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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 September issue of About This Particular Macintosh! It's back-to-school, back to work, and for the editors at ATPM it's back to the Mac and forward to the iPhone. No matter the recent political convention storms in the north and west and hurricanes in the south and east, we remain constant in our coverage of the personal computing experience.

10 Million Macs & 10 Million iPhones

What do the Mac and the iPhone have in common aside from OS X? Apple may sell 10 million of each of these products during the fiscal year ending this month. Apple has regained its position as the #3 PC maker in the United States. This year's back-to-school season and the popularity of Macs on campus may push the company past an impressive sales milestone. Apple is on the verge of shipping 10 million Macs in a year for the first time in the company's history. For the fiscal year ending this month, the company is on track to set new unit sales records and may find itself achieving a level of success almost unthinkable a few short years ago.

Months ago Steve Jobs made a forecast that was thought by some to be almost hopelessly ambitious. He forecast Apple would sell 10 million iPhones in calendar year 2008. That marker may be reached even before the end of September.

The App Store

The iPhone's iTunes App Store has captivated the imagination of millions of iPhone owners. The low-cost and no-cost apps made available have been downloaded by the tens of millions. While competitors in the smart phone market are expanding their own application offerings, there's nothing to rival the consumer-oriented approach Apple has taken in development of its app store plan.

While the app store has already proven to be popular, some are suggesting the iTunes interface is beginning to show its age. It's the place of purchase for music, movies, and now iPhone apps. Has iTunes become an unwieldy collection of digital storefronts or does it remain an easy-to-navigate way to find the digital wares you want? Please e-mail our editors with your point of view.

Will We See Them in September?

In [last month's](#) *Welcome* we mentioned Apple management's statements in the July conference call with Wall Street analysts about new products to be released before the end of September. With the back-to-school season closing and the Christmas shopping season to come, what might be in the offing? We're sure that question will be answered at Apple's "Let's Rock" event on September 9.

Dell in the Doldrums

Dell Computer, one of Apple's most aggressive and formidable competitors, is still suffering hard times. Despite growth in unit sales through expanding its retail presence in global markets, the company has had to cut prices to compete with market leader HP and Apple's strong presence in the \$1,000+ US retail market keeps that company from moving more profitable laptop and desktop PCs.

Dell has now used more cash than it has ever earned to buy back the company's shares to keep the earnings per share from falling through the floor. Fewer shares means less earnings needed to push earnings per share higher or to keep the earnings per share from falling. The problem this creates is that Dell has few assets remaining to invest in new product development and to improve customer satisfaction. The folks on Wall Street aren't pleased by the company's poor performance, and the lack of profit growth relative to sales will keep the company under continued pressure. Cutting prices and cutting costs alone will not return that company to its former glory.

The 1990s are over, and with them the days of shipping cheap, general use PCs as a means of gaining market clout have long passed. It's the era of digital devices, sophisticated user tastes, and constant connectivity. Dell's dilemma illustrates the changes in the consumer technology market.

The Personal Computing Experience Today

ATPM has been chronicling the personal computing experience since 1995. Since our beginnings as a monthly publication, we have covered the fall and rise of Apple, the rise and fall of Dell, and user migration from general use desktop computers to laptops, iPods, and other specific-use digital devices such as the iPhone. The personal computing experience now finds its way into many different product forms. The editors of ATPM will continue to cover the changes in the personal computing experience in our easy to read monthly format. No matter the changes in the size, shape and use of personal technology devices, our desire to bring you a relevant and informative publication hasn't changed.

Our September issue includes:

MacMuser: Whose line is it anyway?

Mark Tennent mulls the ramifications of the BBC moving its streaming services from Akamai to Level 3 Communications.

Next Actions: Master List for September

Ed Eubanks Jr. updates his master list of GTD applications.

Photoshop For the Curious: Don't Yield—Merge!

One of the more powerful tools in Photoshop is often one of the simplest to use, and yet many people aren't even aware of its presence. Learn how to expand your horizons in this month's *Photoshop For the Curious*.

How To: Making Preview Useful Again

Quick Look hasn't made Preview obsolete just yet. With the right coaxing it is still very useful.

Desktop Pictures: Western US National Parks

Julie Ritterskamp returns with more desktop photos, this time from national parks in the western United States.

Cartoon: Cortland

The identity of Lord Fate, present and past, is revealed, as Cortland's saga comes to a close. Todd and Angie begin to move their lives forward again, though Angie is having trouble letting Cortland go. But does she have to...?

Review: Das Keyboard Professional

Loud, shiny, and black, but some of the quirks in Darth Vader's keyboard might lead to a few Force-strangled generals along the way.

Review: Hard Drives as Floppies

Michael Tsai tries out several hard drive docking peripherals that support his rationale that hard drives are now as ubiquitous as the venerable floppy disk.

Review: iMetal Headsets

Maximo's iPhone-friendly headsets are stylish and have good sound, yet one of the two models is prone to some fallout.

Review: MacGourmet Deluxe 1.0.3

Having learned to cook at an early age, Ed Eubanks Jr. is pleased with this recipe management application.

Review: Séquence 1.0.1

Functionalities implemented out of sequence? Useful features are there, but the basic ability to capture window cleanly is sorely missing.



Photoshop: I Love Layers

Thanks for this. I just found this publication, and Layers have been a mystery to my up until now. This makes them less scary for sure.

—*Andrew Spearns*

Microsoft, Revisited

You know, Word 2007 is hands-down the best word processor I've used, and it makes 5.1 look like an antique. Word 2008 on the Mac doesn't come close...in fact, *nothing* on the Mac comes close.

This pisses me off! How can the Mac not have a world-class .doc-compatible word processor?

—*bonaldi*

You know, I have the greatest respect for the MacBU (the Business Unit at Microsoft responsible for Mac products). It's got to be tough to not only churn out great products but also have to work with people that probably consider you at least somewhat disloyal (to the Windows platform).

I am not sure what it entails to port application code from WinOffice to MacOffice. You know, the old OOP "code-reuse" thingie that we've been hearing about since, well, OOP. Maybe it's hard porting Win C++ to Mac Obj-C (or just C) but I just don't see why documents can't render 100% exactly on both platforms. Full, seamless WYSIWYG transparency.

Call it the "Turing Test for Office Docs." Whatever. The UI elements don't have to be mirrors between the platforms, but I don't see why it's not possible to display, edit, and print exactly.

The same company makes the two products fer chrissake! The same entity owns whatever intellectual property is required to do the task.

(Of course, anything beyond technical reasons why it can't be done starts the Conspiracy Theory lights blinking, with respect to the Mac/Win platform wars).

—*Angus Wong*



I have used MS Word/Office since 1990, even reaching the level of expert on both Mac and Windows versions. But recently on my MacBook Pro Office 2004 went bad, and I have not been able to launch anything except Excel; so I uninstalled it. Between NeoOffice and iWork 08 I have everything I need for exchanging files. Also, I have been using the

OpenOffice 3.0 Beta and have been pleasantly surprised. So I won't upgrade to Office 2008, and would think twice about installing Windows on the MacBook Pro just to get Office 2007.

—*Rich*



I have been trying for a good 2–3 months already to get used to Office 2007, but the longer I use it, the more frustrating it becomes. Certainly, there are some nice features (more seamless editing of pictures you paste into your Word document, a much better PivotTable interface in Excel), I still find it annoying that (a) ribbon takes so much of my screen and (b) keeps a whole bunch of stuff I hardly ever use available, while (c) obscuring things I really am using (try switching PowerPoint presentation windows).

Now, that said—Office 2008 on a Mac is an even further abomination. On my iMac G5 it is by far the slowest to start application of all. So slow is it, I think I am going to “upgrade” it back to Office 2004.

I agree with some of your points on Xbox, although I think that Microsoft's ability to sustain losses on sale on console was a very important factor. Not the most important one, yet still a major one.

—*Andrei*

iPhone App Roundup, GTD

I really appreciated this article. It gave me an excellent head-start in finding a good GTD-based tool.

—*Robert B.*

Knapsack 1.1

This article very clearly depicts the pros and cons of the software. It definitely affected my willingness to buy the software. Thank you.

—*Jay Kappmeier*



Thanks, Eric, for your review. We really appreciate the time you took to kick the tires and provide a fair evaluation of the features and limitations of Knapsack 1.1. Many of the items you mention have been brought up to us by our users and we have even touched on some of them already in our blog. In fact, iCal integration was added in 1.1 expressly because

of the amount of user feedback we had for this feature. . . plus, we wanted our trips on our iPhones, too.

The next release of Knapsack will be focused on improving the map experience and more tightly integrating trip's locations with the itinerary.

It's direct user feedback and reviews like yours that are helping to shape the future of Knapsack.

—Brad Willoughby, *TinyPlanet Software, LLC*

Logitech TrackMan Wheel

I've used this product for more than 15 years, for both drawing and hard core gaming. Two things. . . I disagree that the center trackball is better for any purpose. It require side-to-side finger movement, which will eventually get into your wrist and cause problems. The thumb motion is much more natural and easier on your hands as long as you keep the thing free moving. Clean and dry is key to smooth action. Also, replace it when it wears out and starts to drag.

To clean, turn upside down and gently but firmly smack it down on the palm of your other hand. The ball pops right out. I clean mine with a microfiber cloth designed for lenses. You can wash the ball if it gets grungy, but be sure it's good and dry before putting back in. Be careful not to pop out the little teflon balls that the thumb ball glides on. It's easy to put them back in but also easy to lose them!

I also keep thumb balls from old mice for swapping out if my current ball has a problem. As long as they are in good shape, they can be reused to replace a damaged or clammy ball.

Another trick. . . if you spend so much time using the mouse intensely (like gaming) that your palm starts to get sore from pressure on the hard plastic, get a small gel insert for high heels and pad the top. That is one thing I would change about this mouse, to have a soft insert on the top.

—Teadye

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.



Whose line is it anyway?

iGate took another turn for the worse recently, when the BBC announced it was moving streaming services from Akamai to Level 3 Communications. This latest skirmish is just another in the war between the BBC and Internet Service Suppliers.

Not content with threatening ISPs that the BBC would retaliate if customers' access to streaming content was restricted, it is likely ISPs will be charged a lot more to stream reruns of BBC shows. Internet suppliers are understandably miffed about the extra demands on their bandwidth that streaming TV makes. Some ISPs report a 200% increase in traffic due to the iPlayer. To be charged to provide something they gain nothing from is just another kick in the teeth.

This is because nearly all ISPs will have to pay to receive traffic from Level 3, unlike now where they get data from Akamai for virtually nothing. The actual figures are somewhere in the region of £5 per mbit compared with the current £0.50 from Akamai, according to one commentator on thinkbroadband.com.

Just a Minute

Presumably the BBC is switching suppliers so that the end user pays for the service rather than the BBC. As licence fee payers, we ought to be pleased, but not if it comes as an across-the-board increase in the price of Internet access. TV companies already have three or more other ways to transmit their programs: analogue and digital RF and cable feeds, satellite, as well as on DVDs.

Is there really any need to supply a scrunched-up, low-res version of last week's Gardeners World when TV capture devices cost less than 50 quid? Not only that, but the iPlayer is also restricted to a few versions of a proprietary operating system even, though the BBC has been told to open the service for Mac and Linux users. The other channels aren't under the same control, and simply ignore anything other than Internet Explorer, but at least they are charging for their downloads.

That means we all end up paying more in extra costs for our broadband service as ISPs buy increased bandwidth to enable streaming TV, then add a little more to our bills to cover Level 3's charge so we can download TV shows whether we want to or not. With a tiny bit more to the BBC to cover their loss of revenue in licence fees, because no doubt online viewers won't want to buy a TV licence even though they still need one.

As broadband speeds rise in the UK, it is inevitable that Internet users will download ever increasing amounts of data. TV channels adding to this when they already have their own dedicated delivery mediums is taking things too far if they expect us to pay for it as well.



Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

Master List for September

By reader request, I've added a new report to the list: iPhone Presence, which reports one of three possible options—an application in the App Store, an iPhone (or mobile) version of a Web-application, or nothing. I'll be working the kinks out of this for a couple of months, so any help you might have is appreciated.

ZenPages by Zenbe is a new addition to the general Web-based solutions below; while it's not heavily GTD-oriented, it is worth a look for what it *does* do: it can serve as a project and task manager, calendar, global e-mail, global address book, and social network aggregator all in one. If this sounds like your kind of thing, you'll want to check out ZenPages, as it is a well-done implementation of all of that.

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

Locally Installed GTD Applications

[Action Tracker](#)



Developer: Mac Productive

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

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

News: None

[ActionTastic](#)



Developer: Jon Crosby

Current Version: 0.9.3

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Beta

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

[EasyTask Manager](#)



Developer: Orionbelt.com

Current Version: 2.0

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: Yes

Print Lists: Yes

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

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

Frictionless



Developer: Twin Forces

Current Version: 2.0d18

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

Ghost Action



Developer: Ghost Park Software

Current Version: 1.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

[iGTD](#)



Developer: Bartek

Current Version: 1.4.5.6

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

[iCog](#)



Developer: HensPace

Current Version: 1.88

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: Python 2.4 or later

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

News: None

[mGTD](#)



Developer: Apokalypse Software Corp.

Current Version: 1.2

Price: Free

Development Status: Pre-final

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: Mori 1.4

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

News: None

[Midnight Inbox](#)



Developer: Midnight Beep Softworks

Current Version: 1.3.1

Price: \$35

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: Developer has suggested that version 2.0 will be released in August, so it may already be in-hand by press.

