ATPM

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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the March issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We move into the month of March following record-setting winter storms in February. This month we say goodbye to winter and look forward with optimism to the annual renewal of spring.

No matter February's series of harsh winter storms and the dark economic clouds moving across the horizon, 2010 will be a year of record-setting revenue and earnings for the maker of Macs, iPhones, and the soon-to-be-released iPad. We begin this month's issue with a quick look at all things Apple.

The iPad

Even before its debut later this month, the iPad is already a factor in the fast-growing e-book market. Amazon.com, with its Kindle e-book reader, was the undisputed leader in e-book sales. To support sales of the Kindle, Amazon insisted publishers provide content in e-books for under the wholesale model. Amazon would take a 50% cut of the predominant $9.99 price for e-books, insisting on this price point as a means to push sales of the Kindle.

In preparing for the release of the iPad, Apple has been offering e-book publishers an agency model similar to the terms Apple offers as a distributor of music and apps. Apple's take of the retail price is 30%, and publishers are allowed influence in determining the price at which e-books would be offered to customers.

The iPad starts at $499 versus $489 for the more expensive version of the Kindle, known as the Kindle DX. Both the iPad and the Kindle DX have 9.7-inch displays. The iPad, however, comes with an LED-backlit color display and multi-touch functionality for moving between pages. The more than 150,000 iPhone OS apps available for the Apple iPad are also a sales draw for e-book reader customers.

To-date Amazon has shipped a bit over 3 million Kindles. Apple may sell at least that many iPads in the final six months of the company's fiscal year, which ends in September 2010. Watch for the iPad to offer real competition in the e-book sales market in the same way the iPod touch has transformed the way consumers purchase and enjoy games for handheld devices.

Tim Cook in the Spotlight

At this year's Goldman Sachs Technology & Internet Conference, Apple Chief Operating Officer represented the company and offered insights into Apple's product strategies. Tim Cook stood at the helm of the company during the leave of absence taken by CEO and co-founder Steve Jobs last year.

According to Tim Cook, Macintosh market growth doesn't depend on PC industry growth. It depends on people switching to the Mac from Windows PCs. Over the past five years

and over 20 of the last 21 calendar quarters, Mac unit sales growth has outpaced the growth of the PC market as a whole. Mr. Cook also stated that growing the developer base for the iPhone OS has a direct and positive impact on the rate of growth in iPhone OS–equipped device sales.

During 2010, Apple intends to open as many as 50 new retail stores. After slowing the pace of new store openings during 2008 and 2009 due to the slowing economy, the company is returning to a faster pace of new store openings due in part to the attractive leasing properties available because of the recession.

Perhaps the most insightful comment concerned the number of products Apple currently ships. He noted that in the company's most recent fiscal year Apple reported revenue in its retrospective financial reports of over $42 billion. Although the company's revenue has more than tripled over the past four fiscal years, the number of hardware products the company sells could fit on the table used by those conducting the day's interview. In his view, Apple's goal isn't to make the most products. Apple's goal is to make the best products.

$40 Billion and Counting...

At Apple's annual meeting for shareholders held in late February, much attention was paid to Apple's substantial holdings of cash and marketable investments now reaching $40 billion. To manage the company's cash assets, Apple incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary named Braeburn Capital that oversees and invests the dollars.

The company's large cash position could be used for a number of purposes including acquisitions, share repurchases, or even the establishment of a regular cash dividend to shareholders. For now, the company is holding tight, allowing the cash position to build by the quarter for possible use at later dates. Over the past few years, Apple has used cash in small amounts relative to the size of its holdings for the purchase of companies such as PA Semi and more recently the purchases of Quattro Wireless and LaLa Media.

At the annual meeting, Apple CEO Steve Jobs stated that the cash holdings would most likely not be used at this time for shareholders dividends or share repurchases, but he did not rule out the use of cash for large acquisitions should opportunities arise.

Our March Issue

Each month, the editors of ATPM endeavor to provide our readers with informative and thought provoking content designed to enhance understanding of today's world of digital devices. As the calendar moves from winter to spring, we look forward to continuing our monthly chronicle of the personal computing experience.

Our March issue includes:

Bloggable: Burn Down the Mission

Wes Meltzer returns to share what the blogosphere has to say about the iPad.

MacMuser: iPad mini
Mark Tennent believes size is everything when it comes to the iPad.

MacMuser: He, the Usurper, Must Choose
Mark Tennent hits a snag about choosing Mac.

How To: Making Your Mac as Smart as Its Owner
Your Mac is already pretty smart but mastering these features might make it smarter.

Desktop Pictures: New England
Christopher Turner shares another batch of photos of a trip to New England in May 2006.

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: BusyCal 1.2
Frank Wu is impressed with BusyCal—colloquially referred to as "iCal Pro."

Review: Flickit Pro 2.0
This new iPhone application for mobile access to a Flickr account had ambitious aspirations, but is in need of some polishing from having missed the bullseye on many included features.

Review: P-Flip
A functional external battery-pack-slash-desk-stand—as long as you don't use a case—that's twice as expensive as it ought to be.

Review: U-Pouch
As if in answer to Chris Lawson's P-Flip review, the U-Pouch is a case that's twice as expensive as it ought to be and hardly as useful as any case should be.

E-Mail

My First Mac

I saw an Apple][in 1979, not long after I bought my first computer, a Radio Shack TRS-80. Within a week, I became an Apple user, and have remained so ever since. I still have my first Mac, the 1984 machine that boasted 128K of RAM, and have—model by model—kept up as best I could. My current Mac is a 24″ iMac from last year, and I wouldn't trade it for the most hyped-up PC. Unfortunately, a job I have been working on for the past five years requires me to use Windows, but only because the people I am doing this for can't handle anything else. Of course, I run that platform on my Mac, but it is still painfully awkward by comparison.

I recall how, in the beginning, computer magazines printed program code that one had to spend a long time entering before running (usually a game), but it was educational. One saw a program's guts and learned how to modify it. Upgrading to 32K was heaven. Yes, I said *K!* It was also a thrill to install a chip that gave my characters true descenders, and a CP/M card that took my text lines past the 40-character limit. I wish I could include a couple of photos from those days.

—Chris Albertson

OmniFocus, TaskPaper, and Things

Brad Hutchins is uncertain as to whether he will prefer Pocket Informant or OmniFocus.

I use both of them. Pocket Informant on the iPhone gives a calendar with tasks included. OmniFocus on the Mac gives tasks that syncs through MobileMe with the other Mac I'm using + OmniFocus on iPhone. Also it keeps my preferred Mac calendar, BusyCal, updated with tasks.

There's no major problems with the calendars themselves; they sync through Google Calendar.

But since there's no way to sync between OmniFocus's actions and Informant's tasks, I have to keep them "in sync" manually. I would really hope for Omni Group and WebIS to develop a sync between the two great applications, a sync that both applications would benefit from.

I think the best sync option would be through MobileMe or [when made possible by an iPhone OS update] directly between OmniFocus for iPhone and Informant.

—Per RØnne

Your Own Additions to the Services Menu

Up to this point I have not upgraded to Snow Leopard. As a user of services regularly, this has sold me that I need to get the lead out and upgrade.

—Heather Isaacson

Using Activity Monitor

Just wanted to clarify the term Inactive Memory:

Your explanation of Inactive Memory being "already cached to disk" seems to suggest that this memory has been stored in the pagefile. It's actually the other way around—inactive memory is disk data (i.e. files/applications) that's been cached in RAM so that if you re-open them or if an application needs to re-read data from a file, it will be much faster.

In general, files will remain in this "disk cache"/"inactive memory" to the point of filling all Free memory, and when your applications need more memory, the files in the disk cache are cleared to make space.

This can cause some people to believe that they don't have enough RAM (since after, say, looking through their photos in iPhoto, they have almost no free memory), even though Mac OS X is just using the Free memory to speed up their disk access.

Programs like iFreeMem (as suggested by John Wylie) are not always useful—most of the time Mac OS X does intelligent things with its disk cache (inactive memory) and after you "free" your memory using iFreeMem you'll notice that everything runs quite slowly for 10–60 seconds while a lot of files are re-read from the disk and put back into the cache.

"Freeing" your memory like this is only useful if:

a) Mac OS X is mistakenly caching too much (I think a bug existed in 10.5 where it would allow the disk cache to grow too large and have to swap data to the pagefile!—seems to have been fixed in 10.6), or;

b) If you're doing something like processing a very large number of files (e.g. batch processing images in Aperture/iPhoto) and the disk cache is keeping every file in memory (despite the fact that they're accessed only once each)—the only real problem with this is that there's a time delay in clearing space from memory, and it seems to be faster to do it all at once (with iFreeMem or similar) than having OS X clear a small amount of space for each file as it's read in.

—Andrew Hill

And the Winner Is…Who Cares?

I see Chrome is only supported on Macs using Intel processors. I'm sure there are a large number of users like myself that have both Intel- and PowerPC-based Macs running on their home network. I've got a MacBook, two G5s, and a maxed out G4, plus the hand helds running on the network. Now, I've got to keep the older stuff current on Mac OS X 10.5.8, and run Snow Leopard on the Intel stuff. Great. It was nice to read about the early days. I remember playing with HyperCard back in 1995.

—Grover Watson

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.*

Burn Down the Mission

No, Virginia, there is no Santa Claus! There is no Easter Bunny or Tooth Fairy either. All of these things are mythical inventions of adults just to keep you dumb, fat, and lazy.

Or at least that's how I feel whenever the latest big Apple keynote comes around. *Most* of us enjoy oooohing and aaaahing about the product. In fact, most North American newspapers put up a photo of the device or of Steve Jobs holding it when these things happen.

(In fact, I remember vividly reading *USA Today* in the Detroit airport with my dad in October 2001 and being really fascinated by this new-fangled iPod device that played MP3s.)

So I wasn't surprised to see similar hype in January. It was the day of the State of the Union, but frankly you might not have known that from looking at newspaper front pages: very nearly every US newspaper played Steve Jobs as big as or bigger than the president of the United States of America!

First, a Little Analysis

This is the first piece of technology in a long time that my grandparents have asked me about before it was already passé. I could see my grandmother (who struggles with the basics of computing) using an iPad without any trouble at all. She's already figured out my grandfather's iPhone.

I've often wondered who the target audience for a tablet device would be, and the answer seems to be, not me. I have a work-issued MacBook Pro, a white MacBook at home, an itty-bitty red Eee PC 10″ netbook with Ubuntu for traveling light, and an iPhone if I'm *really* traveling light. But my job is to interact with several suites of enterprise software which were designed to be used with keyboard and mouse over Citrix, so I accept that I'm unusual.

So if you're my dad, who already uses a tablet PC at work to fill out PDF forms, or my grandparents who use a computer to e-mail and keep photos of their grandchildren and travel, maybe the iPad is that transformational device that makes "computing" a misnomer.

The beauty of the iPhone OS—and before it, the iPod OS—is that for non-technical users it reduces the UI to almost nothing and makes content primary. So my mom and gran may find even iPhoto to be pretty befuddling, with all those damn buttons and settings, but they don't have any trouble looking through photos on the iPhone.

Bottom line is, the baseline iPhone OS was never designed for people like me, or you, dear reader, who is currently wasting his or her time reading my column. That's what the third-party apps are for. My iPhone has four pages of apps, including one with only travel apps

for when I'm on the road for work, and my mom barely cracks the second page with the Facebook application my sister helped her install and the like.

I've learned to use a piece of software with three different sets of keyboard commands depending on what *mode* I'm in (and I don't mean vim!), but for most people, flipping back and forth between photos or sending basic e-mails is what their computer is all about. *Not* "computing," per se, but just plain old "storing and browsing content."

Steven Frank (that Steven Frank) makes the point in a much more concise way than I ever could, using an auto transmission analogy (yes, I know, the obligatory car analogy):

> When I learned to drive, my dad insisted that I learn on a manual transmission so I would be able to drive any car. I think this was a wise and valuable thing to do.
>
> But even having learned it, these days I drive an automatic. Nothing is black and white—I sacrifice maybe a tiny amount of fuel efficiency and a certain amount of control over my car in adverse situations that I generally never encounter. In exchange, my brain is freed up to focus on the the road ahead, getting where I'm going, and avoiding obstacles (strategy), not the minutiae of choosing the best possible gear ratio (tactics).

To me, that's the iPad in a nutshell. It's not an overgrown iPhone, even if it looks like one. It's a computer with all the complexity of a desktop computer boiled out of it.

Back to Our Regularly Scheduled Programming

While everyone else in the Union was raving about the iPad, there was a hurricane brewing over Flash on the iPhone OS. You see, it's one thing for your cell phone not to support Flash (although I'm tired of wailing about that too)—but I guess because the iPad is computer-sized it's a whole new debate.

