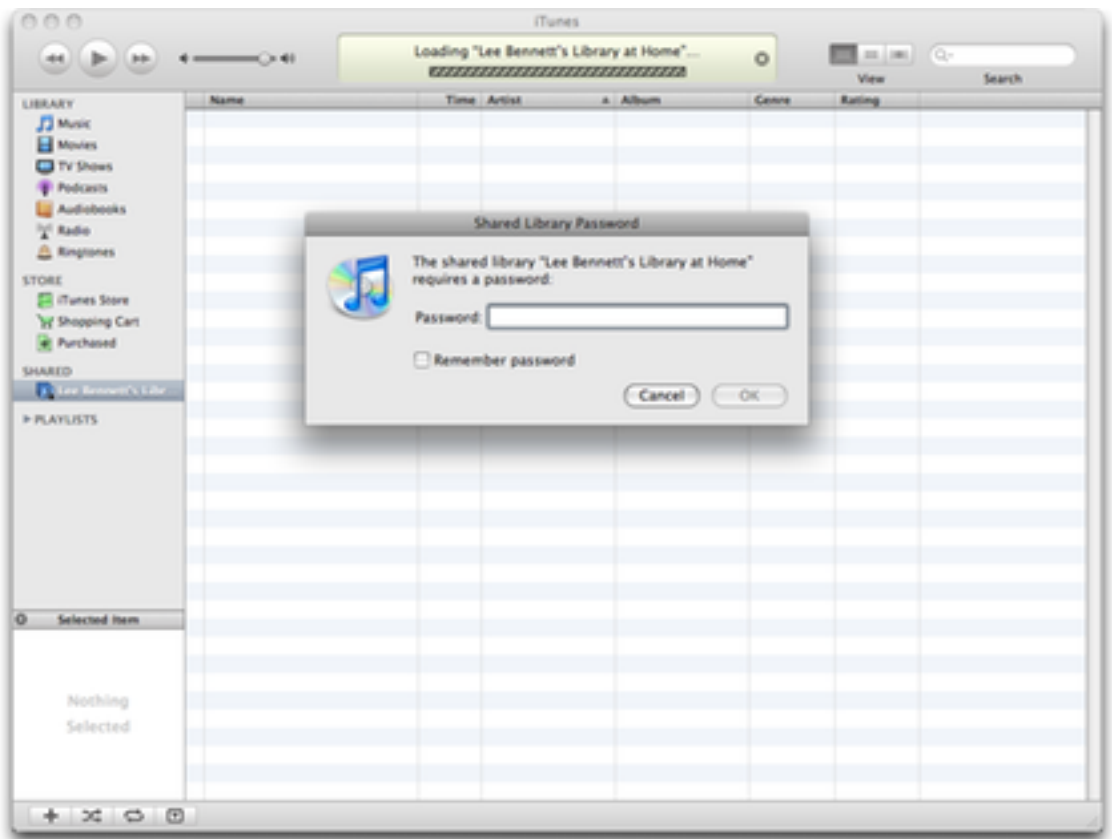
Sharing iTunes libraries outside of a local network apparently frightens Apple since doing so isn't even possible with the $100/year MobileMe service. But with ShareTool, you're just a password away from streaming your music to wherever in the world you happen to be.
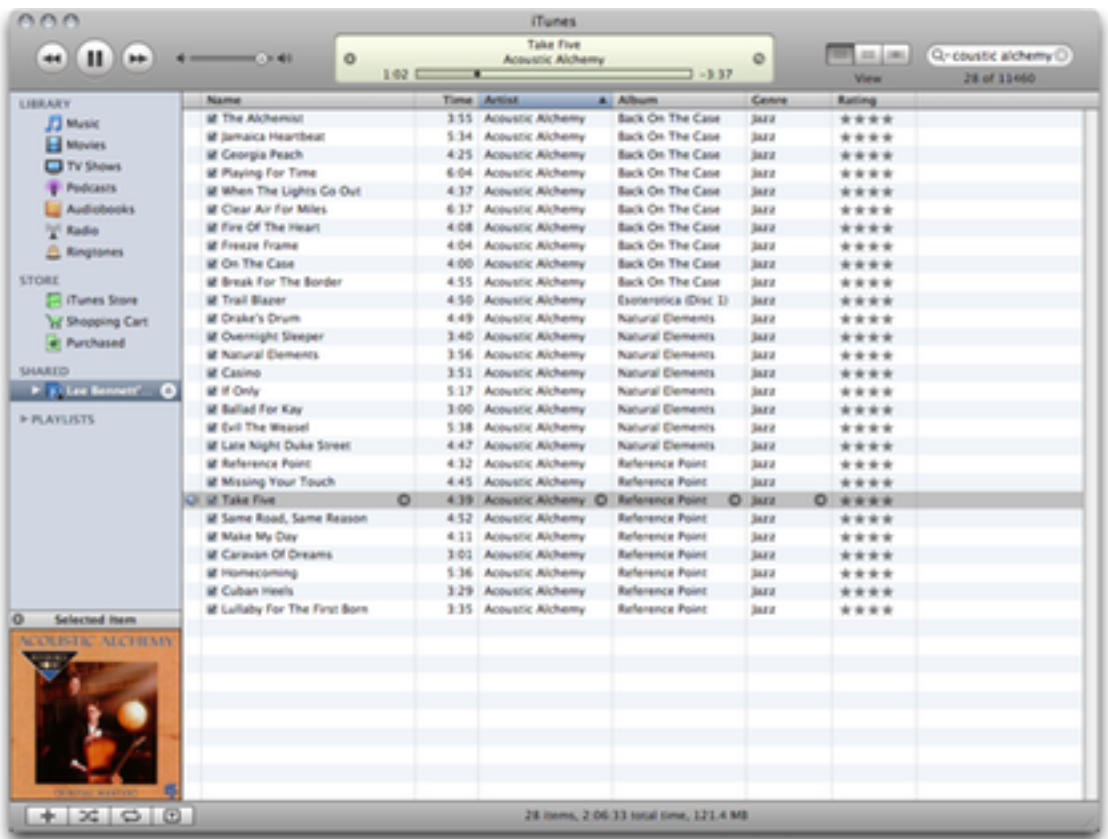
Enjoying a bit of acoustic guitar streamed to my office from my home computer located miles away.