OmniFocus



Developer: Omni Group

Current Version: 1.0.3

Price: \$80

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

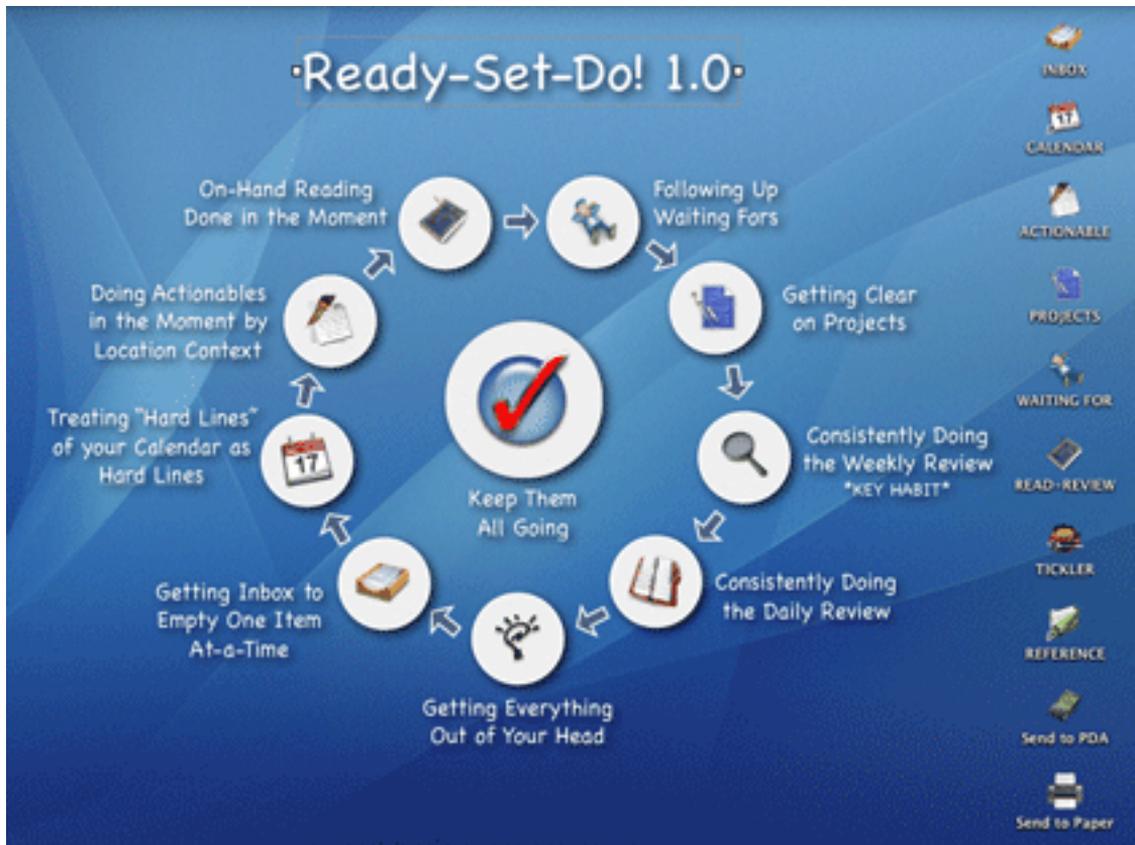
iPhone Presence: App (\$20)

Required Applications: None

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

News: Development continues on version 1.1, which is the only iPhone-sync-compatible version and is still in alpha/beta.

Ready, Set, Do!



Developer: Todd Vasquez

Current Version: 1.3

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

TaskPaper



Developer: Hog Bay Software

Current Version: 1.0.3 (26)

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

Things



Developer: Cultured Code

Current Version: 0.9.4

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

Development Status: Alpha

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: App (\$10)

Required Applications: None

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

News: Release of version 0.9.4 (and version 1.1 of the iPhone app) brought syncing between the two, as well as additional features for the desktop version.

Thinking Rock



Developer: Avente Pty Ltd

Current Version: 2.0.1

Price: Free, open-source

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None.

What To Do



Developer: Objective Satisfaction

Current Version: 1.3.2

Price: \$29

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

Required Applications: None

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

News: None

Locally Installed General Task Managers

Anxiety

Developer: Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

Check Off

Developer: Second Gear

Current Version: 3.8

Price: Free/Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

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

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

Dejumble

Developer: Thinking Code Software, Inc.

Current Version: 1.2.b1

Price: \$19

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: App (\$8)

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

News: None

Docket

Developer: Surprise Software

Current Version: 1.3

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

Dolt

Developer: Jim McGowan

Current Version: 2.6

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: Yes

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

[High Priority](#)

Developer: Aram Kudurshian

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

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

[Hot Plan](#)

Developer: Intuiware

Current Version: 1.4.1

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

[iClock](#)

Developer: Script Software

Current Version: 3.0.5

Price: \$20

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

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

News: None

Life Balance

Developer: Llamagraphics

Current Version: 4.0.5

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

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

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

News: None

MultitaskingAssistant

Developer: Green Cog Software

Current Version: 1.0.3

Price: Donationware

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

Stapler

Developer: The Blue Technologies Group

Current Version: 1.1

Price: €7.50 (about \$10)

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: No

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

ToDo X

Developer: Omicron Software Systems, Inc.

Current Version: 2.2

Price: \$15

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Import from iCal only

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: No

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

ZooDo

Developer: InterfaceThis

Current Version: 1.0

Price: Free

Development Status: Release

iCal Sync: Yes

QuickSilver Plug-in: No

Web-app Sync: No

Print Lists: Yes (through iCal)

iPhone Presence: None

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

News: None

Browser and Web-based GTD Applications

[30 Boxes](#)

Price: Free

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

[43 Actions](#)

Price: Free (donations get extra features)

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

[GTDAgenda](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTDInbox](#)

Price: Free

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

[GTD-PHP](#)

Price: Free

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

[Neptune](#)

Price: \$10/year

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

[Next Action](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nexty](#)

Price: Free

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

[Nozbe](#)

Price: Free

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

[SimpleGTD](#)

Price: Free

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

[Toodledo](#)

Price: Free

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

[Tracks](#)

Price: Free

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

[Vitalist](#)

Price: \$5/month (premium)

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

Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

- [Backpack](#)
- [Basecamp](#)
- [HiTask](#)

- [Hiveminder](#)
- [Joe's Goals](#)
- [Mojonote](#)
- [Remember the Milk](#)
- [Scribe](#)
- [Sproutliner](#)
- [Task Freak!](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Tasktoy](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Tweeto](#)
- [Zenlists](#)
- [ZenPages](#)

GTD and Task Management Wikis

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

iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)

- [Chores](#),
- [Dejumble](#)
- [DoBot ToDos](#)
- [EasyTask Manager](#)
- [Lists by MobilityWare](#)
- [Lists by Tynsoe.org](#)

- [My Lists](#)
- [OmniFocus](#)
- [Outliner by CarbonFin](#)
- [Tanjas Checklist](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Things](#)
- [ToDo by Appigo](#)
- [To Do by Erica Sadun](#)
- [Zenbe Lists](#)

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Don't Yield—Merge!

Many of the consumer-level digital cameras these days are bundled with a shoddy excuse for software intended to help improve photos and do fun things with them. One feature, in particular, seems to be increasingly popular—merging (or stitching) photos into a panorama. Three different digital cameras I've used had this feature, only one of them had a Macintosh version, and it crashed pretty much every time I used it. The other two weren't much better on a Windows box.

Never to worry again, because Photoshop has a splendid Photomerge function. Many Photoshop novices don't realize it's there because it's tucked away in the File > Automate menu. With neighboring menu functions like 3DxPhotoshop and Merge to HDR, those who take casual trips to the Automate menu might be scared away. But, it doesn't take much bravery to use this powerful tool.

Preparing Photos For Merging

The key to great photo panoramas starts long before the photos ever find their way to Photoshop. The best panoramas come from photos that were taken with a panorama in mind. That means thinking about how the photos will stitch together before they are taken. There are four rules to follow:

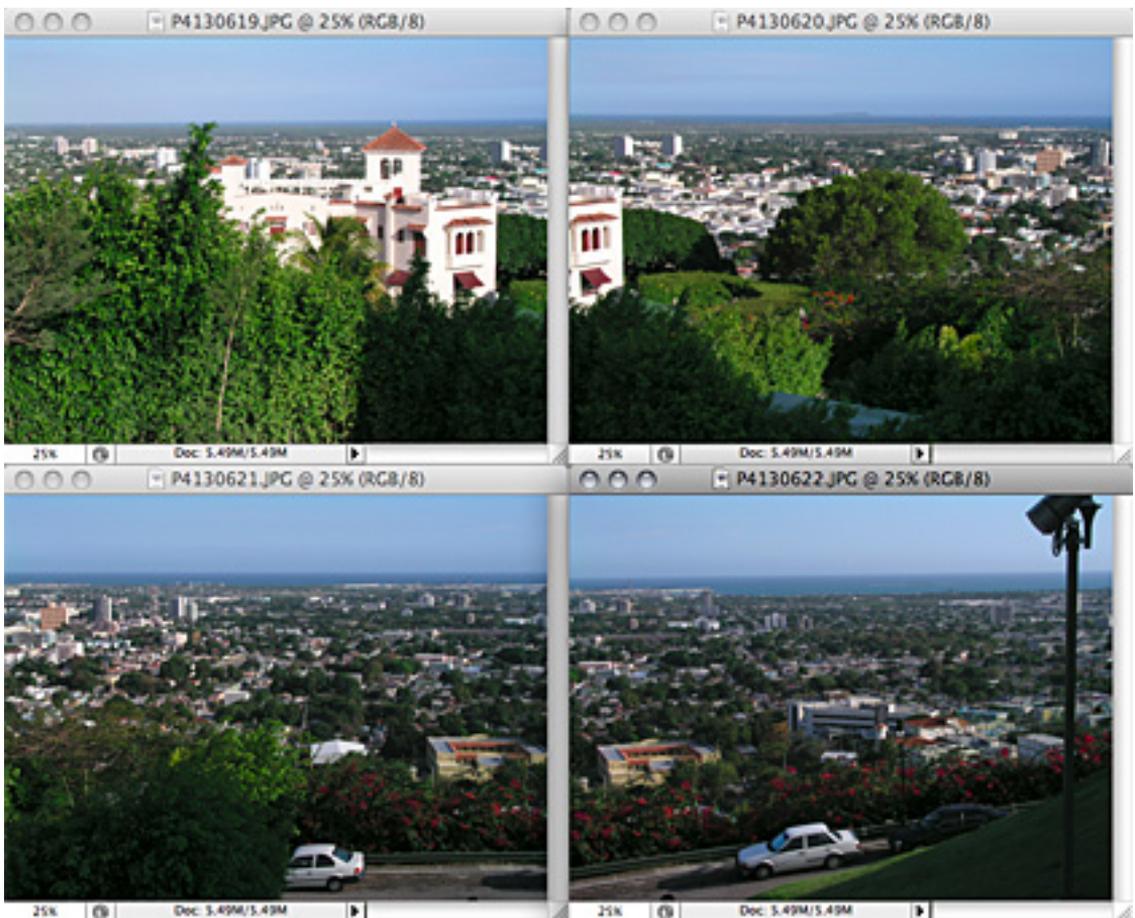
1. Avoid foreground objects as much as possible. The closer objects are to the camera, the more distorted and stretched they can become in the final panorama.
2. Be sure the camera remains in the center point of rotation. This means the camera stays in one spot as the photographer swings around it. Putting the camera on a tripod takes care of this, by design. If the photographer remains stationary and simply turns in place, the camera swings wider around the center of rotation. Even just those few inches can make a difference if there are foreground objects such as the house that can be seen to the left side of my demonstration photo, below. Think of it this way—let the camera be at the spot where the hands of a clock connect in the middle as they turn, and not at the ends of the hands that point to the numbers.
3. Leave enough room to overlap the photos. Some digital cameras have a mode that puts panorama guides in the viewfinder to help line up the multiple shots. If such a feature is not available, frame the picture so that 1/4 of one side in the first photo matches 1/4 of the opposite side in the next photo.

4. Use manual exposure and white balance. A common error in panoramas I see is when the successive merged shots were on automatic exposure and/or white balance. The mismatched exposures and color shifts (most often visible in clear blue skies) can destroy an otherwise perfect panorama. When framing the panorama, decide which region is the primary subject. Manually set the white balance appropriate for the environment, then determine the exposure needed. It's fine to take an auto-exposure reading for that spot, but then use that exposure as a manual setting for all the photos that will comprise the panorama.

Once the desired photos are captured, they're ready for a trip through Photoshop's Photomerge function.