So here's where we begin with this tempest in a teapot: the next morning Adobe Flash "Platform Evangelist" Lee Brimelow posted a series of (faked) screen shots showing Web sites that won't work with the iPad because they use Flash. It's, oh, 10 sites, varying from "very prominent" (Disney, Hulu) to "in poor taste" (a porn site), and he's blocked out the content item or items with the "missing plug-in" icon from Mac OS X.

What we've been debating for the last month is Brimelow's assertion in its broadest strokes: that, as long as the iPad doesn't support Flash, it's not really a true Web browsing experience.

But I thought it was worth noting that Ryan Cooley, a blogger/tech geek in Las Vegas, put together an illustration showing what's missing from *most* Web sites when the Flash goes vacant: ads. And also noteworthy: many of the Web sites Brimelow cited have mobile versions that are either (a) mobile-friendly or (b) encode their video as H.264 or Quicktime rather than in Flash so they *can* be used on an iPhone/iPad.

So we're off to the races! You all know the old joke about there being three types of people in the world, those who can count and those who can't, so let's take this in two parts: (1) What's the deal if the iPad doesn't support Flash?; (2) Are there technical reasons not to support Flash on a mobile device?

Is It Such an Issue If the iPad Doesn't Support Flash?

Ryan Cooley's got a point: Flash isn't exactly the Internet's Great Wall of China, the only thing standing between the Web and barbarism. To folks in this camp, it's more Maginot Line than Great Wall, a large fortification that only benefits you if you're stuck in the past.

I think Jeff Zeldman encapsulates this line of argument best. He writes, on his personal blog, about how Flash was a terrific solution to the dreadful state of Web development a decade ago. But in the time since then, we've had a big move to more semantic development in which the content comes first and the presentation second...without Flash. In essence, he's arguing that Flash is good for presentation but shouldn't dictate the underlying content structure the way it does in some of these examples from Brimelow.

Zeldman makes the same point that I made earlier in this very column, that the next generation of computer operating systems are going to make the leap from command line to desktop OS look like a walk in the park. They're sometimes customizable at the surface level, like the iPhone or Palm Pre with downloadable apps, but even the amount of hackery it was possible to do with my old Windows Mobile 5 phone is pretty much gone. And in its place is a lot of polish and a lot of UI simplification. That means that anything relatively low-level (to the average user, anyway) like a browser plug-in is on its way out.

There's an effort under way that Zeldman writes about, the big HTML5 push, which would support natively embedded video and interactive content without plug-ins. Right now, it's virtually impossible to do this without a plug-in, in which event it might as well be Flash. (Almost everyone with a desktop computer has Flash!)

But between the burgeoning HTML5 standard, Ajax, and the judicious use of JavaScript it's possible to accomplish very nearly everything you can do in Flash without damaging usability. Flash is still great for a lot of things (so far that I know, no one's written (yet) an HTML5 data charting library), but it's at its best when it's used to enhance a semantic UI rather than to reinvent the wheel.

Even Adobe makes a version of this argument. John Nack, the Photoshop Guy but also one of the company's most public and most honest online faces, observes that Adobe is in the business of "helping people communicate." What he means is that Flash was designed to fill a specific gap in the Internet ecology, but that the future isn't and doesn't have to be about Flash. Now, he thinks that Adobe will find that niche and not someone else, and given their resources Nack may well be right. But the broader point is that the Internet will survive without Flash.

I wonder how well some see this. For instance, Joe Balderson, a Flash developer, thinks that Apple is doing this so *they* have control over the platform. There may be a component

to this (he suggests it's [about the App Store](#)), but I see no reason Adobe or Apple couldn't pioneer a method to encapsulate a standalone Flash application on the iPhone just like Adobe Air. Then it could be sold in the App Store through the same (vaguely insane) process as Objective-C applications.

It's worth taking into account Balderson's broader argument that Flash is basically inextricable from the Internet. There are some places where this is certainly true: charting in Flash is bad enough (charts are the best thing about Flex!) but the idea of implementing a dynamic charting library with nothing but Ajax, big emphasis on the J, makes my head hurt. It would also in all likelihood be almost as slow as the Flash Player.

But at the same time, I think Flash is at its best when it's used to alter the presentation of content or to add content, and at its worst when it provides the UI or wraps the content in such a way that it's impossible to access it except in Flash. For instance, copy and paste is pretty much critical to me compiling this column, and has been the aid of every under-skilled hack like me since it became possible to get text as digital data. Unless a Flash application has its own method for copy and paste, I can't get at any text or links encapsulated in a Flash application. If Balderson's blog were implemented in Flash, I would have no practical way of quoting him!

Michael Heilemann, a UI designer and Web developer, really hits the nail on the head. In an article about the technical limitations of Flash in terms of the tablet interface (what's a click? what's a hover? what's a drag?) he makes what I think is the most salient point in this group: in computing, the future of hardware is proprietary and [the future of software is open](#).

To me this is just right. Think of this like an old-fashioned POTS phone network. Anybody can build a phone, and innovate on features, because there's an open standard everyone has to use when it comes to voice communication over copper wires. (I know it's a little more complex than this, because that standard is government-mandated and enforced, but so is road-building, people, and I don't hear any wailing about that. Yet.)

For all the things that have gone wrong since *United States vs. AT&T* in 1982 and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, there's no question that the independence of network operator (the software, in this analogy) and hardware vendor led to a lot of cool features. You can get caller ID notification on your TV, have an outgoing answering machine recordings, etc.

And open standards on the Internet have the same sort of effect. If the future is in Flash, then Adobe is going to tell us what's next...and if the future is in open standards, we'll find out organically when we get there.

Apple Is Better Off Not Supporting Flash

There are those who will tell you that Apple would do well not to hitch their wagon to Adobe, and that the iPad is better off without it. These are not technical evangelists (see

above section) but Rooseveltian pragmatists who have used Flash on other mobile platforms and on their desktop computers and don't want it there for one reason or another.

A quick round-up:

- Morgan Adams, a Flash developer, suggests that in a touch-based UI it's very difficult to discern the difference between different kinds of clicks. And of course, Flash relies very heavily on these differences!

- Robert Scoble points out, from a pragmatist's perspective, the spread of HTML5 technologies means that support for Flash in its current incarnations will probably become optional. Adobe's best hope is an innovation above and beyond what it does now, which HTML5 intends to replace. He imagines, in broad strokes, a world where HTML5 is the baseline and Flash the add-on for additional, better experience.

- The *LA Times'* Mark Milian notes that the challenge for Apple is that the future may be without Flash, but they run the risk, he says, of alienating the present. He quotes Adobe's Adrian Ludwig as saying that "HTML5 is probably going to be around standardization in, maybe, 10 years"—an eternity. Ludwig has a vested interest in saying that, but even if it's 4–5 years, that would relegate the iPad to the same niche as the iPhone, of a device that is a slave to the master computer, rather than the primary user device Apple seems to imagine it could be.

- Even Adobe acknowledges that its performance on mobile devices is, at best, bad. Since Apple prides themselves on the performance and battery life of the iPad (it has a new, Apple-driven CPU in it!) I don't think they're going to burn up the iPad's battery or drive down its perceived performance with Flash. I mean, even light Flash use tends to drive the CPU in my work-issued 2.4 GHz Core 2 Duo MacBook Pro up to near 100% and eat up all its battery time. It even makes my work PC, an old Dell GX280, emit an audible whine! (What a piece of crap that computer is.) Let's fix that before we ruin the mobile platform.

You may have also heard that there's going to be a Flash Player for Android and Windows Phone 7 (this is unofficial, but I'm hearing it will not be coming to Windows Mobile 6.5, just Windows Phone 7).

So the big question is, will enough people buy these Windows Phone and Android devices to outweigh Apple's holdout status?

In Other News...

A good hack never writes a transition. He just puts in a lead-in like that!

- While we're on the subject of the iPad, Mario García, the newspaper design/redesign guru, imagines the future of the media industry in the iPad infrastructure. Frankly,

a lot of us expected more from the *New York Times* demo than an iPad-ized Times Reader, and the fact that they refuse to give up their lovely-in-print custom weights of Cheltenham makes my eyeballs hurt. (Cheltenham is beautiful in print, even if it is impossible to read in all caps. But on screen, it's criminal.) García imagines what the *NYT* couldn't bother to do: invent a world where you click on an article, authorize a dime to the content provider, and then read it.

Apple has the best infrastructure for seamless micropayments on the Internet, as he points out, and even if Apple only passed 5–7 cents to the provider, it would keep at least a little of the cost burden of reading a periodical (pointed not calling them newspapers) on the reader. Let's imagine a hypothetical: I currently pay a buck six days a week to read the Daily Paper on the rack. With the iPad, if the Daily Paper gave me a quota each day of 10 free articles and then charged 10 cents, I would be able to read 20 articles for the price of the daily paper (or 15 in Chicago, say, where the *Sun-Times* and *Tribune* are only 50¢). That's about how much of the newspaper I read each day. Anything less and I'm ahead; anything more and the Daily Paper is ahead. It's a game that virtually demands that media companies compete on value and content, and one where I think almost everyone wins. (And where the losers probably weren't putting good content in print either!)

Let's extend this hypothetical a little further. Newspaper surveys consistently say that most print readers buy the Sunday paper *for the ads!* (And for the weekly TV listings.) A media company could produce a weekly all-advertising section for the iPad, charge 50 cents for that with the ability to clip coupons, and give all the rest of your content away for free on Sundays—and probably make money.

Worth considering, since a lot of the pre-announcement iPad hype was about its impact on the media.

- Did you wonder after the announcement how any other company will compete with the iPad, having seen it? Matt Gemmell tries to imagine what that conversation would be like:

    > Your usual tactic is to simply copy the industrial design of the most successful product, reduce the price, then adopt a pump and dump strategy until your next quarterly financials... [but] I think you might be on a dead-end track without even realising it.

- Brent Simmons writes NetNewsWire for iPhone (and Mac). He blogged all about his transition from using Core Data to writing straight SQLite queries in the next version of NetNewsWire. If you're a SQL lover like me or a programming geek, I think his experience is really worth reading.

- John Gruber (you knew I couldn't write a column without the Macosphere's most prolific blogger) is off to the races about the controversy over "sexy" apps on the iPhone. Did you know there was a controversy? I didn't until last Thursday. Apparently there are still apps in the near-porn mode for the iPhone, but only from established vendors.

So this has, in Gruber's words, "unsettled" a lot of developers. I can see that. At the same time, I think maybe some faint sound of the siren of doubt should have gone off in their heads to suggest that Apple would not allow girls in bikinis (or, to be fair, dudes in swimsuits) forever.

And that concludes this month's almost all iPad/iPhone-related edition of *Bloggable.* Hope you can dig yourself out of snow in time for next month!

iPad mini

Size isn't everything, as many men have been reassured. (Or so I have been informed.) They might get a sneaking feeling that perhaps they have been let down in some area, and maybe dimensions and pleasure have something to do with it.

Back in two thousand and something, my kids bought me a early generation iPod. In reality, a 20 GB FireWire hard drive with a small but usable LCD screen and an innovative operating system. All tucked inside a stainless-steel case heavy enough to beat off the most persistent mugger or for hammering in tent pegs. As a portable music system connected to powered speakers, it was brilliant but not the sort of object you want to carry around in a top pocket or while out jogging. It was just too darned big.

Mine still spends its life doing exactly what has occupied it for most of the last decade: sitting inside a desk drawer. Once in awhile the iPod is plugged into a power supply, recharged, and then used as a portable hard disk. Being FireWire it will also hold an operating system and boot up an ailing Mac. On rare occasions, it is coupled to our now legal iTrip transmitter to play through our paint-spattered "decorating" radio or via the car's stereo.

Fatboy

Instead of the iPod, I used a tiny, cheap MP3 player. Its AAA battery lasts over a month, and with a 16 GB of memory, it holds nearly as much data as the iPod. That original iPod was, for me, a waste of technology. It was close to what I wanted but not quite. Until I bought a Fatboy Nano from Apple's refurb and clearance section in its online store— perfection.

Then I bought an iPhone. The cellphone contract gives 600 minutes a month, of which barely 5% get used, plus a vast supply of text messages. This iPhone's function is as a portable computer, easier to carry than a netbook, more useful than a PSP. The calendar app takes the place of a diary. Information needed in meetings can be googled, and even getting to the meeting is easy using sat-nav software. The iPhone has replaced a handful of other devices and work tools and, coupled with LogMeIn, it will even control those lumps of silicon chippery left behind at the office.

Apple has made the iPhone's operating system a gem. Its virtual keyboard easily lets podgy fingers and thumbs get to the same speed as two-fingered typing on a real keyboard. None of that stupid predictive text, either, which can seem like the spawn of the devil. But it could do with a slightly larger screen to be really useful as a pocket computer.