Before you assume you don't need ShareTool because you already have a Virtual Private Network set up and running, bear in mind that many Bonjour services will not work through a VPN connection. Even though a VPN duplicates the task of bringing a remote computer into a local network, ShareTool can pick up the slack by enabling Bonjour services through that VPN.

There are really no caveats to speak of in using ShareTool that I could find. True, a little bit of knowledge about networking is helpful, but generally not required as long as a newer router that supports Universal Plug-n-Play is at the host location. In my case, I could only access my home computer from work. Even though the routers at my office are new, the computer services staff intentionally don't allow them to host UPnP services and I'm not likely to be granted an exception. Some have written that ShareTool isn't much different from MobileMe's Back to My Mac service, but I disagree. ShareTool opens virtually all Bonjour services, unlike MobileMe which only opens file and screen sharing. Plus, ShareTool is just a one-time cost of $30 for two licenses, compared to $100 per year for MobileMe. Lastly, even though ShareTool can be used over a modem connection, a high-speed connection is strongly advised.

Though I can't speculate as to what Yazsoft is planning for the future of ShareTool, one thing I'm certain I would jump at is an iPhone application for access to my home computer. I've written myself plenty of to-dos in various forms via my iPhone to remind me I need to e-mail something to someone when I returned home. Imagine instead tapping into the home computer's screen through the iPhone and setting up an e-mail attachment on the spot! Yes, even though it might be a little cumbersome, it could work. I use a Windows Remote Desktop application on my iPhone on a regular basis, so I see no reason why a Mac version would be any different.

Furthermore, I'd thrill to be able to stream anything from my iTunes library to the phone, even if it came with a Wi-Fi-only caveat. I'd suddenly have a *lot* more than 16 GB of music in my pocket! Alas, Apple has demonstrated on more than one occasion that the company doesn't intend for us to stream our libraries outside of a LAN. There may not be a lot they can do to prevent ShareTool from doing this from one Mac to another, but I would wager any iPhone application that tried to do this would be denied. Ultimately, the question is, would Yazsoft be up to the task of giving it a shot?