Automatic Photomerge

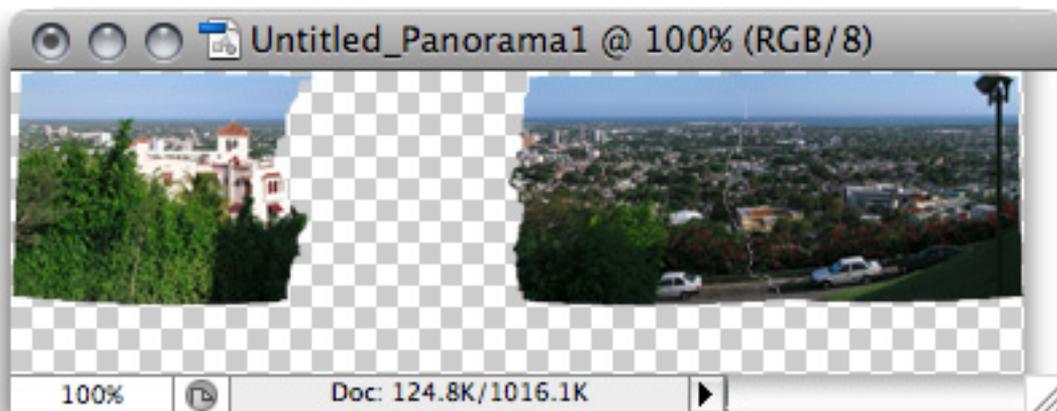
Often enough, the results from a completely automatic Photomerge may be totally satisfactory. Let's give it a try (note: I am using Photoshop CS3, which brought considerable enhancements to the Photomerge function in CS2):



My panorama will be made up of these four individual shots looking over the city of Ponce, Puerto Rico.

An automatic Photomerge is essentially a three-click process:

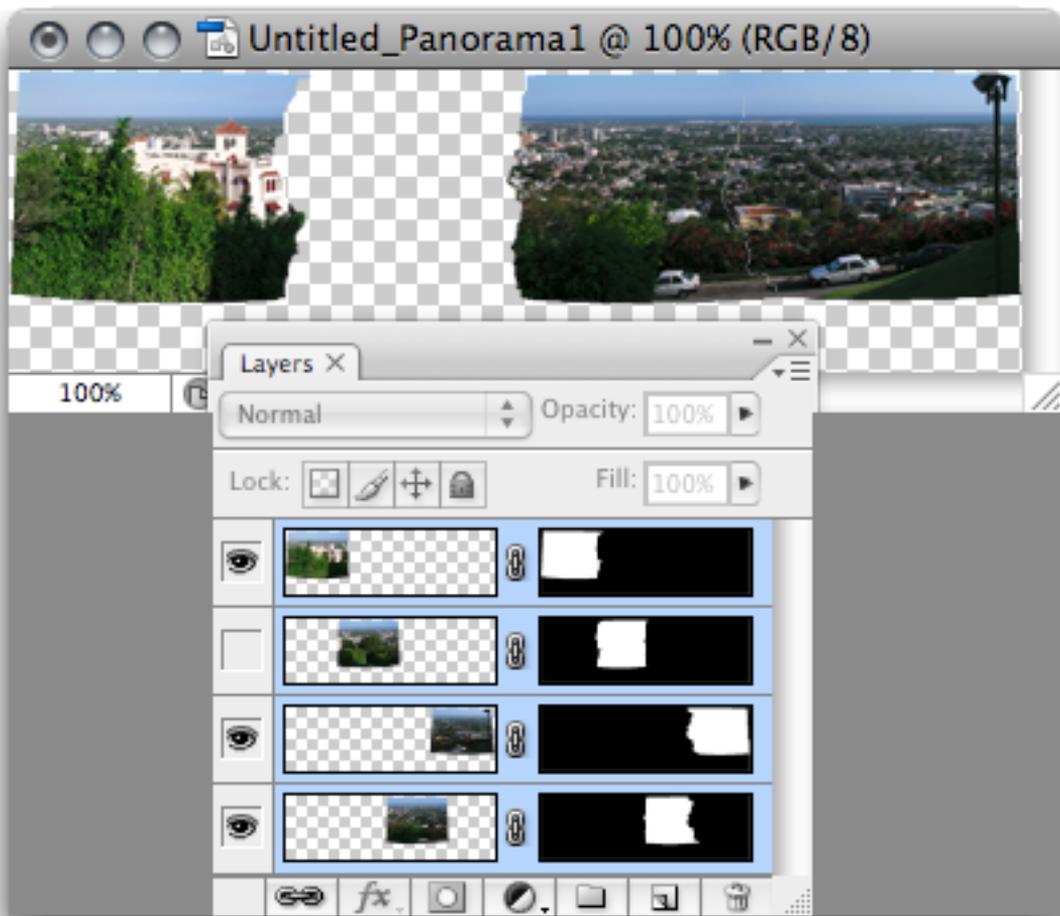
1. Select File ▸ Automate ▸ Photomerge. . .
2. Ensuring that automatic mode is enabled (it should be the default), click Add Open Files if the photos to be merged are already open, as mine are in the figure above. Alternatively (but with more clicks required), use the Browse button to select the directed photos to be merged.
3. Click the OK button, sit back, and let Photoshop do its magic.



Result of the automatic Photomerge. The layer for one of the photos has been hidden to help visualize how Photoshop stitches the images together. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

The result is not bad at all—just a trip to the Crop tool to eliminate the edges that were skewed to make the panorama fit, and this shot would be done.

Notice the Layers palette. Unlike the cheap merge utilities bundled with consumer cameras which arbitrarily find a single vertical spot to blend each photo together, Photoshop instead varies the position of the blend, finding the ideal spot to make the transition. The transition spot usually happens at areas of distinct contrast, such as the edge of a building, where the eye already expects a natural transition from building to background.

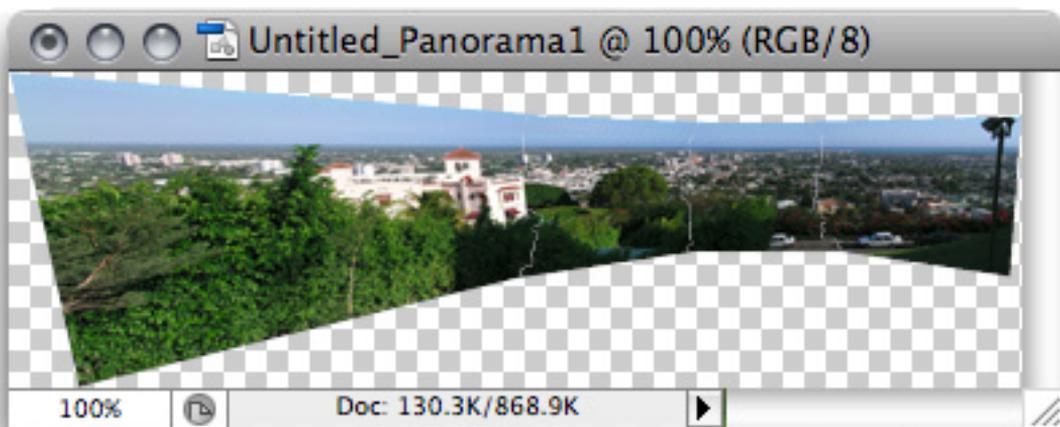


Note the use of Layer Masks as opposed to erasing parts of the image. If desired, experienced Photoshop users can manually fine-tune the image masks to improve the region where each image merges to the next.

Adding a Little Perspective

Even though this Photomerge produced very nice results, it could be better. The most significant issue I see is that the street is curving unnaturally in the lower right corner. The same perspective exaggeration is also in the lower left corner, but isn't so obvious because that region is just foliage with no straight lines.

To attempt an improvement, instead of using the Automatic mode, I'll try the Perspective mode, chosen in the Photomerge dialog box.

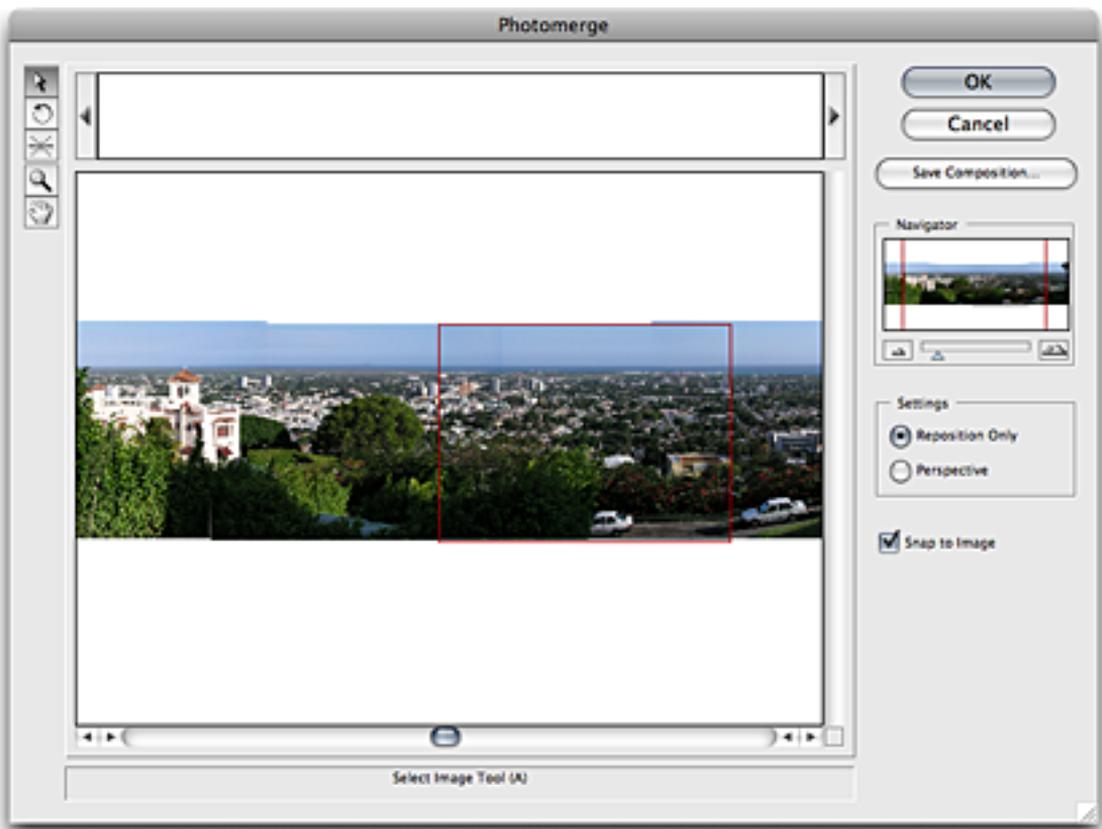


Result of the Perspective mode Photomerge. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

Uh oh. What happened? Admittedly, the various Photomerge modes (all of which except the last one are technically automatic) will generally require a bit of trial and error. In this attempt, Photoshop managed to detect the road in the foreground and keep it essentially horizontal, but at the expense of badly distorting the left side of the photo. Nevertheless, the 3D-like wraparound curve is clearly visible as a result of the Perspective treatment.

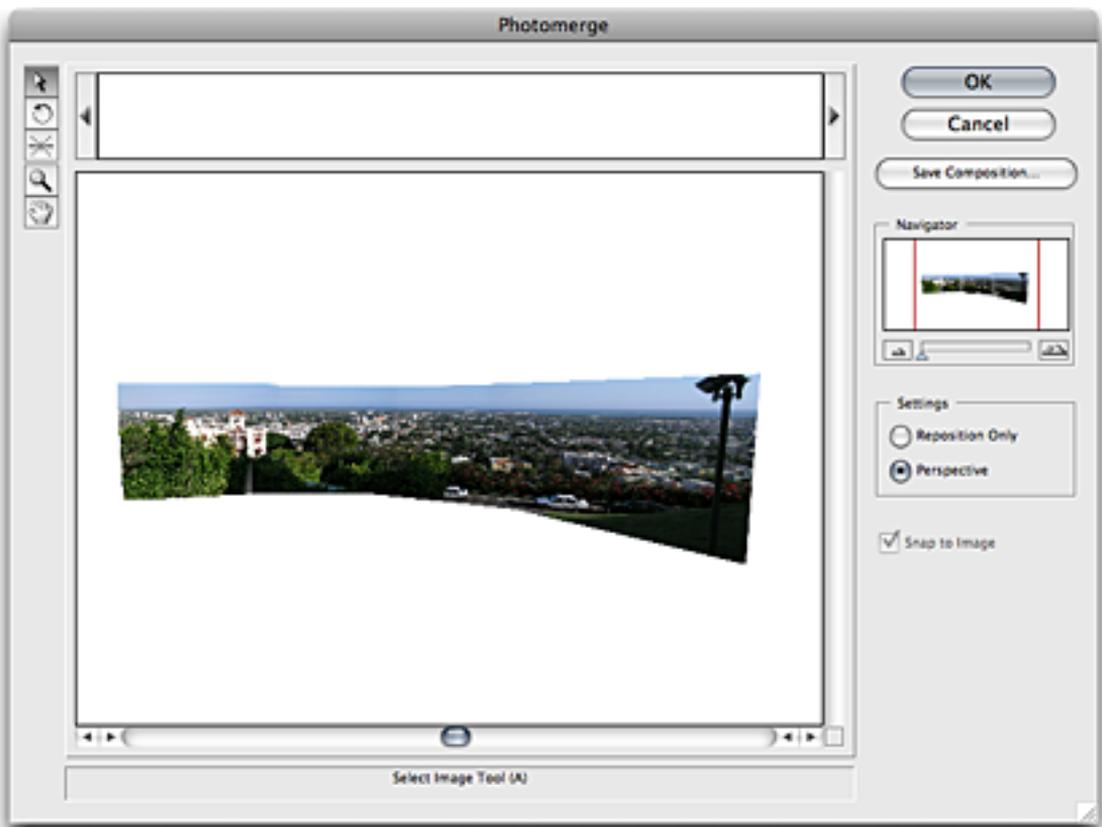
To Do It Right, Sometimes You Have To Do It Yourself

To produce the best merge of this particular photo, I'll require the services of the manual Interactive Layout mode. Once this mode is selected from the Photomerge dialog box, Photoshop begins the same process as before to begin merging the photos. But, instead of a finished merge, the Interactive Layout mode presents me with an interface to customize exactly how the images will fit together.