Size *Is* Everything

What has Apple done with the iPad? Make the screen too large. This is, presumably, on the grounds that size is everything and bigger is better, in much the same line of thought as the US automotive industry. Apple's engineers could have made the iPad in various sizes before plumping for A4-ish (210 × 297 mm) size. Perhaps A5-ish (148.5 × 210 mm) would be better for those of us who don't carry a briefcase or shoulder bag just to hold a small computer. The after-market case suppliers must be wetting themselves in anticipation.

Nevertheless, Apple has come a long way from the original Mac portable, whose weight would have been responsible for many hernias had it sold in large numbers. The Newton was a brilliant idea that spent a decade waiting for technology to catch up. We still see its offspring in the hands of delivery couriers, meter readers, and supermarket shelf-fillers.

Roll on the iPad mini. And please make it run more than one application at a time.

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He, the Usurper, Must Choose

Later this week, two of us are driving a few hundred miles to HQ to be shown the new database which will be implemented on April Fools' Day. A date which is inevitably going to be a joke when it's something to do with new computers and software, all going live at the same time.

Our office's pathetic ADSL can only dribble data up the line at a steady half megabit; we can envisage long gaps between pressing the button and something happening. Currently, only one computer (mine) has a live connection to the servers somewhere in London's Docklands. The others link via a server in the room next door that updates every 15 minutes.

Getting them all connected is going to be interesting. Especially as we are likely to be having replacement machines because our current ones are too slow to run the new stuff. Hopefully they will come with something better than Windows XP.

Then, someone in the IT department said I could probably have a Mac if I wanted one. Hurray! Our main software is Lotus Notes, which runs in Java and is cross-platform. On the Mac, Open Office or NeoOffice will do everything Excel and Word can do, and my own copies of QuarkXPress and Adobe Creative Suite let me install them on two computers.

Decisions. . .Decisions

Hang on! There's a big snag. I was going to slope off back to my own studio to do the newsletters and magazines. My design and publishing background has let me usurp that role from its current holder (who wasn't disappointed to lose it). What a dreadful decision to have to make: have a Mac at work and miss working from home, or stick with a PC.

It will depend on the operating system the new office machines arrive with. If Windows 7, which seems to my untrained eye to be a rip-off of Mac OS X, it might be worth living with. Shame it isn't Unix-based as well; Microsoft missed a trick by insisting on going their own way with a proprietary hodgepodge costing gazillions to develop.

Is it worth having to show my colleagues how to operate a Mac? It would seem our kids get no training in using computers at school and barely scratch the surface of their software and hardware. Instead they rely on IT departments to set them up. How many more times will colleagues ask for a calculator and have to be shown where it is on their computers? And, come to that, on their cell phones too.

Mirror, Mirror

But back to driving halfway round the M25 for a meeting which could easily be unnecessary. The head of IT has already shown me the database by mirroring his computer's desktop on my work PC, demonstrating all the new areas and ways of working.

Like our kids not being shown how to word-process, my managers don't appear to understand the power of video-conferencing, mirroring desktops, instant messaging, and the like. Instead they chuck tons of CO_2 at the UK's carbon footprint as they burn round the motorway system from meeting to meeting.

All new Macs and Apple monitors have one-click access to iChat audio-video conferencing through the camera at the top of the screen. Screen sharing is easy too, with a tweak in a control panel. Or via one of the many free utilities such as LogMeIn.

User Friendly

I expect Windows 7 will have it all but doubt our office's Dell replacements will come with cameras. Even if they do, it will probably be a chore to get them working, trying to find the right device driver and entering arcane numbers into dialogue boxes. This will all be in the name of "user choice," a term which Microsoft chooses instead of "interface designer's laziness."

This week we had a long three-way video conference with our son in Chicago on his birthday. The video was a little blocky at times because we were all thousands of miles from each other, but more so because we were using wireless Ethernet to laptops. The networks occasionally struggled to keep up with the amount of data passing back and forth as they competed for bandwidth with desktop Macs and iPhones. These checked for new mail every few minutes, did online householding tasks, and all the other stuff we never normally notice.

But it was a lot cheaper and easier than flying half-way round the world. So, should I ask for a Mac or not?

Making Your Mac as Smart as Its Owner

I'm beginning to think that Apple wants its customers to get to work. First, it builds hardware that's reliable and just keeps working. Then, it adds an operating system with phenomenal uptime. Finally, the operating system includes numerous small touches to make your computing life easier: Automator and AppleScript handle repetitive tasks, speakable items allows you to control your Mac without using your hands, and contextual menus and commands are where you need them when you need them.

In the last few months, I've written about some of these features, but I've omitted one that probably should have been discussed long ago. Your Mac wants you to work smart, not hard. It's even willing to help you along by creating smart playlists in iTunes, smart groups in Address Book, smart folders in the Finder, and smart mailboxes in Mail. Let's take a look at the "smart" concept in general before looking at what each of these features can do for you.

"Smart" Features and How They Work

Wouldn't it be nice if you had a personal assistant who could get the files you want quickly from almost any location and collect them in one place? With Mac OS X "smart" features you can have that at your disposal: smart assistants that find the things you need based on criteria you specify.

Are you tired having to update a playlist every time you add new tracks by your favorite artist? Ever needed to separate the work contacts in Address Book from your family contacts? I'm sure you've never had to look for a missing file right before a deadline. Looking for one file is bad enough, but looking for more than one can quickly become a time sink. Unless you're highly organized, the ten files that you created for a project six months ago are now scattered throughout your hard drive. It might take you a while to find the ones you need. Using OS X's smart features you can now find any of that information quickly.

The idea of using virtual folders and file locations to organize files has been implemented in a variety of forms across several operating systems. They may have first appeared as "saved queries" in BeOS during the mid-1990s. BeOS software developer Dominic Giampaolo began working for Apple in 2002, and smart folders and Spotlight made their way into Tiger by 2005. If you review the history of smart folders, you'll discover that even Windows has an implementation of this concept. No matter what these assistants are called, they all depend on a good search engine to find the target files—on the Mac that often means depending heavily on Spotlight.

All of these smart assistants have one other thing in common: you develop the rules used to locate the information that you need. Although you can use them for just about any task, they are most useful for those tasks that are going to be repeated frequently. They're also useful for things that you might forget to update, such as iTunes playlists. Once you create the rules and save the results, they're always at your disposal whenever you need them. As you add new files that meet the criteria you've set, new files are added to the search results without any intervention on your part. If you're not finding the information you need, change the search criteria and the results change accordingly.

Now that we've had a history lesson, let's see if we can put these features to use. I'll introduce them in the order that I learned about them.

First Steps: iTunes Smart Playlists

Smart playlists have become one of my favorite iTunes features, but it didn't start out that way. When Apple announced iTunes 3's smart playlists, I either wasn't paying attention or just didn't get too excited. After all, I didn't have any music on my computer at the time, so this didn't affect me. As I moved my music collection from CDs to computer files, I discovered a problem: if I set up a playlist for one of my favorite artists, I had to update the playlist manually every time I added or removed content for that artist. The whole process of creating a playlist, dragging files to that playlist, adding new content, and repeating the process was taking too long. Then someone introduced me to the revolution known as smart playlists. Once I have the smart playlist created and the right rule defined, I don't have to worry about updating the playlist: iTunes takes care of that for me as long as I have the "Live updating" feature checked.

I've written about smart playlists in a previous article. For that article, I created a smart playlist that excluded podcasts and holiday music. Given the way my music was organized at the time, if I had followed my usual practice of just starting iTunes and clicking "Play," the first song heard would have been something from Aaron Neville's "Soulful Christmas" album. That's fine for the recent snow we've had in Louisiana but not what I want to hear in the middle of summer. I also needed to exclude podcasts for those times when I wanted to focus on music. That smart playlist was one of the first I created, and it's easy to do.

Launch iTunes and choose "New Smart Playlist" from iTunes' File menu (Command-Option-N). When the Smart Playlist creation dialog appears, use the pop-up menus to create the first rule. The first pop-up menu tells iTunes what metadata to examine (Artist, Genre, etc). In this case, I set it to examine the Genre field. The content of the middle pop-up menu will vary depending upon the information you are examining, but in this case I set it to "does not include" since I want to exclude certain content. Set the third field to Podcast, as it is in the example. This portion of the rule excluded any media tagged as a podcast from the resulting playlist.

Since there is additional information I want to exclude, click the plus sign. A second series of pop-up menus will appear. Repeat the process for rule two with the settings Genre, "does not contain," and Holiday. If you don't have any holiday music to exclude, you can

either choose another genre or exclude this rule altogether. Click the "Match" checkbox at the top of the dialog and set it to all if you want this playlist to include only items that meet "all" of your criteria. The "any" option is broader and includes content that meets any of your criteria. If you want the information in this playlist to update automatically, choose "Live updating." You can also set the size of the playlist and organize it randomly. When you are finished setting the rules, click OK to create the playlist. Congratulations: you've just created your first smart playlist.

Completed Smart Playlists Dialog

When iTunes saves your smart playlist, it appears as a purple folder in the "PLAYLISTS" section of the source list. If you'd like a few ideas of what this type of playlist can do, Control-click one of the pre-defined smart playlists such as "Recently Played" and select "Edit Smart Playlist"; you will be able to examine the criteria used to create that playlist. You can also use this feature if you ever need to refine the rules for one of your smart playlists.

Smart Groups in Address Book

Mac OS X's search technology appears in Address Book as smart groups. With this feature you can search a large collection of contacts and separate them into groups based on your chosen criteria. I used this feature in the past as a prelude to sending automated birthday greetings via Automator. It is the smart groups feature in Address Book that Automator uses to collect the names, addresses, and e-mail addresses of the people who should receive birthday greetings.

The process of creating smart groups in Address Book is the same as creating smart playlists in iTunes. Choose "New Smart Group" from Address Book's File menu (or press Command-Option-N) and complete the resulting dialog. In a dialog that looks similar to the one for iTunes smart playlists, the first pop-up menu tells Address Book what field to examine

in each contact. The remainder of the pop-up menus help you set criteria that contacts must meet to be included in the group. The content of these menus will vary somewhat depending on how you complete the beginning of the rule.

Just as in iTunes, you can use additional rules to narrow the scope of the group. In the example, my first rule looks for contacts with birthdays sometime in the next two months. The second rule limits the group to contacts whose e-mail field does not contain the "@" symbol. These two rules combine to generate a group of contacts with birthdays in the next two months that do not have e-mail addresses. If I choose to, I could send members of this group an old-fashioned birthday card.
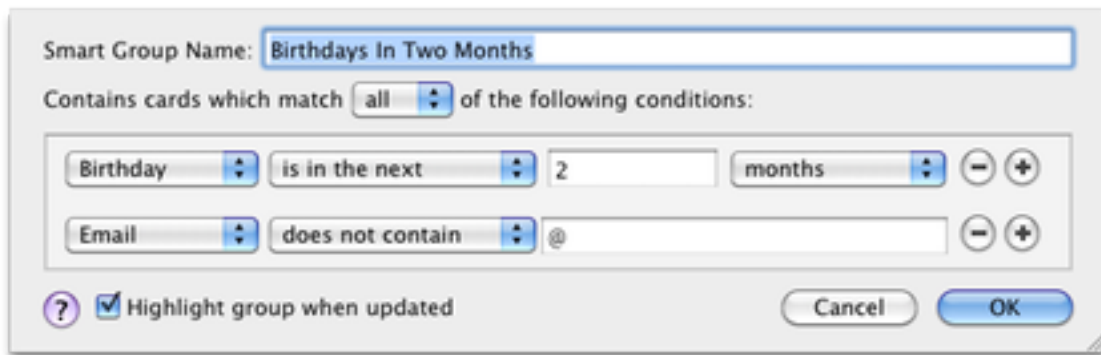
Completed Smart Group Rule

Using Smart Mailboxes

I'm just beginning to use smart mailboxes. Their function is simple: gather messages and to-dos from other mailboxes based upon criteria that you specify. Go to the Mailbox menu and choose "New Smart Mailbox." You'll be presented with a dialog similar to that used in other "smart" features. The pop-up menus present options that are related to managing e-mail. You can also create smart mailboxes by clicking the plus sign at the bottom of Mail's sidebar. As with other smart options, you can combine several rules to narrow the results of your search. You can also opt to include messages in the "Sent" and "Trash" mailboxes.

In the process of writing this article, I created a smart mailbox that contains all of my ATPM-related correspondence. I had a regular mailbox that did the same thing using Mail's rules feature, but I like the smart mailboxes feature a bit better for this task. It's a bit faster to create the smart mailbox than to set the necessary rules in Mail's preferences. I can also use a smart mailbox not only to collect incoming ATPM mail but also to collect related items in the Sent and Trash folders in one place. I'm going to be experimenting with both options in the coming weeks to see which works best for my needs.