Voyager Q

Developer: NewerTech
Price: $90
Requirements: 2.5″ or 3.5″ SATA hard drive; computer with USB, FireWire, or eSATA.
Trial: None

I have so many disk drives, I cannot keep track of them anymore. In part, that has happened because I have become cautious about backups, maintaining two complete cloned drives (thanks to SuperDuper!) plus important files on Time Machine, Spider Oak (an offsite service), and Apple Backup, just to be thorough in the event of disaster. In part, it has also been necessitated by an increasingly large collection of media files (legally obtained), because I switched to lossless ripping for iTunes. Furthermore, I have upgraded my internal drive in my MacBook Pro, which is very easy with the unibody model, leaving me with a handful of homeless drives. I am not alone. As storage prices decrease continually, storage needs increase exponentially. (There should be an aphorism for that phenomenon.)

Previously, I used the excellent enclosures from Other World Computing, which are sturdy, stylish, and just small enough to be plausibly deemed portable. However, they are not especially cheap. There are other enclosures available, but I tried one that displayed poor build quality. There are some awful options on sale.

Accordingly, I was pleased to see the NewerTech Voyager Q drive dock (distributed by Other World Computing). It is one of many devices of this specialized type, allowing a user to swap multiple drives as needed. It accepts both 2.5″ and 3.5″ SATA drives. The lid has a cut-out for the smaller drive size, assisting in holding it in place. The cut-out folds down and out of the way, with a spring-loaded mechanism, for the larger drive size. A moment's glance into the unit allows the user to position the drive appropriately to slide in; it takes less than two seconds. It is held in by friction; there are no fasteners.

External power is required, and a "wall wart" adapter is included. The ports include eSATA, FireWire 800, FireWire 400, and USB 2.0. (A much cheaper model, priced at $40, has only eSATA and USB 2.0, but otherwise appears identical.) Like any other FireWire device, the Voyager can be daisy-chained. A lever on the faceplate ejects the drive. A power button lights up and indicates activity. Construction feels above average, solid, and sturdy. There are four little rubber feet to prevent sliding around. All required cables are included in the package.

There are various bundles available, pairing the dock itself with different drive choices. I bought two Voyager Qs, each with a 1 TB Hitachi Deskstar drive. The Drive Dock is also available naked, sans hard drive.

Although some people have reported that the Voyager Q suffers from issues with Mac compatibility, I experienced no problems of that nature in more than six weeks of moderate usage. It was all plug and play. My laptops recognized the drives quickly. They interacted without any glitches. The Voyager Q stayed cool and quiet. (If you remove the drive quickly, you can still feel the centrifugal forces of the platters spinning.) I did not test read/write speeds. They seemed on par with ready-made portable drives connected by the same means.

I also considered the Data Robotics Drobo hard drive enclosure, which has four bays and pseudo-RAID capability. But it only takes the larger size of drives and is pricey. There also are some similar appliances that have only USB connections. They are from lesser-known manufacturers, though.

My only concern is of another nature, which arises with every innovation of this type, allowing the use of technology in a manner for which it was not designed. The very point of this product is to have a single unit operating with multiple drives, and this almost certainly increases wear and tear over what manufacturers anticipated and designed for. While I do my best to store the naked drives carefully, just having them exposed is not likely ideal, and, beyond that, the connectors must experience more connecting and disconnecting than they would if they were installed into a permanent enclosure.

If you have significant storage demands, the Voyager Q is a worthwhile investment. It can replace a desktop drive, even though it cannot replace a portable drive—I did once use it in a car, when I had to boot up from a cloned drive while my MacBook was in the shop, which I do not recommend. If you plan with care, you can create a system that can grow along with your storage needs. The cost of a Voyager Q and one drive is higher than that of a comparable conventional drive, but a single Voyager Q and several drives will be cheaper than a collection of comparable conventional drives, at any capacity. As a reference point, the OWC Mercury plastic enclosure, with FireWire 800 and USB 2.0 connections, retails for $80.

The Voyager Q is thus highly recommended.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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About This Particular Macintosh (ATPM) is, among other things, a monthly Internet magazine or "e-zine." ATPM was created to celebrate the personal computing experience. For us this means the most personal of all personal computers—the Apple Macintosh. About This Particular Macintosh is intended to be about your Macintosh, our Macintoshes, and the creative, personal ideas and experiences of everyone who uses a Mac. We hope that we will continue to be faithful to our mission.

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