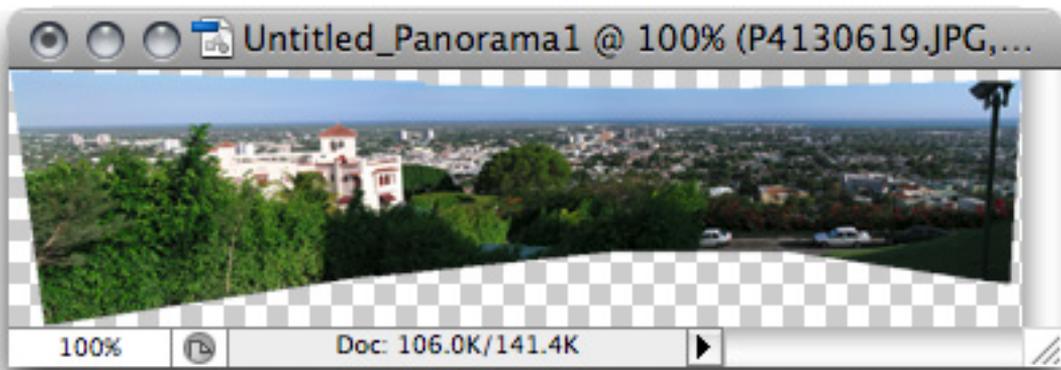
The Photomerge Interactive Layout interface attempts to closely position the photos into the region they should merge.

At first, Photoshop has only placed the images roughly where they will need to be without any kind of skewing to improve perspective. My next step is to click the Perspective mode on the right side of the Interactive Layout mode window.



Certainly better than the automatic Perspective mode merge, but I'm not happy yet.

At this stage, Photoshop decided the “normal” perspective was more to the left, near the foreground building, instead of the street on the right. Fortunately, there’s a simple way to define which of the individual images should carry the normal perspective. I simply activate the third button in the upper left corner—the one that looks like a little starburst. That’s the Vanishing Point tool. Then, I click in the area of the third photo—the one where most of the street is visible—and accept the changes.



Result of the Interactive Layout mode. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

I see now that the left side perspective isn't nearly as wacky as the result from the automatic perspective merge. All that's left to do is some cropping and color adjustment. Also, I admit, back when I took this photo, I violated rule number 4 to lock the exposure. Fortunately for this photo, it's an easy to fix by swiping across those dark areas with the Dodge tool.



The finished photomerge. ([Click](#) to enlarge.)

Homework Assignment

Before taking the time to work in Interactive Layout mode, try the Cylindrical mode in the Photomerge dialog box to see if it provides better results. For photos that didn't follow the initial composition rules very well, try using the Select Image tool in the Interactive Layout interface to slide each photo into a better position, and the Rotate Image tool if needed. Using these tools definitely requires hands-on experience, so open duplicate copies of the original photos and give these tools a try. Start with the Reposition Only button active and then switch to the Perspective button once the photos seem to be aligned as best as possible.

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How To

by Sylvester Roque, sroque@atpm.com

Making Preview Useful Again

Every installation of Mac OS X includes an array of applications in addition to the core OS. Some of these applications are useful from the beginning, and others only prove useful after a little experience and experimentation. In fact, I've previously nominated Activity Monitor, for example, as one of OS X's most [under-appreciated applications](#).

Whether or not I fully appreciate a program depends heavily on how much I use that program. Take, for example, my experiences with Preview. Over time my impression of this program shifted from indispensable, to being on the verge of deletion, to remaining very handy if you know a few tricks. Let's look at how my use of Preview has changed over time as I understand its capabilities.

The Start of a Great Relationship

In the beginning I used Preview any time I needed a quick look at a graphic file. Remember that graphic on your hard drive with the cryptic name? If all you need to do is look at the file, don't wait for a full-blown graphics application to open—Preview to the rescue. It can't read everything, but most of the graphics I handle regularly are JPEG or TIFF, and Preview handles them with ease. Usually, in the time it took larger applications to launch I already had the file open. Sometimes I would even perform a basic file conversion all from within Preview. Life was good.

With the advent of Leopard, Apple introduced Quick Look. Now viewing a file was as simple as selecting it and tapping the spacebar. On the surface this was a brilliant addition to the OS, but it had a downside. After the first few days with Quick Look I found myself using Preview less often. By the beginning of the summer, Preview was my primary PDF reader and was used for little else. It was starting to look like this was the beginning of the end of my daily relationship with Preview. By the end of the summer Preview was not the dominant viewer it had been, but it was proving useful. Its abilities hadn't changed but my understanding of its abilities had. I'll pass on some of the things I've learned in hopes that it will rekindle your appreciation of Preview.

Summer of Discovery

At the beginning of the summer I was using Photoshop to restore some family photos. Using my usual "poke at it till you get something you like" method, the photo I was working on looked much better than the original. One side effect is that I had several copies of the file on my hard drive. Time for a little housecleaning. The problem is, before you clean house you must know what to throw away and what to keep. Although the files didn't have the same names or modification dates that was no help. I wasn't sure the most recent file was

the best. If you are a regular reader you know by now that my experiments don't always work out as well as I intended.

Side By Side Comparisons Using Preview

As intelligent readers of ATPM you may already know this, but I didn't. It's possible to easily do a sort of side by side comparison of graphics files using Preview. Open Preview's preferences and look at the Images tab. In the section marked "When opening images" choose "Open all images in one window" and Preview will do just that. Now that Preview is ready, perform the following steps:

1. Select a group of graphics and right-click them. Choose to open them with Preview in the contextual menu that appears. If you try double-clicking the files, they will open in the program you have chosen for that file rather than in Preview.
2. A thumbnail of each image appears in Preview's sidebar with the first image occupying the window. Getting a full view of the other pictures is as simple as clicking a thumbnail. This makes it easy to do a quick comparison of the files. I had never discovered this feature because I have always had Preview set to open each image in its own window.

After I discovered this method of doing quick comparisons I started to wonder if there were an easy way to delete one of the files—without accidentally selecting the wrong one of course. Long time Mac users have probably already guessed the easy solution. Right-click the thumbnail for the image you want to get rid of, and miraculously one of the options in the contextual menu is to move the selected file to the trash. (You can also press the Delete key.) From the same contextual menu one can close the selected file, without closing the entire window, or move the selected file to a new window.

Combining Files Using Preview

I knew OS X had some pretty good PDF creation capabilities, but I had not really put them to the test very much until I read [this Mac OSG thread](#). It turns out that a series of graphic images can be combined into a single PDF file. Preview comes to the rescue again if you do a little preparation first. First, check Preview's preferences and make sure the Image tab is set to open all images in a single window. Now open the group of files. I often open the first file and drag others into the sidebar. You can rearrange the files as needed by moving the thumbnails in the sidebar. When everything is in order, choose Save As and save the file as a PDF.

Later in the summer I was doing a little online research before making a purchase. When I am in one of those moods I usually save the relevant Web pages as PDFs to read when it's more convenient. The problem is I usually end up with several Web pages all stored in the same folder. Even if I create separate subfolders with the PDFs for each model I'm interested in that's not as convenient as I would like. Wouldn't it be nice if Preview could

combine several PDFs into a single document? Oh, and while we are wishing for things, wouldn't it be nice if you could re-order the pages before saving the separate PDFs into a single file?

If you have looked carefully at Preview's preferences you may have noticed that there is no option to open several PDFs in a single window. Preview wants to open each PDF in its own window. Initially that led me to believe that it was impossible to combine several PDFs into one file using Preview. In fact, I said as much on Mac OSG Podcast episode 112. Well I was wrong. Former Mac OSG Podcast Tips and Tricks guru Rick Prather told me the secret. Combining multiple PDFs into a single file is easy. If you follow this process:

1. Open the first PDF and make sure the sidebar is showing.
2. Drag other PDFs that you want to combine into the sidebar.
3. Once all the files are in the sidebar drag the thumbnails into any order you like. Clicking on a thumbnail shows that file's contents in the main window just in case you need a peek.
4. Once all of the files are in order, choose Save As and save the file.

The trick for combining PDFs has proven reliable for me. This process seems to work fine even if some of the files already have their own Table of Contents. Personally I find it easier to add those files last and then move them where I need them to be just before saving the file.

Final Thoughts

I've only scratched the surface of Preview's capabilities. In the last few months I have also used it to perform some basic color correction just to test an idea or two. The color correction sliders may not be as precise as editors which allow one to enter numerical values, but they were fine for the quick and dirty corrections I wanted to test. It is also a great way to apply some basic filters to an image just to see the effect. Spend a little more time with Preview in the near future. I bet you will be pleasantly surprised.

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Desktop Pictures

by Julie Ritterskamp

Western US National Parks

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

This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's photos were taken by Julie Ritterskamp in July 2008 on a trip to national parks in the western United States.



[View Pictures](#)

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

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

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

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#).

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

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

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x through 10.5.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

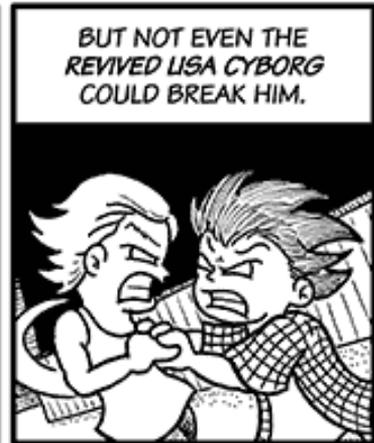
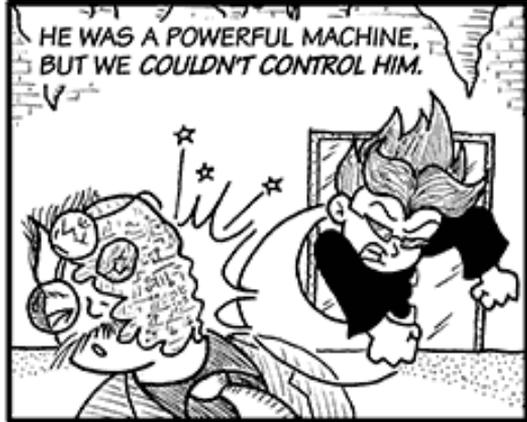
Mac OS X 10.0.x

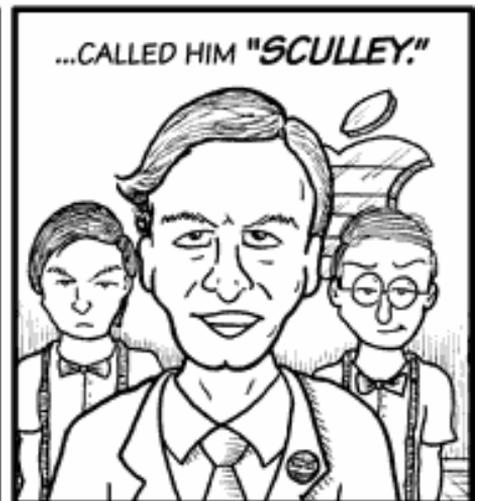
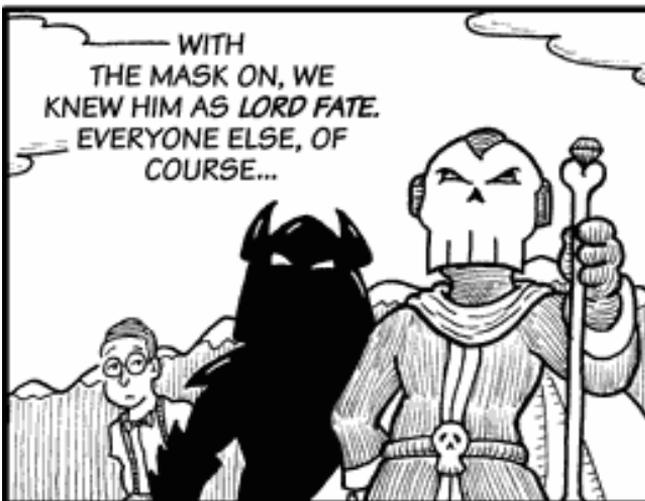
Switch to the Finder. Choose “Preferences...” from the “Finder” menu. Click on the “Select Picture...” button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the “Finder Preferences” window when you are done.

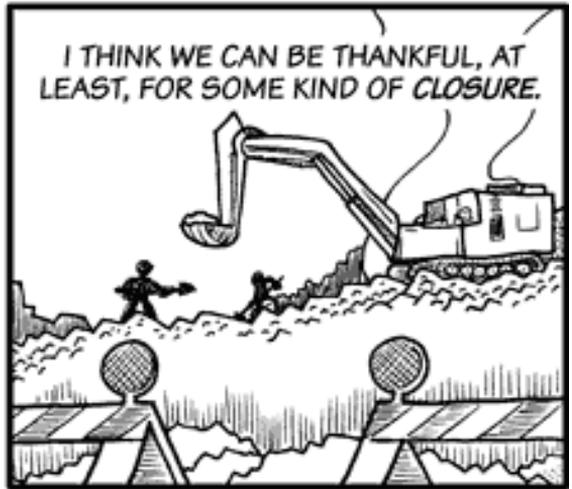


Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com











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Hardware Review

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

Das Keyboard Professional

Developer: [Metadot](#)

Price: \$99 (introductory price); \$129 (MSRP)

Requirements: USB.