I also discovered another instance where smart mailboxes might be better than mail rules. Several days ago, I received an e-mail update about some music collections that were available in the iTunes Music Store. I didn't have time to look at the message right then, so

I left it for another day. Before I had an opportunity to read that e-mail, it disappeared. A quick glance in Mail's Trash yielded nothing relevant. I already had a regular Mail rule in place that collected all iTunes-related messages from my inbox, but the message wasn't there either. I created a smart mailbox to find all mail where the "From" field contained iTunes. As soon as I closed the dialog, the list of e-mails was created, and the one I needed happened to be at the top of the list since it was the most recent. Somehow the message had been relocated into my main inbox.

This is one time I am glad I used the smart mailbox feature to search for the answer. I simply could have launched iTunes and gone to the music store. Since I knew there was a link to the new collections on the main page, I eventually would have found what I wanted, but it would have taken much longer than creating the smart mailbox. I suspect it was also cheaper to create a smart mailbox since, while searching for one collection, I'd probably have found and purchased several others.

Using Smart Folders

Like all the smart features discussed thus far, smart folders make use of user-generated rules to search for data that match those rules. This is another feature that I am just beginning to make use of, but it has potential. You may have been making use of this feature already without realizing it. Open a Finder window and look at the sidebar. It usually contains three purple folders entitled "All Documents," "All Movies," and "All Images." Your sidebar will also contain any smart folders you have chosen to add to this list. Control-clicking a folder and selecting "Show Search Criteria" will show the criteria for that folder at the top of its window. The "All Images" folder, for example, uses a rule set to "Kind is Image" and results set to show All.

Just as with the other "smart" features, smart folders can combine multiple rules to narrow the results of your search. Changing the rules yields a different set of results. Once the rules are set, the criteria can be saved for re-use. Here's one example of how I put this technology to use.

When I started thinking about this article, I knew that I wanted to use screenshots of the Smart Playlist and Smart Group dialogs. They were still on my hard drive. Finding them quickly would be faster than creating new screenshots. I had an idea of where they were on the hard drive, but that folder was a mess. If there were ever a time to use smart folders, this was it. At this point I knew three things that helped me set the rules: the files were on my Mac's hard drive, they were all TIFF files, and they all had the word "smart" in the filename. This was all I needed to know to create the smart folder.

Start by going to the Finder's File menu and choosing "New Smart Folder" (or press Command-Option-N). A new window will appear with options such as "This Mac," "Shared," "Contents," and "Filename" across the top of the window. The name of your boot drive will also appear in this list. Choosing from among these options is a good first step to narrowing your search. I chose "This Mac," for example, because the files were not in one of my shared folders. I tried clicking both the "Filename" and "Contents" options

but still had no results. It took me a moment to realize that these options weren't working because I had defined the search location but not what to find. I could have clicked either "Contents" (to search inside of files) or "Filename" and entered basic search criteria in the search box at the top of the window, but I wanted to be more specific. Let's add a few rules to narrow the search.

Add your first rule by clicking the "+" symbol in the window that just opened. It's small enough to be missed the first time you look at this window. As a reference point, it is at the far right edge of the window next to the Save button. When the first line appears, leave the first pop-up set to "Kind" and change the second one from "Any" to "Image." A third item appears that is set to "All" by default. I changed this to "TIFF" since I know this is the type of image I wanted to locate.

Left with just this rule in place, I would still have to search through more than 400 files. Time to add a second rule by clicking the "+" button again. The first option is set to "Kind" by default and must be changed to "Name." With this field set, a second set of options appears which should be set to "Contains."

When the third option appears, enter a partial filename. I entered the word "Smart" since that's the part of the name that all of my target files have in common. At this point, the 400+ files were reduced to ten with the needed files visible in the window. I stopped there but probably could have reduced the search further and produced the two files I needed.
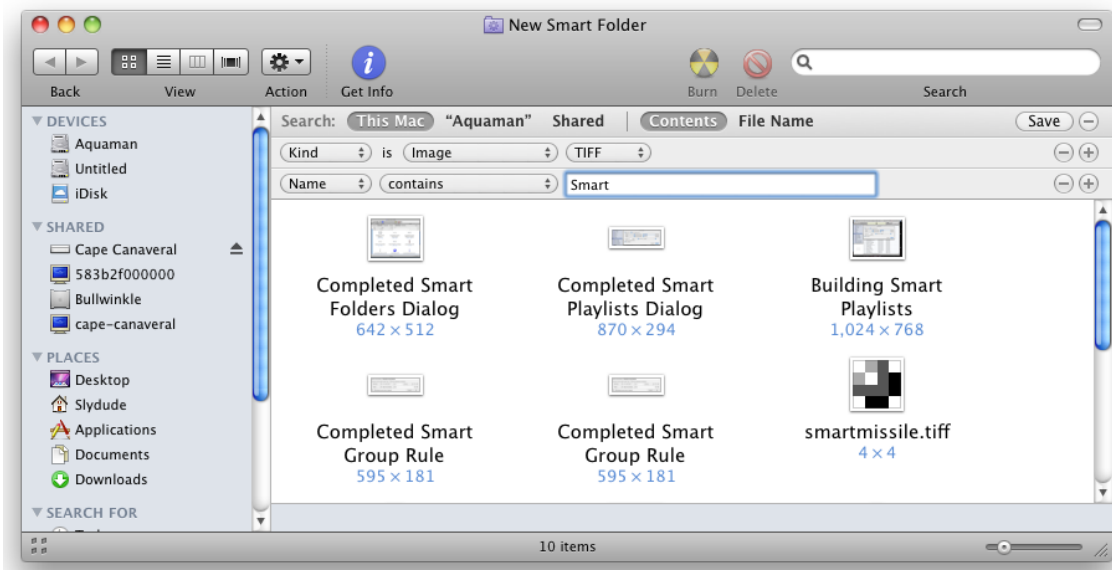
Completed Smart Folders Dialog

Try this search with your own system and you will get different results—especially by changing the partial filename in the second rule. Once you have got a result to your liking, the smart folder can be saved for repeated use. Your saved searches are stored

in `~/Library/Saved Searches`. There are also several pre-done searches included in the `System` folder at `/System/Library/CoreServices/Finder.app`. From there, you must Control-click Finder and choose "Show Package Contents" from the contextual menu. Then open the following sequence of folders: `Contents`, `Resources`, and `CannedSearches`.

Before we leave smart folders, there are a few things worth noting that will make them more useful to you. First, by Control-clicking one of your saved searches and choosing "Show Search Criteria" you can modify an existing search to include new parameters. If you use this method to save a search, you will not be prompted for a new folder name. Second, when creating a new rule, the first field is aware of several other types of metadata in addition to "Kind." If your data type isn't here, choose "Other." You will be presented with a rather extensive list of other data types that can be the basis for a search.

Final Thoughts

There are two improvements I would personally like to see in a future update that might make these smart features even more intelligent. First, how about an easy way to add metadata when a file is saved—from right within the Save dialog? Just think how useful smart folders would be if everything on your Mac were tagged with the appropriate metadata. Second, how about an easy way to create smart mailboxes based on Boolean searches? I have seen a few hints for this but haven't explored them yet.

I am sure there is much more that can be done with these features than I have explored thus far. Some of them are, as you can tell, somewhat new to me. Having said that, the more familiar I become with these features the more useful they are to me. It is certainly well worth the effort.

New England

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

Christopher Turner shares some more photos of a trip to New England in May 2006.

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.
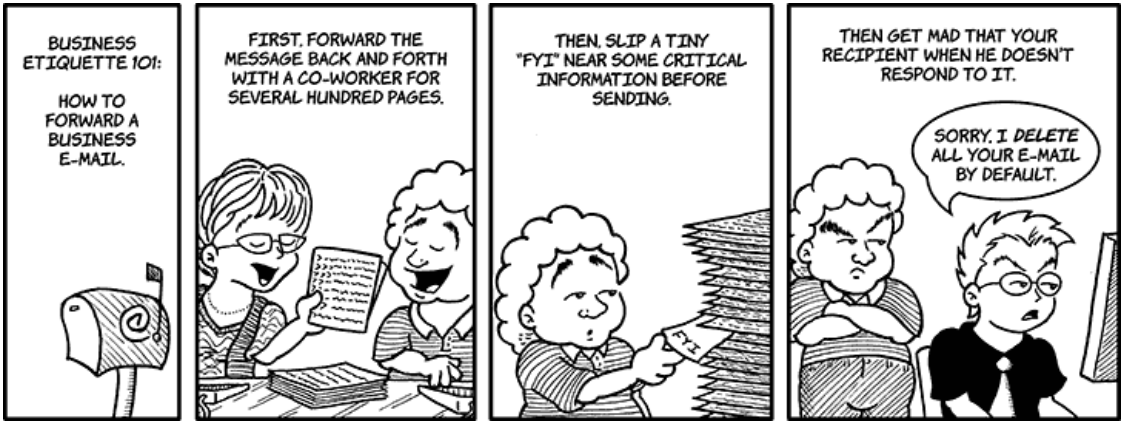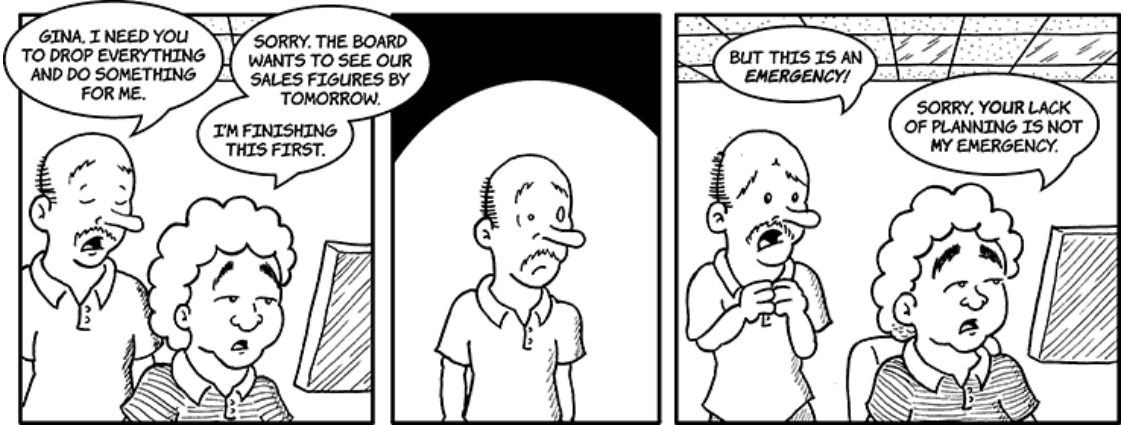
Out at Five

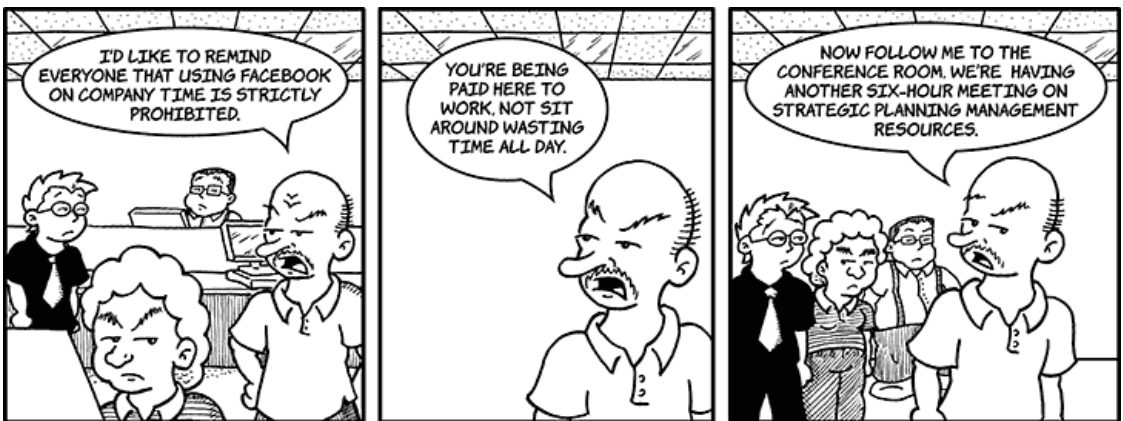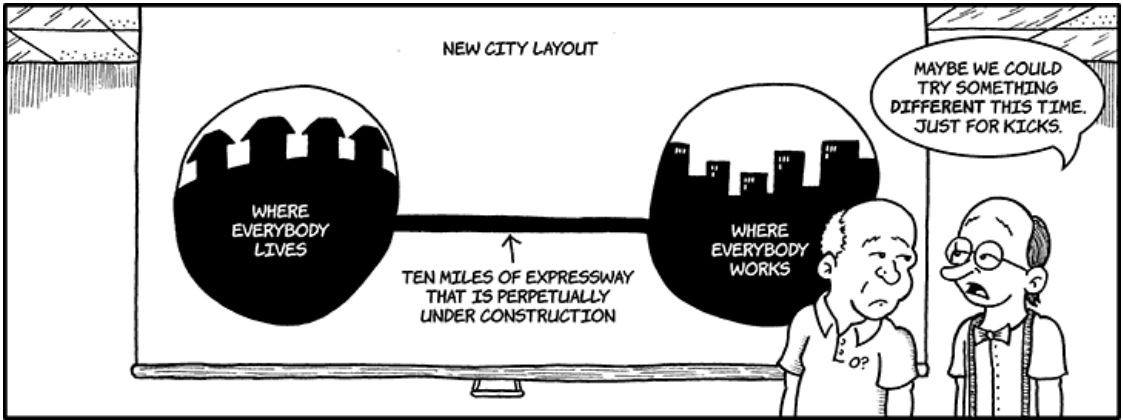**by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com**