Trial: None

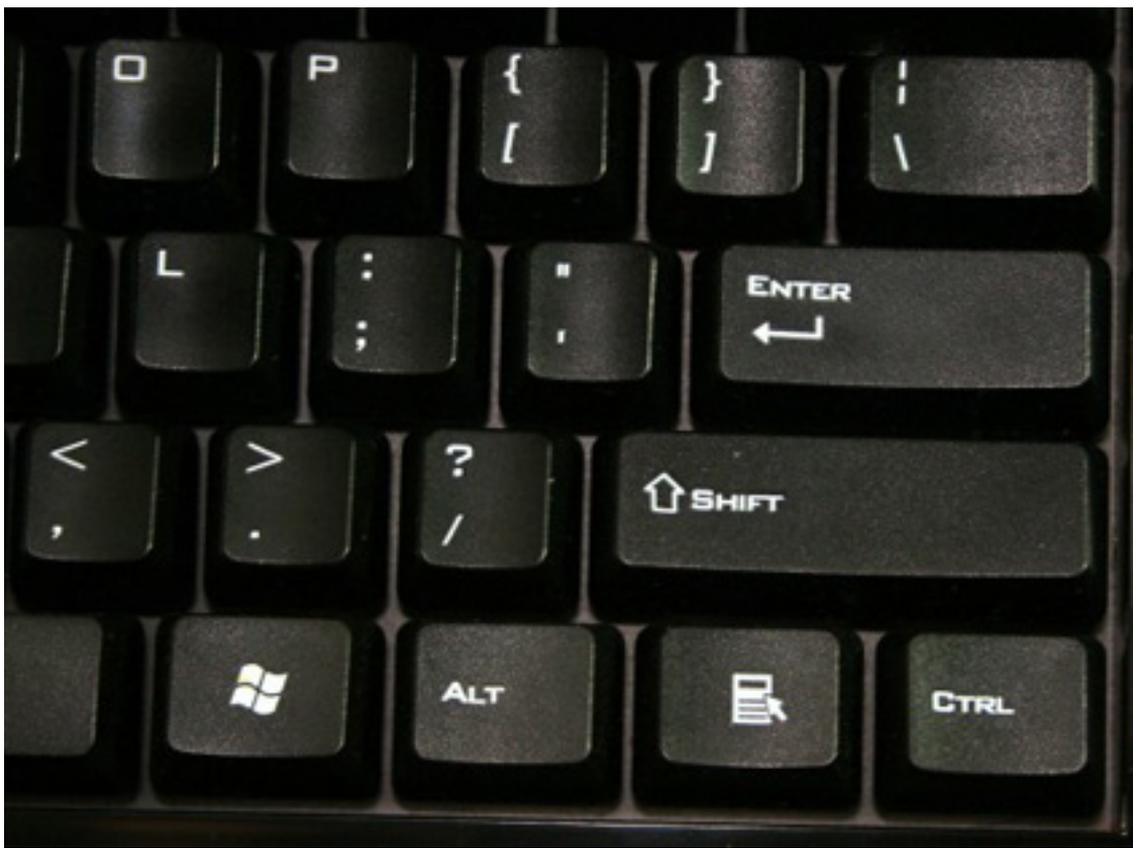


Metadot's Das Keyboard is really nothing new; their totally blank mechanical keyboard for über-hackers has been on the market for a few years now, to largely positive reviews. Someone must have pointed out that not everyone has the entire QWERTY layout committed to muscle memory, though, because they're finally shipping a Das Keyboard with printed lettering: the Professional.



The Das Keyboard Professional's piano-gloss finish classes up any desk, but shows dust to an extreme degree.

The Professional is one of two new models from Metadot, the other being the Ultimate, which replaces the Das Keyboard II. The only real difference between the Professional and the Ultimate is the lettering: the Professional has it and the Ultimate doesn't. Unfortunately, the lettering is printed in a bizarre, squarish, small-caps typeface that, for some reason, evokes bad 1980s sci-fi movies. Presumably in the interest of saving money through the economy of scale, the keys are printed in a typical Windows layout, including the infamous Windows key between the space bar and the Alt key.



For some reason, Metadot chose to use a 1980s sci-fi B-movie font for the key caps, most obvious on the larger keys.

There's a two-port USB 2.0 hub built into the keyboard, although both ports are on the far right end of the keyboard. Metadot isn't going to win any friends in the southpaw community with that, unless the lefties who buy this keyboard have very long cords on their mice. The port location is also very inconvenient for people who use USB memory sticks on a regular basis, as it forces the mouse further outboard for right-handed users, making a greater reach from the keyboard to the mouse. These ports should have been on the back of the keyboard, just behind the "daskeyboard" logo.



Two USB ports are located on the far right side of the keyboard near the back, ensuring left-handed mousers will be maximally frustrated.

The Num Lock, Caps Lock, and Scroll Lock indicators are *very* tastefully done. Though they're blue LEDs, and I've ranted before about how blindingly bright many companies seem to think consumers want their blue LEDs these days, Metadot has hidden them behind the gloss-black finish in such a way that they are totally invisible when off, and present a subdued but clear glow when on. Other hardware manufacturers should take a lesson from this subtle use of LED illumination.



The Caps Lock indicator is illuminated with subtle blue LED light, in stark contrast to most modern computer peripherals. As an added bonus, it's incredibly stylish and attractive.

All that is sort of secondary, however. Why would anyone spend \$130 on a keyboard that only has 104 keys? You can buy keyboards at any office superstore that offer all sorts of additional features on top of the standard 104-key layout for a hundred bucks less. The answer, of course, lies in the mechanism.

When personal computers were in their infancy back in the 1970s and 1980s, keyboards were all made with mechanical keyswitches. Those of you who were around then surely remember the loud typewriter-like clacking these mechanical switches made. I suspect very few workplace stress experts lamented their demise in the 1990s, as rubber-dome keyboards took over the market and lowered the background noise in offices everywhere to a dull roar. Hardcore typists, however, have consistently touted the superior action of the old-style mechanical keyswitches. Apple's old ADB-based [Extended Keyboard and Extended Keyboard II](#) have a cult following amongst Mac users, while the old PS/2-based [IBM Model M keyboards](#) have a similar following among Windows and Unix users.

Given that the mechanical action is pretty much *the* reason for spending that kind of money on a keyboard, how does the Das Keyboard Professional stack up? The overall action is very nice. Keypresses have obvious appeal to the tactile and auditory senses, and the feel of the keyboard seriously puts to shame anything Apple has made since the Apple Extended Keyboard II, along with most third-party keyboards. (Keep an eye on ATPM for more mechanical keyboard reviews in the near future.) I had been using an Apple Pro Keyboard

as my daily driver until the Das Keyboard arrived, and compared to the Das Keyboard, I feel like the Apple keyboard is filled with molasses. While I can't make any quantitative statements about faster typing or reduced typos, it does *feel* as though I'm typing faster and more accurately, although the improvement is probably slight.

It's been so long since I used an Apple Extended Keyboard regularly that comparisons are nearly impossible, but the Das Keyboard Professional feels a lot like I remember the old Apple keyboards did. The Apple keyboards sounded better, though; they had a deeper, richer "thunk" to their action, whereas the Das Keyboard's sound is a much higher-pitched "click." Both sound far superior to any rubber-dome keyboard I've used.

Unfortunately, this otherwise excellent keyboard is saddled with several frustrating quirks. Some are a product of its Windows-centric design, a problem from which many third-party keyboards suffer, but the biggest is not.

The [Web site claims](#) "Mac users can swap the command/control/options keys to match the Mac keyboard layout using the Mac OS X keyboard control panel," which is mostly true. However, the Alt key on the right stubbornly insists on performing its default action of Command, refusing to be re-mapped to anything else via the Keyboard and Mouse preference pane. The left Alt key re-maps properly to Option. The two Windows keys are easily re-mapped to Command to match the standard Mac layout, but I very much miss having a working Option key on the right side of the keyboard.

This necessity to swap layouts also puts laptop users in a bit of a pickle. While the OS copes quite well with having a built-in laptop keyboard and an external keyboard with two different layouts, it does *not* cope well with switching between a standard Mac keyboard and the Das Keyboard Professional. You need to open the Keyboard and Mouse preference pane and reset the mapping each time you switch keyboards. Laptop users who use external keyboards both at home and at the office will probably be best served by using identical keyboards (or, at the minimum, keyboards with the same modifier key layout) in both places to avoid this problem.

There is probably third-party software out there that will solve this problem too, but when you're spending \$130 on a keyboard, you're probably disinclined to spend another \$20–30 on software to make it work right.



The numeric keypad has a slightly different layout from the standard Mac keyboard.

The Scroll Lock and Pause keys, located where F14 and F15 would normally be, act as a brightness decrease and increase, respectively, just as F14 and F15 do on a standard Apple keyboard. While the Num Lock key has no visual cues to indicate secondary function, it does function as a Clear key when using the Calculator widget in Dashboard. Apple has traditionally printed “Clear” on that key, with “Num Lock” as secondary text.

Like most non-Apple keyboards, the Das Keyboard Professional lacks volume-control keys and an Eject key. Holding down F12 for a couple of seconds substitutes for Eject, but after having easy-to-reach volume controls at hand ever since my Wall Street PowerBook in 1998, I miss them terribly. Again, you could use third-party software to re-map unused F-keys for this purpose, but having actual volume-control keys would be much nicer.

The biggest problem with the keyboard is the Return (labeled “Enter”) key on the main part of the keyboard. It very occasionally sticks in regular typing, but certain ways that I type seem to trigger it much more often, possibly as much as 10 percent of the time. This isn’t a big deal in some applications (Adium, IRC clients, most Web browsers’ location or search fields), but it’s a very big headache in others (filling out Web forms, e-mail, coding, word processing). It’s tremendously frustrating when it happens, and it happens enough to detract from the utility of the keyboard.

After spending most of an afternoon being driven crazy by this behavior, seemingly exacerbated by high humidity such that it was happening as much as 50 percent of the time I

hit the Enter key, I took the key cap off. Close inspection of the mechanism under the key revealed two small wear marks where the support wire was rubbing the inside front edge of the key cap. Filing a small amount of material off the inside surface of the key cap where the wear marks were located seems to have resolved the problem. I suspect either the wire's bend or the key cap itself was very slightly out of tolerance, causing the cap to hang up on the support wire on its return stroke. The key switch itself is not the least bit sticky.

The Das Keyboard Professional is a very good keyboard...for anyone but Mac users. It's acceptably good for most Mac users, and it's certainly far superior to most other Mac keyboards out there, but the type of people who spend \$130 on a keyboard are the type of people who would be exceedingly bothered by this keyboard's quirks. A dedicated Mac version with volume keys and relocated USB ports would go a long way toward satisfying keyboard connoisseurs.

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Hardware Review

by Michael Tsai, mtsai@atpm.com

Hard Drives as Floppies

BlacX N0028USU

Developer: [Thermaltake](#)

Price: \$60 (list); \$40 (street)

Requirements: USB 2, bare 2.5" or 3.5" SATA hard drive.

Trial: None



RTX100-Q

Developer: [WiebeTech](#)

Price: \$200

Requirements: USB 2, FireWire (400 or 800), or eSATA; bare 3.5" SATA hard drive.

Recommended: FireWire.

Trial: None



RTX100-SJ

Developer: [WiebeTech](#)

Price: \$100

Requirements: USB 2 or eSATA, bare 3.5" SATA hard drive.

Trial: None



It seems like I can never have too much storage. Between current documents, music, and photos, my working set of data doesn't fit on the hard drive that's built into my MacBook Pro. The music and master photos I put on an external drive. Other drives, cataloged with [CDFinder](#), hold old projects and software that I've downloaded or purchased on CD. DVD-Rs are great for historical archives of certain folders, but I also maintain several [SuperDuper](#) clones that I can switch to at a moment's notice if there's a problem with one of my main drives. In order to test the software that I develop, I keep installations of various versions of Mac OS X. Lastly, I keep off-site copies of important data so that the backups are protected from environmental damage and theft. All told, it's a surprising number of drives for a small business. I can only imagine how much more storage I'd need if I worked with digital video.

The obvious solution to increasing storage needs is to buy more hard drives, but how should they be connected to the Mac? For users who want to access the files from multiple

Macs, [Network Attached Storage](#) devices and Apple's [Time Capsule](#) are good choices. An increasingly popular option is Data Robotics' [Drobo](#), which holds up to four drives, lets you treat them as one big drive, and makes it easy to replace the drives with larger ones as your storage needs grow. However, I prefer traditional hard drives, connected individually via FireWire or USB 2, as this provides more flexibility to move the drives around.

Combined Enclosures

The most common form of traditional hard drives is what I call a combined enclosure. The hard drive mechanism is packaged inside an enclosure that provides power and USB or FireWire ports. Companies such as Iomega, LaCie, Maxtor, and Western Digital produce combined enclosures, you can buy them at any computer store, and they're easy to use: just open the box, plug it in, and you're good to go. Prices are decent, and sales and rebates are common.