The Committee

Facebook Friends

FYI
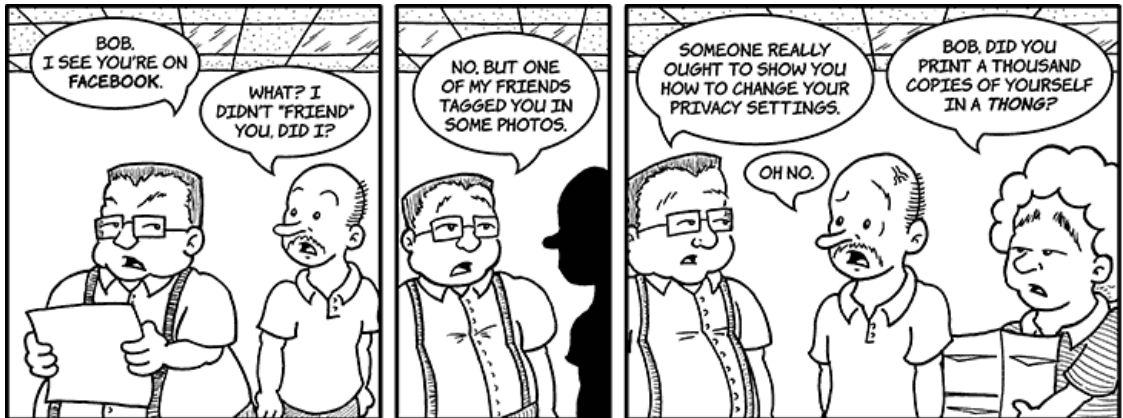
It's an Emergency

Wasting Company Time

City Planning

Something's Different

Computers and Religion

BusyCal 1.2

**Function:** iCal Pro.
Developer: BusyMac
Price: $40
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.5. Universal.
**Trial:** Fully-featured (30 days)

A principled critic must be open-minded and amenable to being persuaded by data. Remembering Oscar Wilde's admonition that experience is the name we give our mistakes, I often find myself admitting error. When I first saw a digital photo frame, for example, I thought, "What a silly idea." Then my wife's niece gave us one for Christmas, and I realized it was revolutionary: other than for the rare frame that itself is a work of art, I now believe there is no reason to own a conventional photo frame. That is the appropriate preface to my assessment of BusyCal. When I read about this software, I wondered why anyone would want to buy a program that appeared to duplicate the functions of the free iCal program, more or less. But then I found myself in a situation where it was important to sync with Google Calendar, and in trying out BusyCal I learned it was superior in virtually every respect.

The developers encourage users to see BusyCal as "iCal Pro." It's a good description for what appears to be an elaboration of BusySync, an earlier piece of software from the same company that allowed sharing of calendars over a LAN or syncing with Google Calendar. It has more features, and offers a high level of control over the interface, compared with iCal.
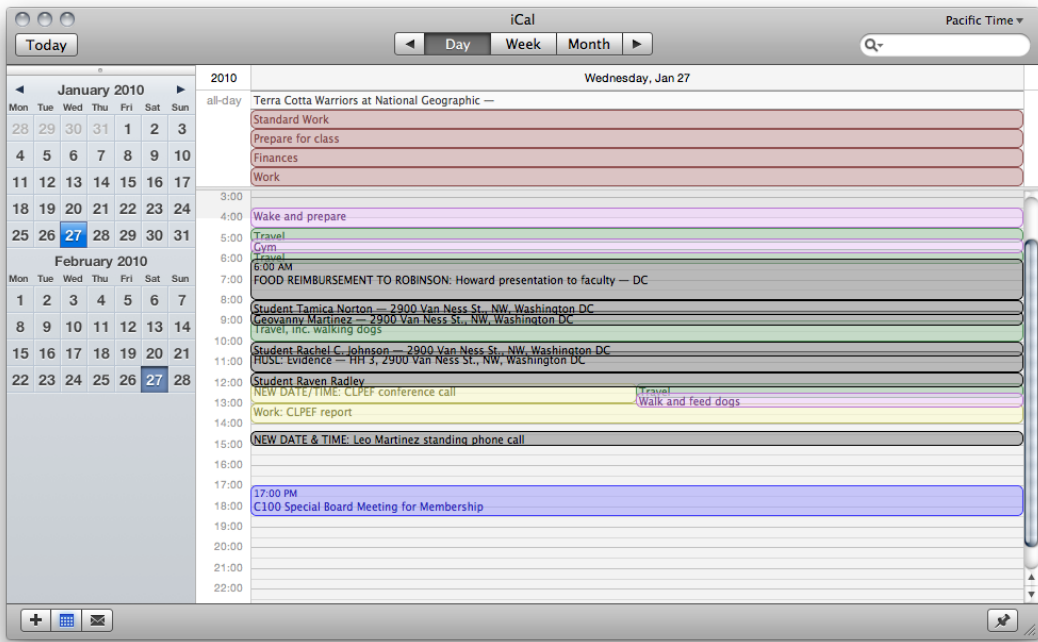
Day in iCal
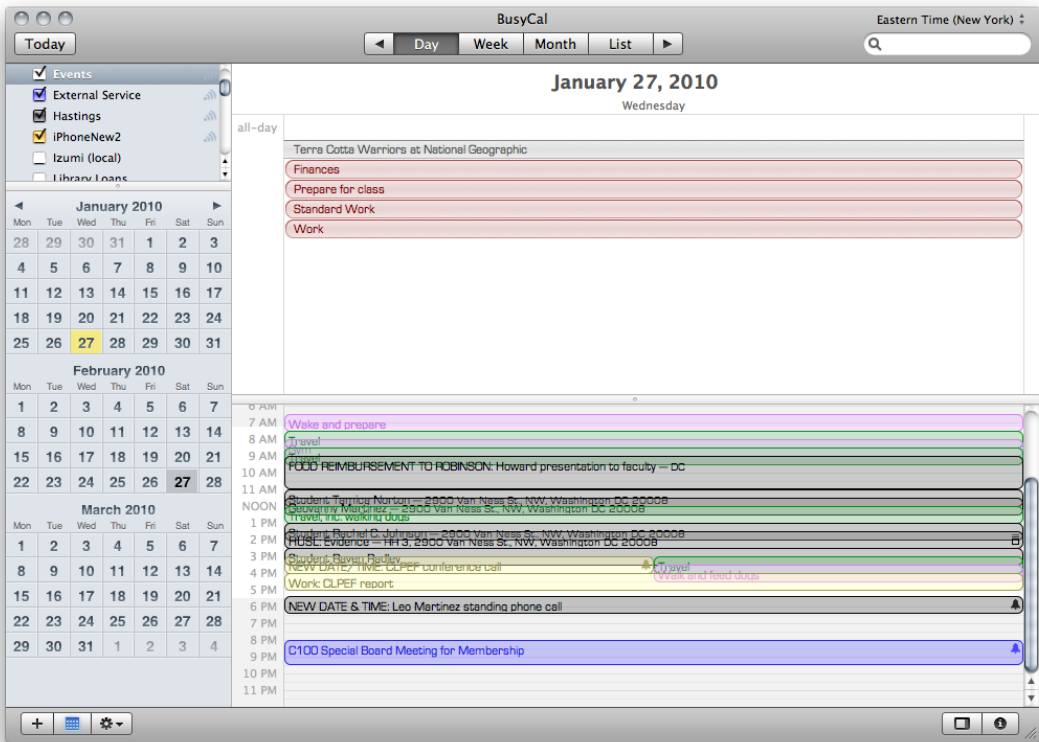
Day in BusyCal

When you run BusyCal, you will find it looks almost exactly like iCal. Only an aficionado would be able to spot the differences. Porting your data to BusyCal requires nothing more than launching it for the first time; additionally, you can revert to iCal without losing anything except the custom features supported by BusyCal.

Then you create a new event and instantly BusyCal shows how its designers have responded to users. You can edit the event immediately, without further keystrokes, in either a floating window or a separate pane below the to-do list on the right. You also can edit more than the title: tabbing runs through the other fields. The fields that are displayed also can be customized. A user who truly couldn't stand iCal's setup, which unlike its own earlier version requires a separate command to enter the editing mode, might want to buy BusyCal just for this convenience.

Lisa Kennelly, Sport & Health

location	Tenleytown, DC
all-day	☐
from	01.28.2010 08:30 AM
to	01.28.2010 09:45 AM
time zone	Eastern Time ⇕
repeat	Custom... ⇕
	Every week on Monday and Thursday
end	On date ⇕ 02.18.2010
show as	Busy ⇕
calendar	☐ Personal ⇕
alarm	None ⇕
invitees	Add Invitees...
attachments	Add File...
url	None
note	None

Done

Event in iCal
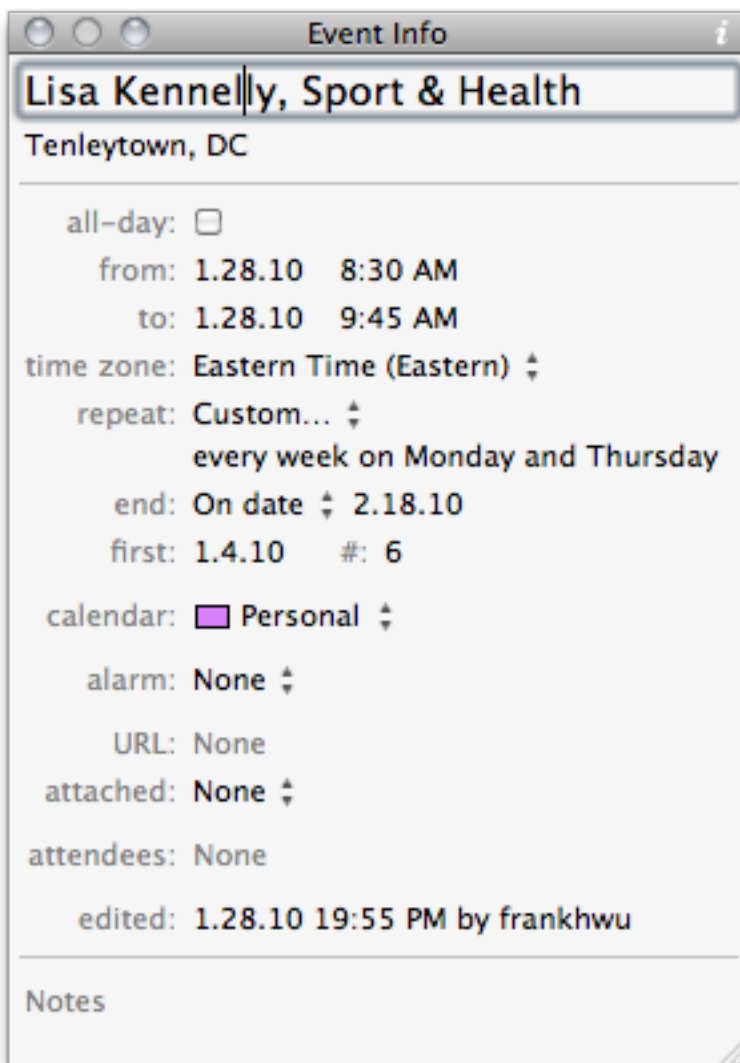
Event in BusyCal

In the latest update, BusyCal also allows the setting of a different default font. Earlier versions already allowed customization of fonts, but the new universal font setting is terrific. It's another single feature that might persuade some users, who have strong preferences about aesthetics.

As for Google Calendar, the sync works perfectly. It took me under a minute to set up everything. I was skeptical, so I ran multiple tests, checking the sync function with Google Calendar, MobileMe, and an iPhone. BusyCal will also sync over Bonjour and with BusyCal itself, on other machines.

There also are some minor features that distinguish BusyCal from iCal. It has an option for displaying a three-day weather forecast and moon phases. There are sticky-notes and

journal entries, and you can insert graphics. Events show when they were last edited and by whom; each iteration of a recurring event shows which one it is in the sequence.

There also are subtle differences. Searches don't work exactly as they do in iCal; the format is more and less powerful: more powerful because the results can be displayed by day, week, month, or list views, and in the last with various customization of columns; less powerful because you cannot specify searches of events versus to-dos, titles versus notes, etc.
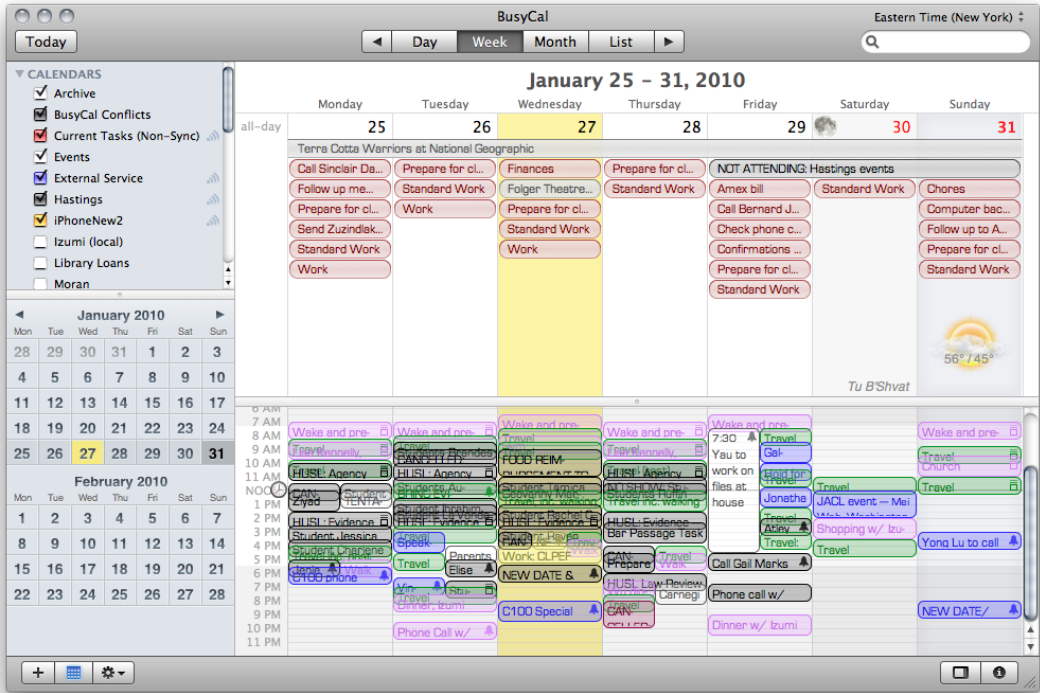

Week in BusyCal
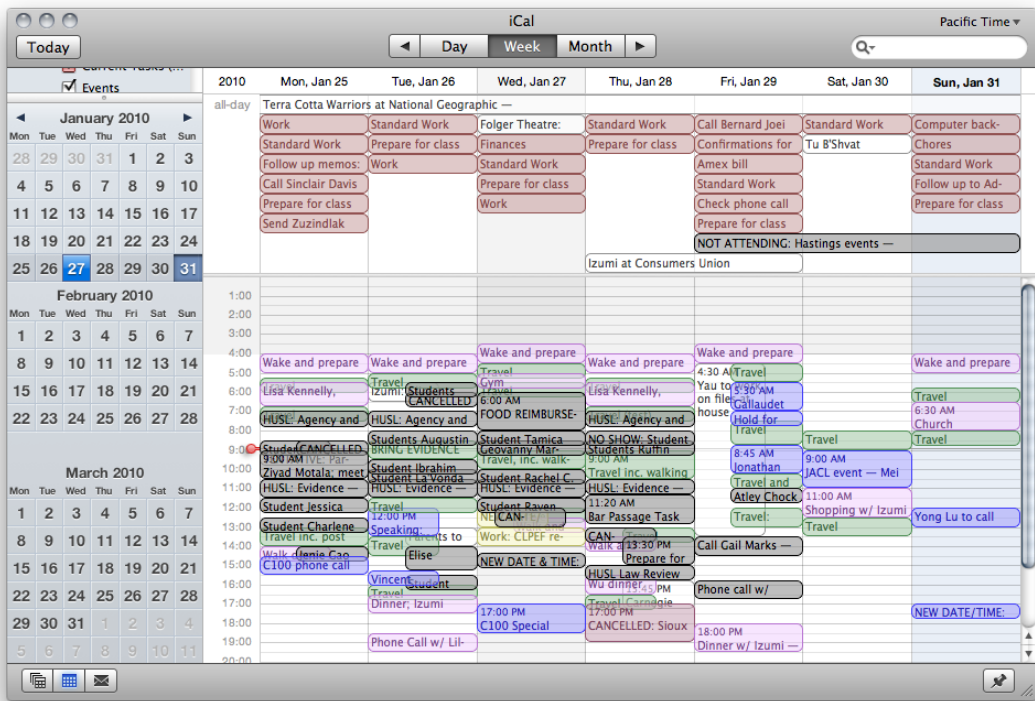
Week in iCal

A number of features are advertised, which I did not test. These include password protection of calendars. I use another program for to-dos, so I have not cared if my calendar program does them. A cursory look at BusyCal suggests that its to-do function is sophisticated, with dated and undated options and recurring items. BusyCal, unlike iCal, is not integrated with the remainder of the Mac OS X built-in suite. Thanks to the data detector function, iCal captures events from Apple Mail seamlessly. The workaround is to continue using that capability, because the items that are inserted into iCal appear in BusyCal almost simultaneously.

There are only minor flaws. There is one glitch, though it might be my imagination. On BusyCal, it seems that events are bit more twitchy than in iCal, so that when you try to move them around they don't seem to move as smoothly. It also isn't possible to drag all-day items downward to convert them into events at a specific time, or vice versa.

And there is a tiny discrepancy that may require an adjustment, if you use 24-hour time settings, also known as "military time" (e.g., 18:00 for 6:00 PM). In iCal, clicking onto the space that is after noon and entering 9:00 creates the event at 9:00, meaning 9:00 AM, but in BusyCal, doing that sometimes creates the event at 21:00 (unless you further type "AM"). For example, say you have a "red-eye" flight from the West Coast to the East Coast, starting at 9:00 PM in San Francisco and ending at 6:00 AM in Washington, D.C.; when you type 6:00 in the field, it converts to 18:00; iCal assumes 6:00 is 6:00 AM and

assumes you will type 18:00 for 6:00 PM, which is how devotees of 24-hour time tend to use it in actual practice. The reference times listed on the left side of the main window do not convert to a 24-hour format, but are fixed in a 12-hour format.
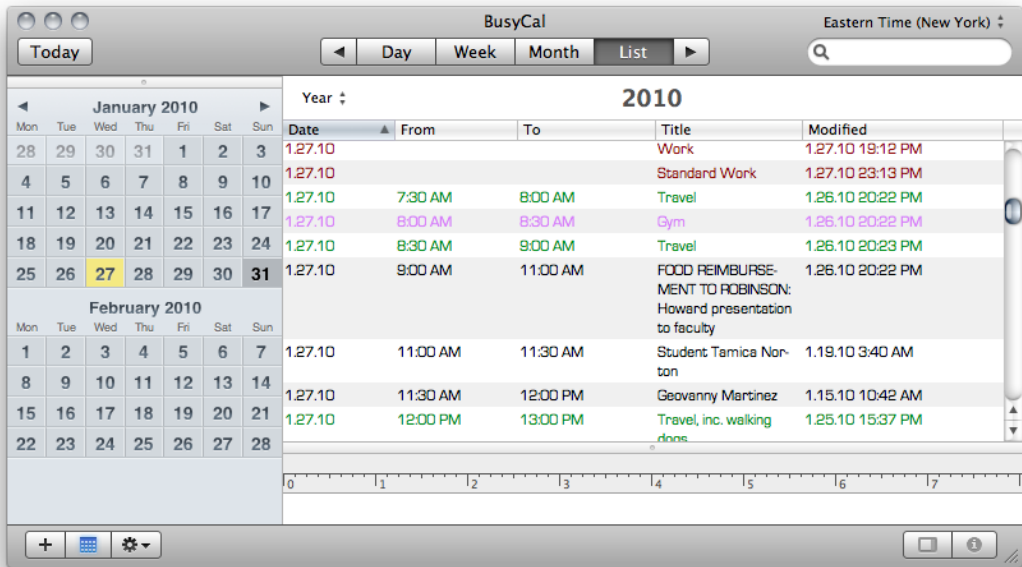
List View

Although I am no programmer, playing around with BusyCal I infer that BusyCal and iCal are just the front-end user interfaces for the same databases. That must be why BusyCal works as well as it does, and it's possible to go back and forth. Both programs are just presenting and allowing the editing of the same basic files. Even if I'm wrong, it's conceptually helpful in explaining how things work.

Since I have a temporary need to track events in two time zones, I've just set BusyCal to one, iCal to the other. I'm running both, and with a launcher program it takes about a second to jump between them.

The only concern I would raise about BusyCal is a concern for the developers, not about them. Because it is so much better than iCal, it's likely that Apple engineers will incorporate its features into their next iteration of their own application. But until then, it's easy to recommend switching to BusyCal.

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Flickit Pro 2.0

Function: Access a Flickr.com account from iPhone OS.
**Developer:** Green Volcano Software
Price: $4
Requirements: iPhone OS 3.1; WiFi, 3G, or EDGE network connection; valid Flickr.com account.
Trial: Feature-limited (basic upload-only version)

Flickit Pro is an application for iPhone and iPod touch that offers on-the-go access to your Flickr.com account. Besides the ability to upload new images to your account, you can browse past images in your photostream and from your friends, family, and other contacts; explore Flickr's photos by interestingness, proximity, and groups to which you belong; and peruse recent activity (comments, favorites, etc.) on your content.
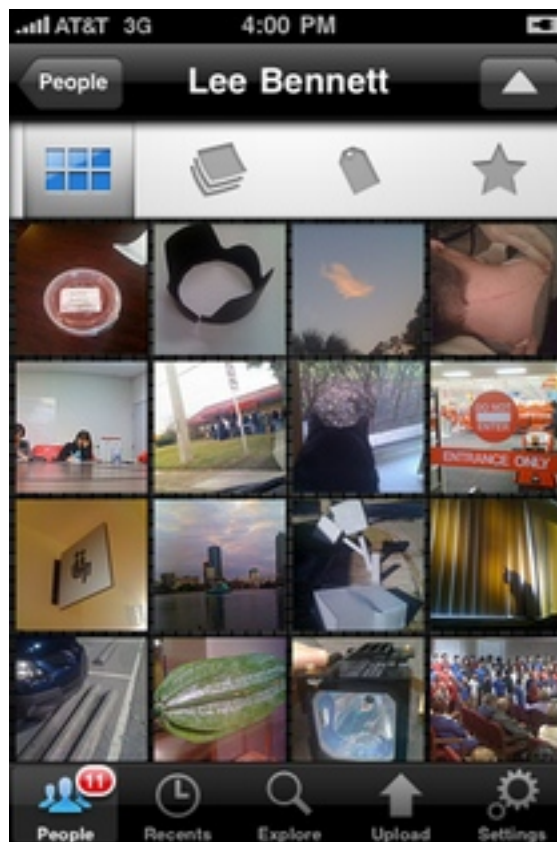
Browsing a photostream in Flickit Pro. The mode visible in this screenshot shows basic thumbnails. This screen also provides access to the account's sets, tags, and favorite photos.

If you've been an ATPM reader for a while, you may remember my October 2008 review of the [Mobile Fotos](#) application for Flickr interaction. I must admit that Mobile Fotos served as a benchmark against which I compared Flickit Pro, yet I exclusively used Flickit Pro for a month in order to become accustomed to using it as my only mobile access to Flickr.

Good Marks for User Interface

On the whole, I am pleased with the intuitive user interface. Browsing Flickr photostreams, searching, and uploading new pictures all work well. A nice touch is that Flickit Pro automatically loads more thumbnails when the bottom of a screen is reached by scrolling. In other applications, including Mobile Fotos, some sort of Next button must be tapped to see more photos.

I particularly was impressed with the uploader, which allows predefinition of metadata such as keyword tags and whether or not to post new photos to your Twitter account, though all can, of course, be overridden for each new photo. I was also very happy about being able to edit the metadata in any of a batch of queued photos before they are uploaded—something that is not possible in the Mobile Fotos application.

It should be noted that if uploading to Flickr is your only desired task, Green Volcano Software also offers a free, uploader-only application that offers the same functionality for uploading as Flickit Pro, minus the ability to tweet new uploads.

Browsing Photos: the Good, the Bad, and the Odd

When viewing individual photos, there are three modes from which to choose. One of the modes simply displays the selected photo at full screen size. Swiping left and right or using the arrow buttons will advance through the photos in this mode.