There are, however, some problems. In my experience, combined enclosures are not very reliable. After several years of use, the enclosures or power supplies tend to fail, although the drives inside are almost always fine.

It's easy to find combined enclosures that support USB 2, but there are fewer choices for FireWire 400, and support for FireWire 800 is rare. I prefer FireWire because it's faster, but FireWire enclosures tend to be more expensive.

With the drive and enclosure packaged together, and sold mostly by capacity and price, it can be hard to find what you want. Over the years, I've bought combined enclosures one at a time as I needed more space. Some were larger or louder than I wanted. Others didn't stack well, didn't let the drive go to sleep, or had inconvenient power adapters. Whenever it was time to buy a drive, the previous models had been discontinued, so I couldn't get the same enclosure again even if I liked it.

I ended up with a variety of enclosures. Each had a different power adapter that had to stay with the enclosure as it moved between Macs or between my office and off-site. As enclosures failed, their drives were orphaned. It seemed like a waste of time and money to research and buy all these different enclosures. I didn't need to use them all simultaneously. I just needed to add additional storage now and then.

Separate Drives and Enclosures

For me at least, it makes more sense to buy the drive and the enclosure separately. I can find a high-quality enclosure that I like and stick with it. As I need more storage, I can buy more and larger drives to put in it. There are more choices and better prices when buying bare hard drives at places like [Newegg](#). And I don't need to buy an enclosure for each drive, only for the ones that I want to access simultaneously. The archives and off-site backups can be stored without enclosures, either in their original plastic cases or in [DriveBoxes](#).



Bare SATA Drives

My main enclosure of choice is WiebeTech's [ToughTech XE](#). It's pricey, but it's quiet and compact, and it provides speedy FireWire 800 performance. The build quality is excellent, and the enclosure is well designed, both to protect the drive and to make it easy to swap it out for a different one. I think it's a great choice for drives that will be connected more or less all the time.

Hard Drives as Floppies

The remaining question—and the purpose of this review—is to decide how to connect the other drives, the ones that I want to access occasionally but that don't need to be connected all the time. In essence, I want to treat hard drives like floppy disks: find the one I want to use, connect it to the Mac, and put it away when I'm done. I want to have multiple “floppy drive” enclosures so that I can copy from one floppy to another and move data between Macs.

The first option I considered for my “floppy drive” is the ToughTech. It's easy to open, but even so I don't want to keep unscrewing it to exchange drives. Nor do I want to turn it off, unplug it, and disrupt my FireWire chain.

Another option is a cable adapter such as WiebeTech's [USB DriveDock](#) or NewerTech's [Universal Drive Adapter](#). These make it easy to connect and disconnect drives, but I prefer an enclosure that the drive can sit in, so that it isn't directly on the desk. That cuts down on noise and vibration.

Recently, a much better option has become available: enclosures that work much more like the floppy drive that I desire. Below I examine three different models from Thermaltake and WiebeTech. (I've recently learned of another option [from Addonics](#).) All of these enclosures make it easy to swap drives, and they're even easier than the cable adapters. Instead of

having to connect the power and SATA cables, you can just slide the drive itself. They're also fully Mac-compatible: you can boot from them, there are no drivers to install, and they can spin down the drive after it's been idle for while. As with floppies on the Mac, you need to unmount the drive (e.g. by dragging it to the Trash) before ejecting it.

BlacX

The BlacX looks more like a big, black iPod dock than a typical hard drive enclosure. It accepts both 2.5" and 3.5" drives, which is handy because I ended up with an extra 2.5" drive when upgrading the drive in my notebook. To use the BlacX, insert the drive into the slot on the top, press down a bit to make sure it's connected, and press the power button in the back. Also on the back is a full-size USB 2 connector.



BlacX

On the front there's an activity light and an eject button. Ejecting disconnects the drive so that you can pull it out without lifting the BlacX off the desk along with it. Thermaltake says to power off the BlacX before ejecting. I didn't have to do that with my floppy or Zip drives, and it's easy to forget. I wish the eject button powered it off automatically.



BlacX (With 3.5" Drive)

The BlacX is fanless, so the only sound you hear is the drive itself. It's slightly louder than the ToughTech or the RTX100-SJ, though, because the drive is exposed. If you're working in a dirty environment, you might prefer an enclosure that doesn't expose the drive (and the dock connectors, when no drive is inserted), but otherwise I think it's fine.



BlacX (With 3.5" Drive)

I appreciated the short power cable with a small power brick at the end. (Both the RTX100-SJ and the RTX100-Q include a larger power adapter that consists of a brick in the middle, with cords going to the enclosure and the power source.) Unfortunately, the BlacX isn't as portable as it looks. It's an odd shape that wouldn't fit well in a slim computer bag, and it's weighted in order to provide a steady base for the drive.

RTX100-Q

The RTX100-Q supports USB 2 (full-size), eSATA, FireWire 800 (2 ports), and FireWire 400 (adapter cable included). It uses the same Oxford 924 chip as the ToughTech. In the front is a little door that opens (left-to-right) so that you can insert the drive. Closing the door pushes the drive in and connects it. Opening the door disconnects it and pulls it out so that you can grab onto it. I liked this horizontal system better than the BlacX, although both are quite easy to use.



RTX100-Q (Front)

Unlike the BlacX, there's no need to power off the RTX100-Q before ejecting or inserting a drive. You can hot-swap drives in the middle of a FireWire chain. The bay can be locked with a key, to prevent accidentally opening the door while the drive is in use. (The enclosure has no security slot, so this doesn't prevent anyone from stealing the drive.)



RTX100-Q (Back)

The RTX100-Q is solidly built and stacks well. Unfortunately, it's more than twice the size of the ToughTech, and it has a fan that's active even when the drive isn't in use. I'm sensitive to noise, and the fan is loud enough that it makes me not want to use the RTX100-Q in a room where I'll be working.

RTX100-SJ

The RTX100-SJ is a newer, cheaper version of the RTX100-Q. It's slightly larger than the ToughTech and supports USB 2 (mini) and eSATA. The door and bay are similar to those on the RTX100-Q, but more compact. There's a little safety tab, instead of a key, to lock the door closed. You can hot-swap drives without powering it off.



RTX100-SJ (Front)

The enclosure is designed to hold the drive on its side, with the door opening downwards. A flat configuration is also possible, although there are no feet for it to rest on. Although the [specifications](#) say that the RTX100-SJ includes a “4cm Ball Bearing Fan” like the RTX100-Q, I didn’t see a fan. I found that it ran quietly.

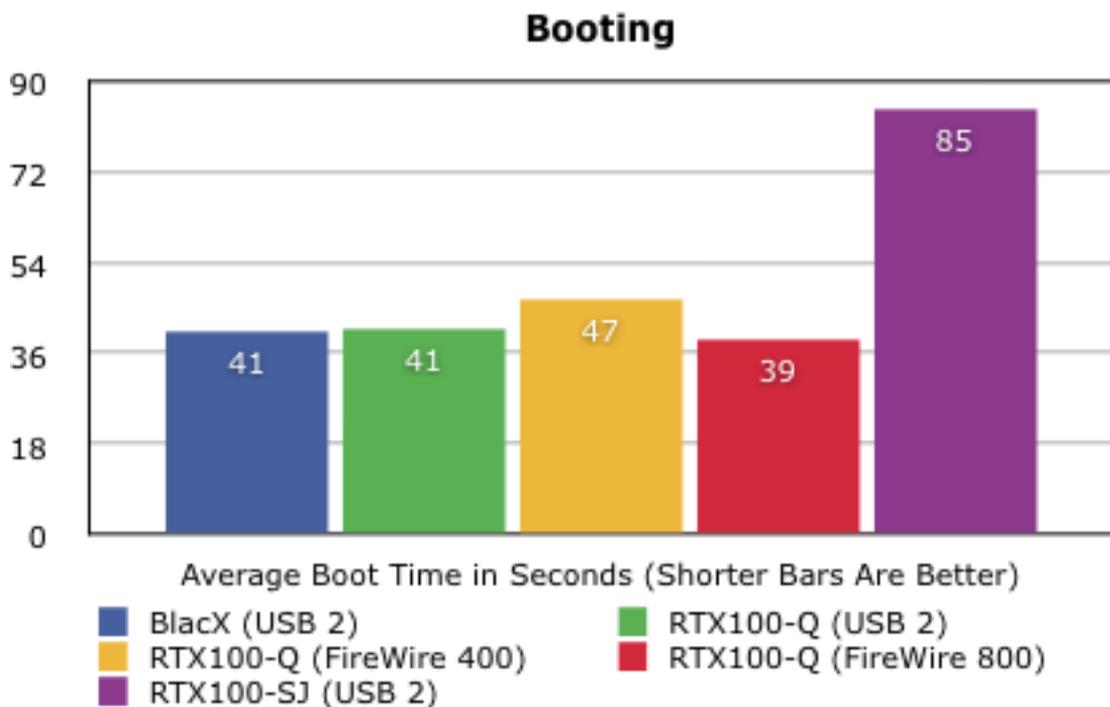


RTX100-SJ (Side and Back)

Speed Tests

As processors and memory get faster, performance is increasing limited by hard drive speed. My MacBook Pro can feel like an old iBook when using its internal 4,200 RPM drive, but using an external FireWire drive it's more like a modern iMac. In order to compare their performance, I tested the three enclosures using the same 500 GB Maxtor drive. In real-world use via USB 2, I found that the BlacX and RTX100-Q performed adequately, about the same speed as other USB 2 enclosures. When connected via FireWire, the RTX100-Q was noticeably faster during periods of heavy disk use. The RTX100-SJ was adequate for accessing archived files, but it felt too slow to use as a main drive.

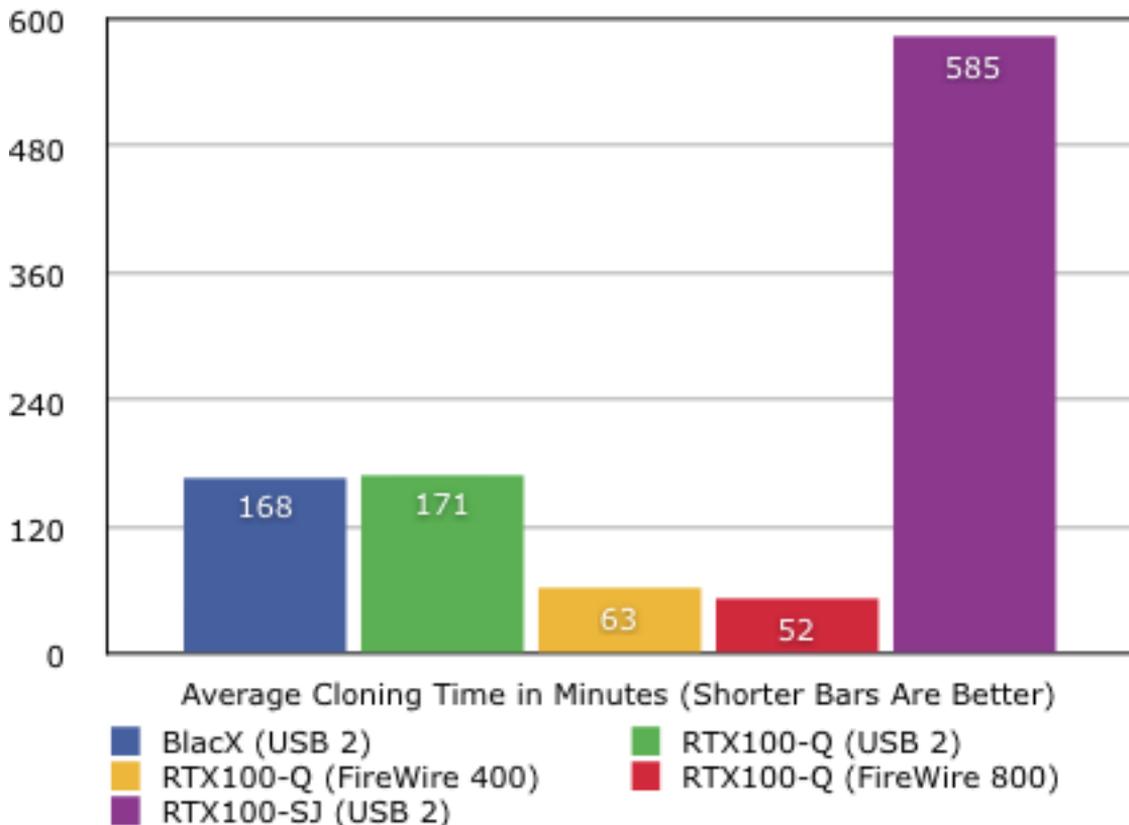
In order to try to quantify the differences, I chose two simple tests and timed the three enclosures. The first test was booting my MacBook Pro. This tested the read performance in a typical use situation.



The BlacX and RTX100-Q are about the same speed, each about twice as fast as the RTX100-SJ. FireWire 800 is a little bit faster than USB 2, and (surprisingly) FireWire 400 is a little slower.

The second test used SuperDuper to clone a Mac OS X installation (containing a mix of documents, mail, photos, and music files) from one partition on the drive to another. Normally, I would use SuperDuper to clone between two different drives. Cloning between two partitions on the same drive is less typical, but it's more interesting for testing purposes because it measures the reading and writing performance without introducing a second enclosure.