A second view mode that is apparently unique to Flickit Pro is called Photoflow. In this mode, photos are presented in stacked succession and viewed in a manner similar to browsing windows in Apple's [Time Machine](#). You can either manually drag through the photos or enable auto-advance, which moves forward and backward through the photos simply by tilting the iPhone or iPod touch.
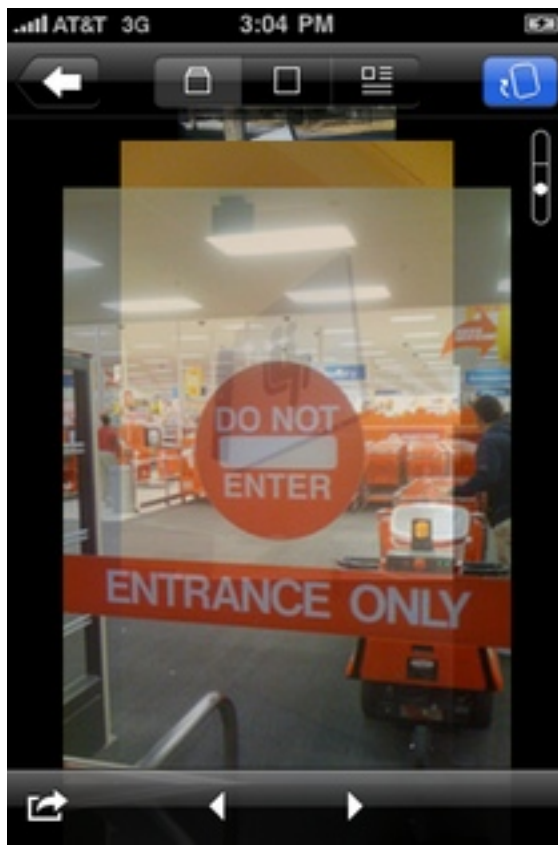
The Photoflow feature offers a unique, albeit gimmicky, way to browse a photostream.

This view mode is only going to please some people. Personally, I found it to be somewhat gimmicky and not extremely useful.

The third viewing mode displays the title, description, tags, comments, etc. for a photo. This mode is generally most useful to me; however, I found it to be sorely lacking. Even though the developer touts a mobile-optimized engine for Flickr, retrieving metadata seemed to take a smidgen longer than the Mobile Fotos application and doesn't even offer as much information, such as the geolocation map and dates when the image was captured and uploaded. In fact, I didn't find the engine particularly faster anywhere throughout the application than Mobile Fotos.
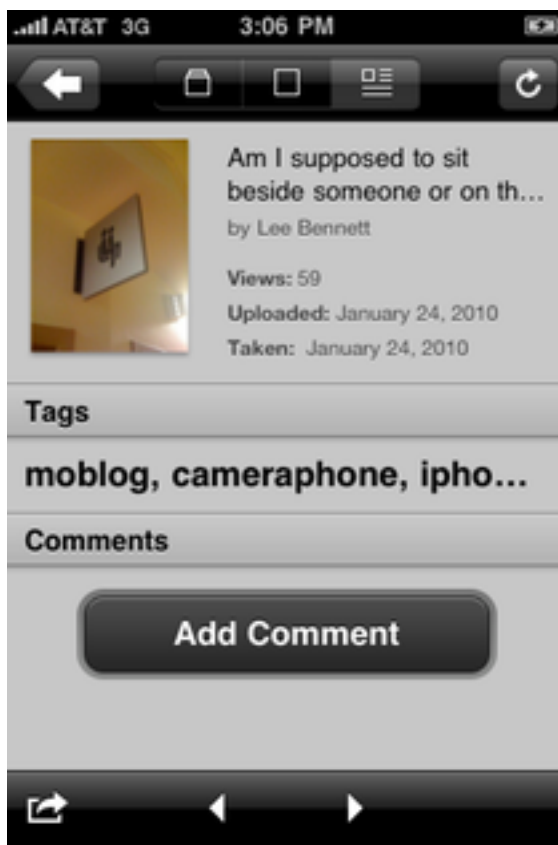
Viewing photo details with truncated title.

Particularly concerning is that if there are more than 7–8 words in the title or more than 2–3 keyword tags, the remainder is truncated with no means that I could find to view the rest. The description field, however, enables a small button to access a page with the rest of the description, if any. It seems to be a silly oversight to include a means to view the rest of a truncated description but not a truncated title or set of keyword tags.
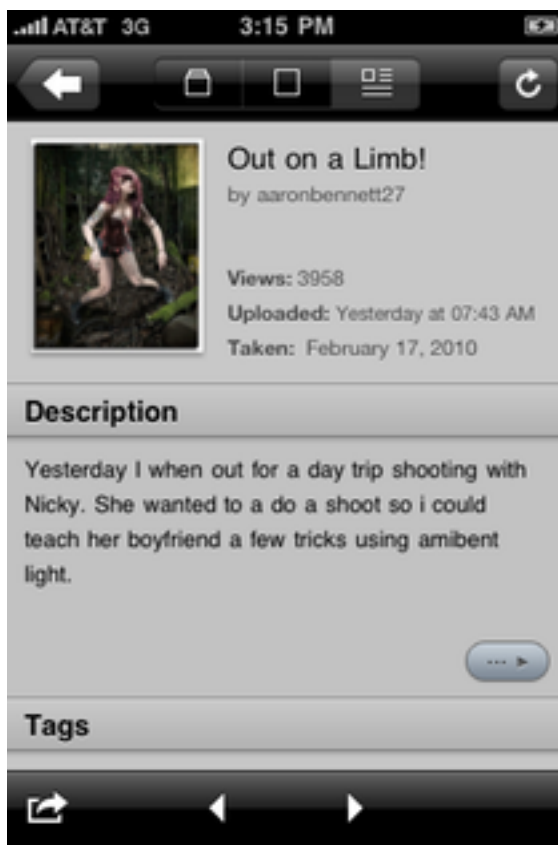
A small button provides access to the rest of a long description, but no such button exists for truncated titles or keyword tags.

Also of concern was an interface glitch that occurred just as I began writing this review: the title shifted to the left edge of the screen with the thumbnail photo overlapping. Several relaunches of the application didn't resolve it, however the text did eventually return to its proper position.
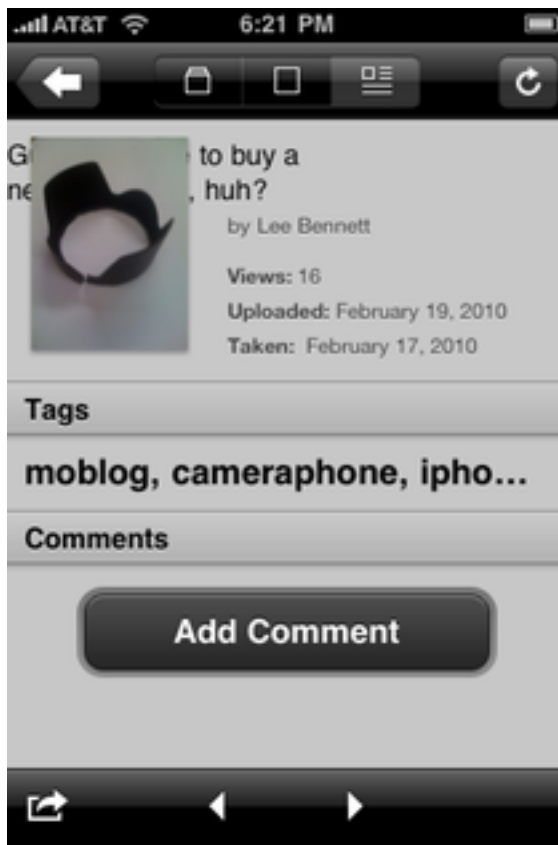
Interface glitch with a photo's title.

There's one additional bug that is present both in Flickit Pro and Mobile Fotos—neither application appears to honor the Taken timestamp. The Uploaded timestamp information is used instead.

Flickr Contacts

The interface for browsing accounts of my contacts, friends, and family seems somewhat clumsy. I'm accustomed to all my contacts being accessible at all times in Mobile Fotos. In Flickit Pro, however, contact visibility is optional.
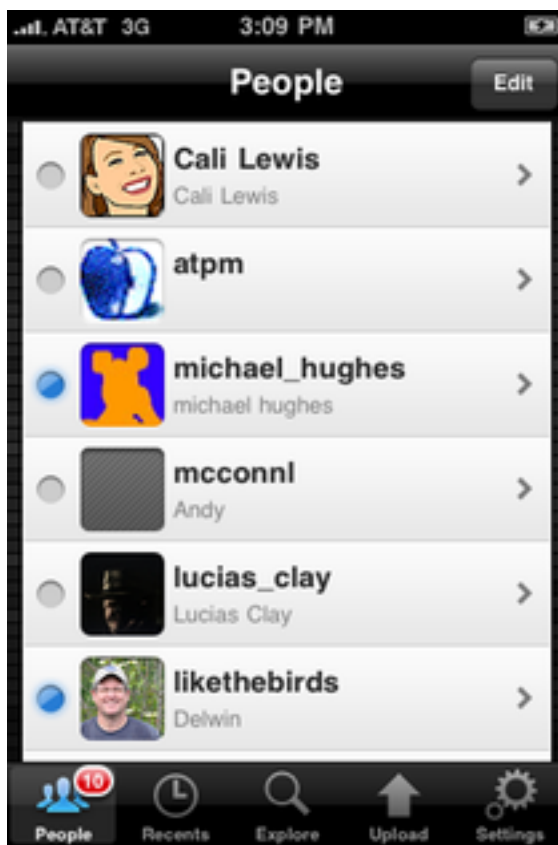
Viewing available Flickr contacts. The blue dot indicates new photos from the respective contact.

Rather than directly accessing all your contacts, in Flickit Pro, you choose contacts to be displayed in the People screen. This behavior may work just fine if you know you only care to keep up with several specific people whenever you're on the go. Some users, like me, may never know which of their contacts they want/need to peruse at any given time and prefer seeing a stream of thumbnail photos from *all* contacts in reverse chronological order, regardless of the photo's owner.

While it's easy to quickly add multiple accounts to the followed contacts list in the People screen, they can only be removed one at a time. Also, if the number being followed is large, it's awkward to add more since you must first tap the Edit button at the top of the screen, then scroll all the way down past the last contact to access the Add New Contact option.

Another troublesome aspect of the followed contacts is that I find no single step to clear all the blue dot indicators for new photos from contacts. A user shouldn't be required to tap each individual's name and wait several seconds while the page of latest thumbnails loads in order to clear the notifications. There needs to be a Clear All Notifications function on the People screen.

Recent Activity

While it's true I do not get much activity on my Flickr photostream, I can imagine there are people who do get a lot of activity and might like to be able to check on comments, favorites, etc. rather frequently.
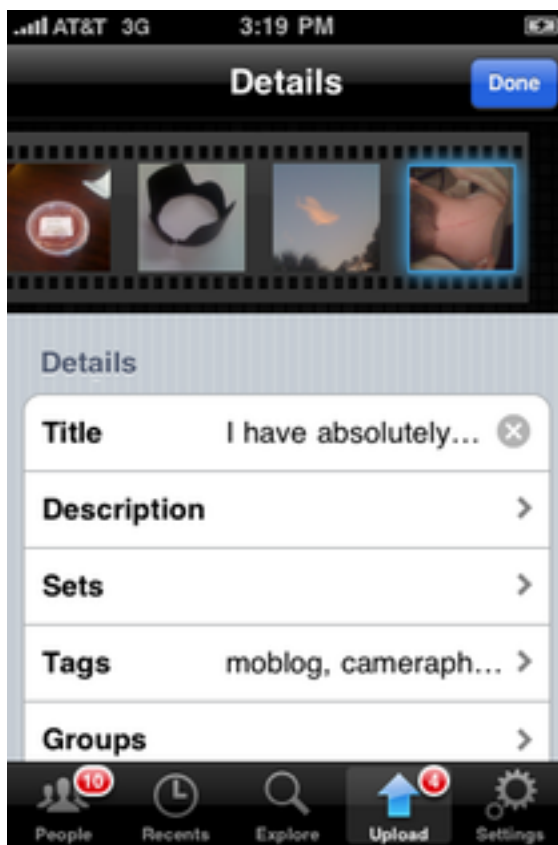

No refresh for you!

Maybe it's a limitation with Flickr's API and there's no way around it, but surely something is better than a jarring note that activity refreshing can only be done once per hour.

The Uploader

The interface for uploading photos is, in my opinion, the strongest feature of Flickit Pro, albeit not without its own quirks.

Uploading pictures to Flickr.

I very much like that metadata can be modified as often as necessary before a batch of queued photos is uploaded. Photos can also be selectively removed from a batch. This is far superior to Mobile Fotos, which offers no access to editing metadata after a photo has been added to the queue and only allows deleting the entire queue to start over—not individual photos out of the queue.