Cloning Using SuperDuper (37.37 GB; 624,130 Files)



The BlacX and RTX100-Q were about the same speed when using USB 2, but with FireWire 400 the RTX100-Q was between two and three times faster. With FireWire 800 it was more than three times faster. Again, the RTX100-SJ was several times slower.

The cloning test makes all the enclosures look slower than they actually are. It involves reading and writing a large number of small files to different parts of the drive, and drive head has to move back and forth between the two partitions. Copying a small number of large files from one drive to another would yield a much higher number of megabytes per second, but I believe the cloning is a better stress test for measuring the relative performance of the enclosures.

The main surprise from these tests was how much slower the RTX100-SJ was than the other enclosures. Additionally, its performance was far less consistent. I performed each test three times, and with the other two enclosures there was little difference between the fastest time and the slowest. The three times for the RTX100-SJ, however, varied by 18 seconds on the booting test (a large percentage) and by nearly *7 hours* on the cloning test.

I asked WiebeTech about this, and they replied:

The reason for this is the difference in controller boards. The RTX100-SJ is a simple pass through unit (has no controller board) so the speed varies depending

on CPU usage and what other processes or programs you are running at the time you are doing your testing. This explains your varied times.

The [RTX100-Q] has a 924 Oxford chipset on the bridge it uses which gives the unit stability while transferring data thus allowing for faster transfer rates and constant transfer times.

The lack of a controller board is a good explanation for the overall slow speed of the RTX100-SJ. However, since the tests were conducted under controlled conditions—with no other processes using CPU time as far as I know—it does not make sense to me that the times should vary so much.

eSATA

Thus far I haven't discussed eSATA, which theoretically provides much better performance than USB 2 or even FireWire 400. Both RTX enclosures have eSATA connectors, as does Thermaltake's higher-end BlacX, the [SE N0029USU](#). [Macworld](#) found that the RTX100-SJ was much faster using eSATA than using USB 2. The main problem with eSATA is that no Macs currently have it built-in, although you can buy expansion cards to add it to a Mac Pro or MacBook Pro. Some such cards support booting; others do not. Additionally, it's not as convenient for connecting multiple drives because it supports neither chains (like FireWire) nor hubs (like USB).

Conclusion

All three enclosures worked well, but I did not find an ideal “floppy drive.” The BlacX is the best value. The RTX100-Q is much faster, but it's five times the price and noisy. The RTX100-SJ is my favorite design, but it's more than twice the price of the BlacX and by far the slowest of the three. Overall, I think the BlacX is the best choice for most users. If speed is the most important consideration, get the RTX100-Q or look into an eSATA solution.

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Hardware Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

iMetal Headsets

iP-HS2 iMetal Isolation Headset For iPhone

Developer: [Maximo](#)

Price: \$70

Requirements: None

Trial: None



Earphones that are designed to fit in the outer ear canal are, admittedly, not for everyone, and I've never really considered myself among those who enjoy using this style. Yet Maximo's iMetal Isolation Headset seems to have swayed my opinion.



iMetal Isolation Headsets are stylish and comfortable. They also sound great and block out a considerable amount of ambient noise. I liked the inclusion of a simple pouch for storing the headset rather than the latest gadgety gimmick intended to “contain” the cable.

I am not insinuating that all in-ear headsets are uncomfortable, but the iMetal Isolation Headset is the first model that I felt I could use all day long. Three sizes of rubber eartips are included, which should help ensure a good fit for anyone.



The included rubber eartips should make for a good fit for almost anyone. I tried all three to be certain of a good fit, though the middle-sized tips, which were originally attached, were the best for me. A two-foot extension cable is also included; however, the headset cable, at four feet, is plenty of length for most needs.

While I'll never give up my Bose QC-2 headphones, the sound quality of the iMetal Isolation Headset is excellent to my decidedly non-audiophile ears. Bass response is very good, as is the noise isolation. I enjoyed the significantly diminished noise during a recent flight on a commercial airliner.

Owners of the first generation iPhone won't need an adapter to use the iMetal headset, and the tiny in-line microphone shouldn't get in anyone's way. The button to answer/disconnect calls and advance/pause music tracks is separate from the microphone, and I feel this is better than Apple's microphone/button combo. I have to wonder, though, how much noise a caller hears when a hand swishes across the microphone on Apple's earbuds before the button is clicked.

Perhaps not quite as important as audio and noise isolation quality, but important nonetheless, is the style of the headset. I'm a fan of chrome/silver/gray color schemes. For my own taste, the iMetal Isolation Headset is unquestionably the best-looking in-ear headset I have ever used.

By rating this headset Excellent, I don't mean to imply that no in-ear headset could be any better. Rather, having not identified any shortcomings, I found no reason to rate it any less than Excellent.

iP-HS1 iMetal Stereo Headset For iPhone

Developer: [Maximo](#)

Price: \$70

Requirements: None

Trial: None



When the time came to set aside the Isolation Headset and put the earbud-style iMetal Stereo Headset to the test, I frequently had to remind myself that I was testing this product for review and to ignore my desire to return to the Isolation Headset.



The iMetal Stereo Headset is just as stylish as its isolation-style cousin.

The sound quality of the iMetal Stereo Headset is fine—certainly at least as good as any decent earbud-style headset. Like its cousin, it sports a good-looking design style, the same in-line control button and microphone, a first-generation iPhone-friendly plug, a two-foot

extension cable, and the same carrying pouch. Instead of the Isolation Headset's rubber eartips, this headset, as with most earbuds, came with foam covers to wrap around the buds. Unfortunately, the people who designed the shape of the covers seem to have done so without measuring the size of the earbuds. I found it impossible to put the covers on the earbuds before ripping one of them.



Oops.

I tried again with the second, being even more careful, than I was with the first, but I felt it beginning to come apart and I stopped before ripping it again.

I would have liked to try using the earbuds with the covers because I believe they may have presented a solution to a bigger issue I encountered with this headset. The earbuds kept falling out of my ears. Had I been able to attach the foam covers, the slight extra padding may have helped comfortably hold them in place.

There seems to be two factors contributing to the fallout problem. First is the shape of the earbuds. They are visibly bulkier than others I've used—including Apple's. Also, the leading edge tapers in more significantly than the Apple earbuds. Second, the metal bar that extends from the earbuds may look stylish, but it seems to add unnecessary weight

that tugs on the back of the earbuds, making them prone to being pulled out with only a minimum of head movement.



Comparing apples to, um, Maximos.

Obviously, I cannot account for someone else's differently shaped ears, and perhaps someone else may find the iMetal Stereo Headset to be a perfect fit. What I can say, though, is that no other earbuds I've used have been so prone to coming out of my own ears, and I've seen no other earbuds that possessed such visible clues that might lead to unexpected departures.

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Software Review

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

MacGourmet Deluxe 1.0.3

Developer: [Mariner Software](#)

Price: \$50 (boxed); \$45 (download); family pack also available.

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured (15 days).



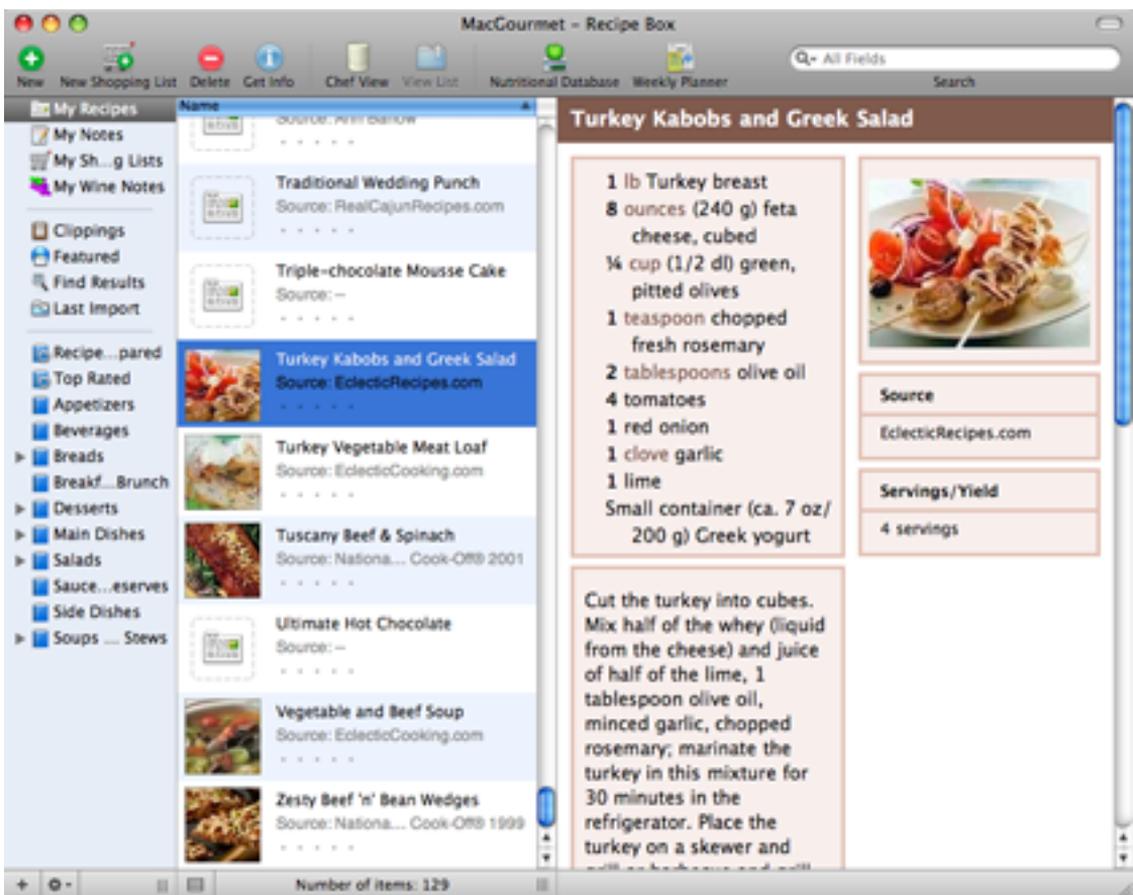
I learned to cook at an early age and have always done most of the cooking at our house. Over the years, I've done a lot of experimenting, inventing a number of recipes, as well as adjusting and tweaking known recipes to better suit my tastes—and the tastes of my family. Needless to say, as the years go by, I've wished for a better way to gather and store that information—better than, say, trying to remember what I did the last time, and whether I liked it!

As a Mac guy and a technology enthusiast, I've naturally looked for a software solution for this. Until recently, I've used Hungry Seacow's [YummySoup!](#) to do it. Lately though, I've been using Mariner Software's MacGourmet Deluxe—and I have to say, it is the total package.

Getting the Basics Right

When it comes to managing the recipes themselves, the task simply isn't that hard. Building a basic database has been straightforward for quite a while now, and there's no excuse for not having an easy-to-use interface and system. That said, MacGourmet is as simple to use as any recipe database I've seen.

The variables in a program like this aren't many, but they matter. How is the database laid out? MacGourmet uses a three-pane view similar to Entourage, with categories/groups/collections on the far left, recipe summaries in the middle, and the displayed recipe on the right. It can be changed, however, to a three-pane view more like Apple's Mail. In addition to the recipe as displayed in the third pane, you may also choose Item View to see it in its own window, or Chef View to have it enlarged to fill the screen for easy viewing while cooking.



The other primary variables—which I deal with as a user, at least—are the number of fields and what they are. MacGourmet excels here, with a field for almost every piece of information I could think of, pre-populated with dozens (or possibly hundreds) of the most common options in many cases. Adding new options is no problem, nor is having no data for a field—not unlike Apple’s Address Book, empty fields are simply not displayed.