Managing keyword tags for uploads, however, isn't nearly so thrilling as the rest of the upload process. In Flickit Pro, tags are selected from a list. If a tag isn't available, there's a button to add a new one.
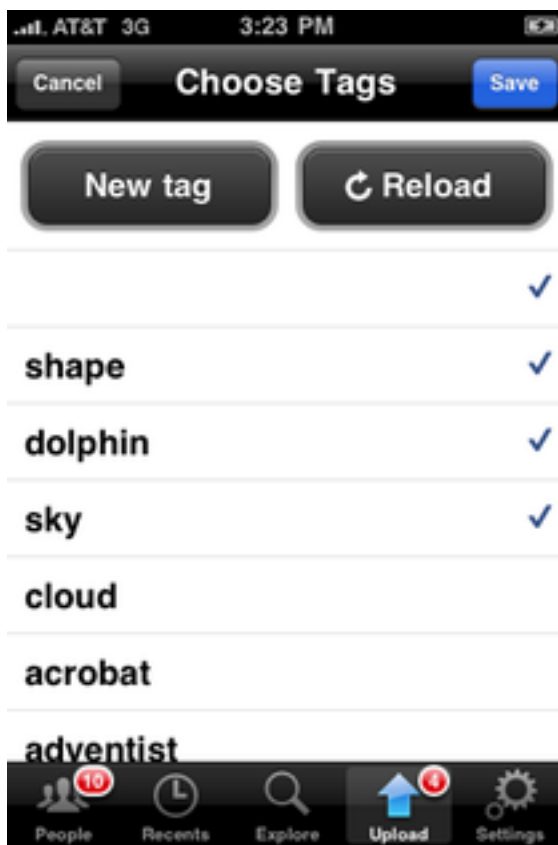
Setting up keyword tags. Note the blank "null" tag at the top of the list—an interface bug that keeps the tag line visible if the Done button is tapped when no text was entered as a tag.

This behavior doesn't cater well to accounts with dozens (or more) of pre-existing keyword tags. Regardless of whether the tag already exists, I can enter tags far more quickly if I can simply type them all out, as I do in Mobile Fotos, rather than scrolling through dozens of tags and selecting them individually.

Flickit Pro doesn't even allow multiple tags to be added at the same time. If I type more than one word, it's treated as one multi-word tag. To add several tags, the user must tap the New Tag button, type the tag, then tap Done—rinse and repeat all three steps for *every* new tag. And yet, I can even do this convoluted process faster than scrolling through existing tags and selecting them for the photo.

Almost as if adding insult to injury, the iPhone OS–native autocorrect is not enabled in the tag entry field. I have uploaded an improperly spelled tag on more than one occasion directly because of this omission.

Tweeting Uploads

A rather glaring bug in Flickit Pro's uploader interface involves the feature for posting a message to a Twitter account when a photo is uploaded. After I added my own Twitter

account, it became quickly apparent that there was no way to modify or remove my account. Although I can choose to not post a tweet for any or all photos in a batch upload, until this bug is fixed, I am stuck with only being able to tweet uploads to my personal Twitter account. There is also no method for tweeting a photo that has already been uploaded. The only point at which a photo can be tweeted is at the time of upload.

Currently, the only positive thing about the Twitter interaction is that the tweets are posted from the Flickit Pro application itself and requires only a single tap to choose whether or not to post a tweet.

Although Mobile Fotos has to switch to a desired Twitter application or the Web page to tweet photos, it is possible to tweet photos that are already uploaded, and you retain the ability to tweet from any desired Twitter account, assuming the Twitter application you use supports multiple accounts.

Defining an Innovation

The developer's product Web page for Flickit Pro lists six "innovations you won't find in any other Flickr iPhone app." While it's likely true that some of the innovations listed are unique to Flickit Pro, such as Photoflow and Infinite Scroll, I have trouble believing the rest are fully unique innovations:

Mobile-Optimized Flickr Engine

I've already mentioned that I don't find Flickit Pro to be operationally faster than Mobile Fotos.

Favorite Contacts

Flickit Pro may indeed be the only iPhone application to manage a subset of Flickr contacts independently within the application. However, without the option to bypass favorites and directly access all contacts, this "innovation" may be pointless to some users.

Nearby Photos

Flickit Pro uses the Google Maps interface for accessing nearby photos. This may be a unique feature, but Flickit Pro most certainly is not alone in offering access to geotagged photos that were taken near your current location.

Batch Upload

As mentioned earlier, this feature has some strengths, as well as some weaknesses, compared to other applications, but batch uploading itself is not a unique innovation to Flickit Pro.

Lack of Multiple Accounts

Perhaps a dealbreaker for many people is that Flickit Pro will only manage one Flickr account at a time. Although you can log out and back in with a different account, Mobile Fotos wins this round with its ability to store login information for multiple accounts and quickly switch between them.

Summary

Although Flickit Pro is a promising application for mobile access to Flickr, it will require some revision and updating to truly be on par with other applications that are available.

Accessory Review

by Chris Lawson, http://chrislawson.net

P-Flip

Function: External battery and desk stand for iPhone and iPod touch.
Developer: Dexim
Price: $55
Requirements: iPhone 3G/3GS or iPod touch.
Trial: None

The iPhone has a battery that gets most people through the day, but it oftentimes doesn't last much longer than that. The nearest wall outlet isn't always convenient, so a healthy market for external batteries has sprung up. Dexim's P-Flip is a combination battery and desk stand that roughly triples the time you can spend away from a power source.

The back view of the P-Flip, when closed, really looks like a travel alarm clock.

Here's what the P-Flip looks like just before you insert an iPhone. Note, again, the charge indicator LEDs showing a full charge.

The front of the closed P-Flip has three blue charge indicator LEDs (illuminated here).

The dark grey metallic plastic P-Flip looks a lot like a travel alarm clock. It has three charge indicator LEDs along the back edge, with a mini-USB charging port on the right side and a charge test button on the left. The test button works much like its counterparts on PowerBook and MacBook batteries have for years; simply press it and the LEDs indicate the current state of charge of the P-Flip's internal battery.

This small button, on the left side if you're looking at the open P-Flip, triggers a charge level test like the buttons on Apple's notebook batteries.

The right side of the P-Flip has its mini-USB port, through which you can charge your iPhone, sync it, or simply charge the P-Flip, or any combination of the three.

With a capacity of 2000 mAh, that internal Li-Ion polymer battery should be able to provide just under one and one-half full charges of the iPhone's 1400 mAh internal battery, or roughly two complete charges of the iPhone's battery from the "20% remaining" warning. That's probably enough to keep the average iPhone user going for at least three full days away from any other source of power, assuming a full charge on day one. The P-Flip's capacity falls around the middle of the spectrum in the market—Mophie's Juice Pack Air battery/case combo and the i.Tech SolarCharger 906 have less capacity than the P-Flip, but there are several products out there with equal or (much) greater capacity at (much) lower cost.

Both of the aforementioned external batteries have their own drawbacks, but the P-Flip isn't perfect either. Its ultimately fatal flaw is a design that completely prevents using a case of any kind with your iPhone. The form-fitting support, presumably intended to prevent excessive pressure on the dock connector while using the P-Flip as a desk stand, is too form-fitting for a case. Removing your phone from a case that otherwise allows charging via a normal USB cable is just too much trouble.

Sadly, the P-Flip is totally incompatible with any cases, which makes it pretty useless to me.

Furthermore, the P-Flip isn't a great desk stand. It holds the iPhone too close to the vertical, making it difficult to use the phone while it's standing up. It's less stable than either the Keynamics Element or PED3 stands, and it's useless in landscape mode, despite the photos on Dexim's Web site. (Oddly enough, using the stand in landscape mode as depicted will cause lots of accidental actuations of the charge indicator button.)

To get this photo, I had to get the camera down to desk level, which is some 18 inches below my normal eye level. It's simply not comfortable to use the iPhone at this angle.

It's difficult to tell just from this photo, but unless you sit almost eye level with your desk surface, the P-Flip holds the iPhone nearly vertical, too much so to be comfortable as a stand.

As with the Juice Pack Air, the P-Flip uses a mini-USB connector and allows syncing the iPhone via the included cable while the phone is on the stand. This is nice, because it allows most people to carry just one cable. Folks who carry around multiple Apple devices still need to carry a second cable, and for these people, a dock connector pass-through would be much more convenient, even if it added $5 to the price.

Finally, there's the question of value. The $55 price is quite simply out of line. When you can buy a much better desk stand for $30 and a higher-capacity 2200 mAh battery pack for another $15 (disclaimer: I haven't used that particular battery pack, so I don't know whether its dock connector is long enough to be fully compatible with most cases or not, but the point stands) and still have $10 left over for a four-pack of good stout, I'm just

not seeing a reason to spend that money on an average battery pack that doesn't play nice with cases.

U-Pouch

Function: Sleeve case for iPhone 3G/3GS.
Developer: Uniea
Price: $23
Requirements: iPhone 3G/3GS.
Trial: None

It's easy enough to make a protective case for a phone, camera, MP3 player, or other assorted portable devices. The tricky part is figuring out how to do it without excessively limiting the device's functionality. Camera bags, for instance, are big sellers, but almost all of them require you to take the camera out of the bag in order to use it. That makes them less convenient than something like a form-fitting iPhone case that allows you to use the phone while it's still in the case.

Apparently Uniea missed that point, or they've simply chosen to ignore it, because the nearly complete inability to use an iPhone in the U-Pouch "leather" sleeve didn't stop them from making the U-Pouch and charging $23 for it. "Leather" is in quotes because the U-Pouch does not actually look or feel like it's made from natural leather. It may be convincing from a distance, but if you're handling one, it feels and smells very much like some sort of pleather. Furthermore, the so-called "zebra pattern" looks sort of silly and doesn't seem to serve any purpose other than as a visual element.

The "zebra pattern" in the U-Pouch's material does nothing for me, or for the functionality of the case.

The design of the U-Pouch is extremely simple, such that anyone with access to (real) leather and a good sewing machine could easily make their own for two or three dollars in materials and 15 minutes of time. Two identically shaped pieces of patterned black material with a fuzzy synthetic liner are sewn together to make a sleeve that fits very snugly around the iPhone 3G. So snugly, in fact, that it's difficult to insert and remove the phone, which means the U-Pouch manages to be inconvenient at being inconvenient.

If I can't use my phone in its protective case, at least make it easy enough for me to insert or remove it that I don't mind doing so every few minutes. Regular readers of ATPM will remember that I had the same complaint about Rivet's Loop back in November, though the Loop at least attaches to your belt to give you an extra hand when removing the phone. The U-Pouch doesn't attach to anything.

I'm not sure if this was a factory goof or a design goof, but you can't charge the iPhone while it's in the U-Pouch. That fabric is solid.

It does at least attempt to make a concession to usability by putting a cutout in the bottom so you can charge or sync your iPhone without removing it from the case, but somehow Uniea managed to screw this one up, too. There's a solid piece of material over the cutout preventing all access to it. In order to plug into the dock connector on the phone, you'd have to cut a slit in the fabric. I'm not sure if the U-Pouch I received to review simply missed a step at the factory or if Uniea honestly thought it was a good idea to make a cutout and then cover it up.

You can forget about actually using the iPhone once it's in the U-Pouch.

Even assuming that the U-Pouch reviewed here was a defective model missing its slit for dock connector access, there are still a host of limitations with the case. You can't access the volume-control buttons, and you certainly can't use the screen (or, logically, the Home button). The camera lens is obscured by the back of the case, and, in any event, you need screen access to use the iPhone's camera anyway. You can turn off the screen by tapping the power button, but you can't power off the phone entirely because power-off requires a swipe to confirm, and it's impossible to access the screen area needed to do that without sliding the phone halfway out of the case. About the only thing you *can* do with the iPhone in the U-Pouch is listen to already-playing music via headphones, which you can't then control, or turn the ringer on or off.

The upper corners of the iPhone have basically zero protection against impacts or scratches.

All of these limitations might be acceptable if the U-Pouch provided ironclad (so to speak) protection for the phone, but it doesn't. Aside from being made of relatively thin, soft material, and thus leaving the iPhone vulnerable to impacts, the upper corners of the iPhone are left almost completely unprotected. If the relatively slippery case happens to fall out of a shirt pocket, something I've complained about before, the corners of your phone are just asking for an introduction to the ground, with possibly disastrous results.

For me, and I suspect for most other people, the U-Pouch simply limits the functionality of an iPhone far too much for the minimal protection it provides. Keep your $23—or the $20 for the "suede" version of the same thing—and put it toward another, better case.

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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What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

We hope by now that you've found what you're looking for (We can't imagine there's something else about ATPM that you'd like to know.). But just in case you've read this far (We appreciate your tenacity.) and still haven't found that little piece of information about ATPM that you came here to find, please feel free to e-mail us at (You guessed it.) editor@atpm.com.