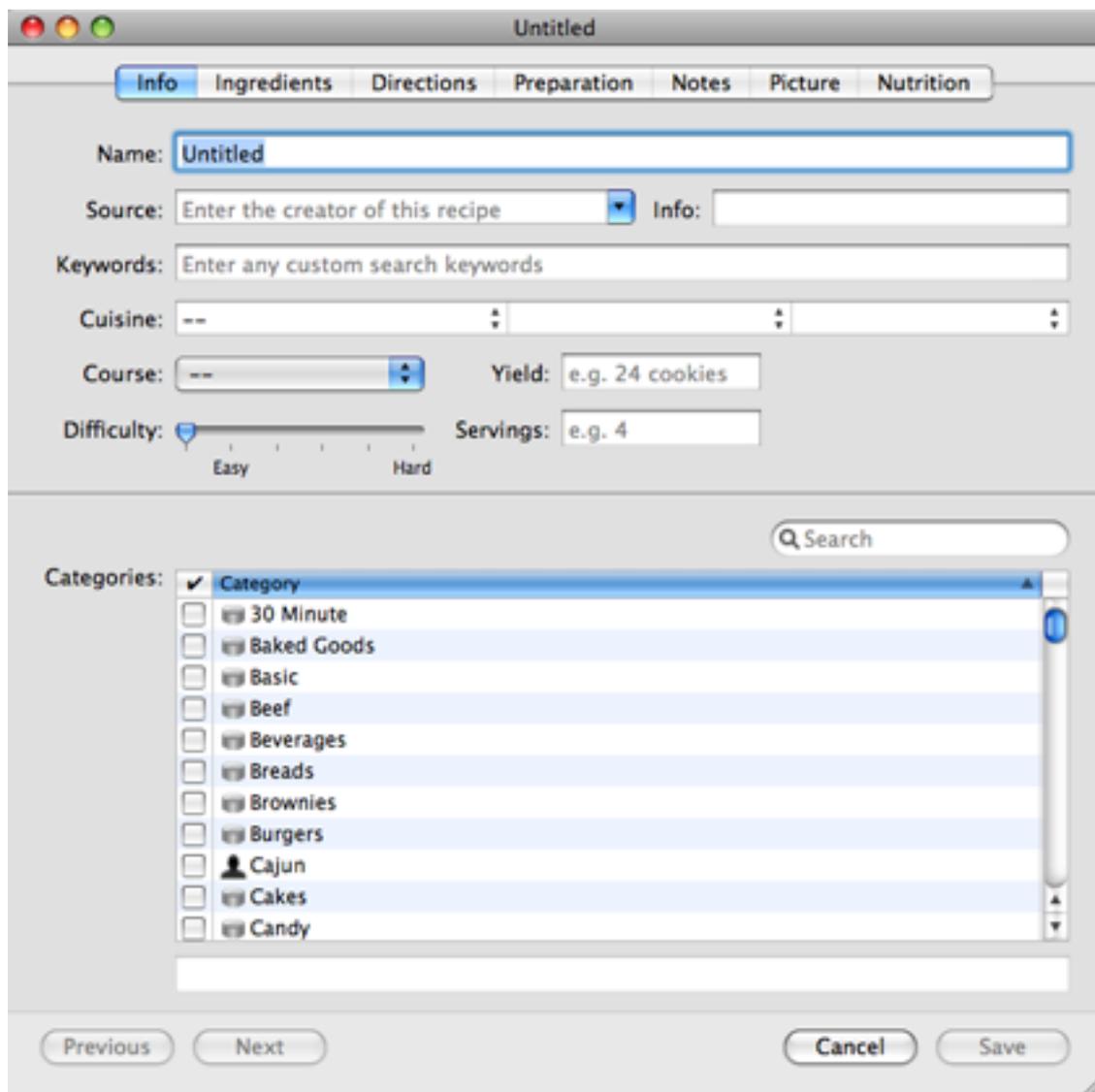
The last problem I’ve I encountered with any frequency in a database like this is what happens when the types and amount of information it is capable of handling increase significantly. Often, this makes for an overwhelming amount of information displayed, a busy and sticky-mushy interface, or both. In MacGourmet, the basic recipe management is only the tip of the iceberg—the frosting on the cake, if you will—yet the rest of it is handled with elegance and simplicity.

Expanding Options

Getting information into a database like this is as vital as the actual management. MacGourmet makes it very easy to add a recipe entirely by hand—a dialog with tabs for various types of information is plain and simple. But what about recipes that are already digital—say, from a Web site or a PDF, an e-mail, or some other document? For this, MacGourmet makes good use of Apple’s Services menu—a universal command menu that allows any application to embed commands and connections to any other application. The

Services provided with MacGourmet—combined with an equally easy Clippings manager in the program itself—renders adding recipes into the mix a snap.

I know. This is starting to sound like a Ginsu knife commercial.



But wait, there's more! MacGourmet includes a weekly meal planner that is drag-and-drop simple, and that meal planner (or any individual recipe) can generate a shopping list. You can also send your meal plan to iCal, complete with times (which you set) for the meals themselves. As you are planning your meals, feel free to make use of the Nutrition Database (populated with data from the USDA) that is included and automatically tagged to your recipes as you enter them.

Alongside the digital recipe box and meal- and shopping-planning tools is a full-fledged wine database. Track the wines you've tried before with all of the data that a collector or

taster might have. You can even keep up with the inventory in your personal wine cellar. I'm not really a wine guy, but I've worked in enough restaurants to realize how important this information can be.

Sharing and exporting recipes is a piece of cake, with many options. You can print to standard sheets of paper, of course, and index cards. But MacGourmet also has a fully functioning Cookbook Builder built-in, which lends an entirely different component to sharing recipes. Select your recipes, decide whether to include images, add text pages that you edit, even divide up into chapters, and choose your cover—then print on your home printer, send it to PDF to share in that way, or format it for a print-on-demand service.

MacGourmet is set up to allow you to share your recipes, recipe notes, and wine notes on the Web, either through MobileMe or via a WebDAV server. Or you can publish recipes and notes to a blog easily. You may also export to iPod notes, simple text files, and in rich text format.

It's in the Details

There are lots of small features that make MacGourmet a true treat. Cupboard Find is a good example. Put in the items you already have in your fridge, cupboard, and pantry, and MacGourmet will suggest any recipes that fit.

Linking recipes is another cool feature. Do you have a separate recipe for the special frosting that goes on Aunt Betty's pound cake? Link them—a new Related Items field appears in the recipe box for both. You may link as many recipes as you like, so complexity and simplicity may co-exist.

The developer's attention to detail can be found in other advanced Find features, smart lists, and groups, and a lot of great printing options. It has included several different printing layouts, all quite attractive, that allow you to further personalize your recipes to your tastes as you print them.

Very Few Complaints

As much as I like MacGourmet Deluxe, there are a couple of things I would like to see improved. They aren't very many, though—it seemed as if every time I thought of something I would like it to do, I found that it already did it without much trouble!

It's possible to set preparation times (with great specificity) within the recipes themselves. Wouldn't it be great if MacGourmet would calculate total prep time for all the elements in a meal and export that to iCal with the meal plan as well? I know, this is a niggly detail, but I'm frankly surprised it isn't already built-in, given the attention to such details that Mariner already has.

Similarly, it seems to me that a very useful feature might be to allow wine notes to be connected to certain meals by linked relationships. It's possible to connect, say, a certain roast with a specially prepared rice, so why not also include wines that you've found to especially complement?

Summary

It all boils down to this: if you need a database to manage your recipes, there are several available, though none has been more pleasant for me to use than MacGourmet Deluxe. If you need or want options for dealing with your recipes beyond basic collection and management—meal plans, nutritional information, shopping lists, wine notes, even cookbook creation—then MacGourmet Deluxe is a great option, with very few shortcomings or flaws.

If the extra features are simply more than you need, and you'd prefer to do without the Nutrition database, the Mealplan maker, and the Cookbook Builder—or you'd rather add one or two, but not the third—then you might prefer to look at [Advenio's MacGourmet](#), which is the same application without these tools, and in a download-only version, for \$25. Each of them is available as a plug-in for \$12, so the economics of more than one plug-in quickly point to the Mariner version. Advenio and Mariner have a republishing agreement that sets up this peculiar but flexible set of options.

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Software Review

by Linus Ly, lly@atpm.com

Séquence 1.0.1

Developer: [app4mac](#)

Price: \$19

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

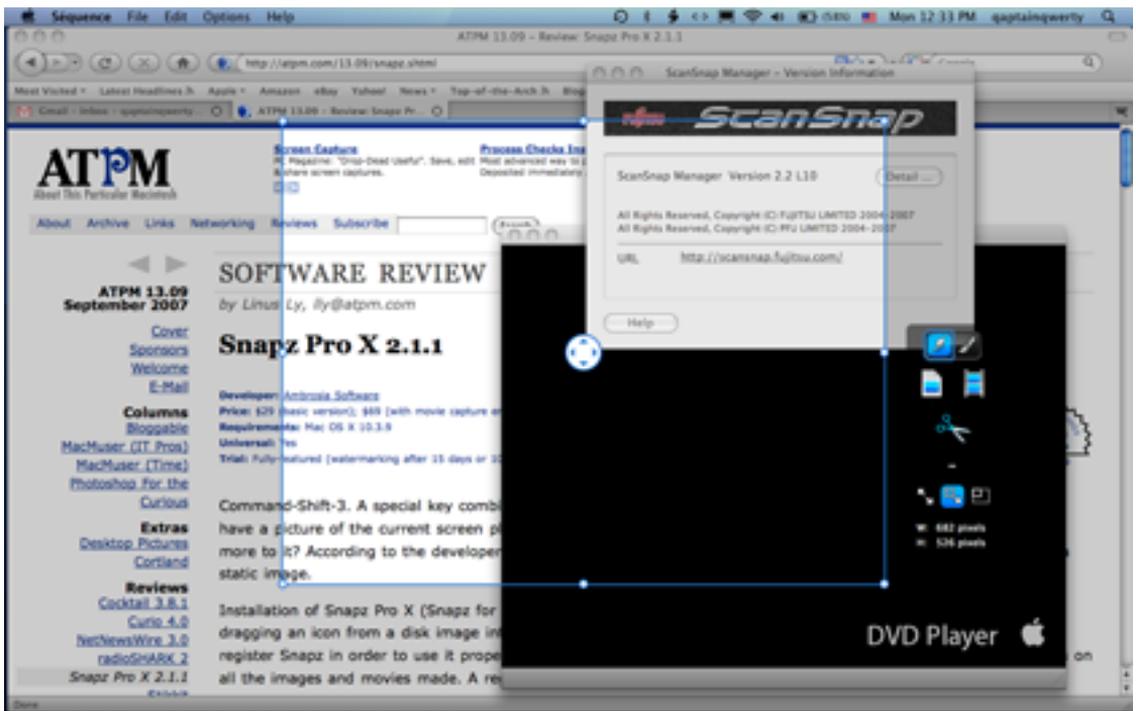
Trial: Feature-limited (watermarking, limited functions).



About a year I reviewed [Snapz Pro](#), a screen capture utility, and was critical of its inability to capture full screens such as those used by games. Now I find myself with a different utility, Séquence. My requirement is still the same, that a system utility should do all that the built-in application does, plus some enhancements. How does Séquence fare? Let's find out.

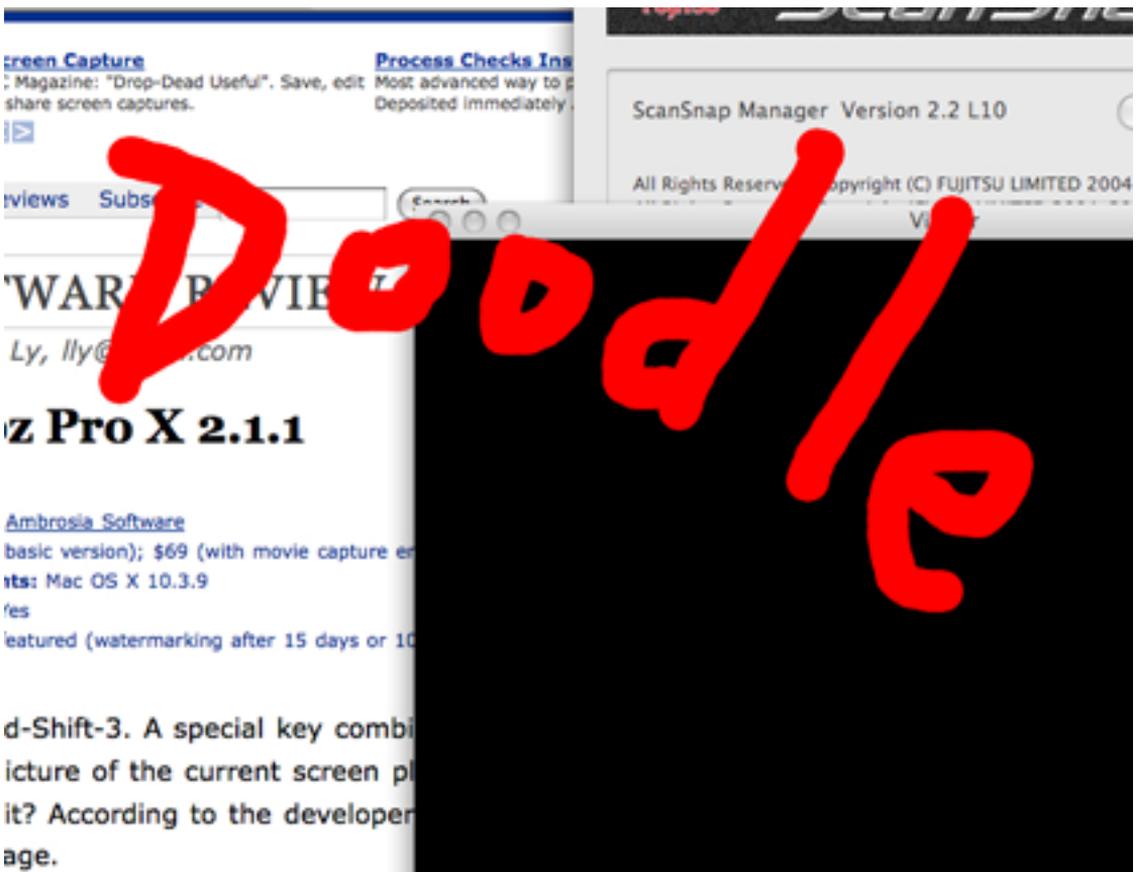
First Impression

On the surface, Séquence appears to be a good substitute for the built-in Command-Shift-3 or Command-Shift-4 keyboard combos, or even Grab. Press the hotkey and Séquence appears overlaid on top of the screen. Somewhat like Grab, you get the screen to look the way you want before the actual capture happens. Choose between full screen or selection, then click the scissor in the Séquence floating window to capture. Command-N is the keyboard shortcut to capture.



When invoked, Séquence floats above the current screen. Make your selection, then capture.

As expected, Séquence does more than just capture screens. You can doodle on top of the screen before capturing it. You can change the size and color of the brush, erase what is already drawn, or clear everything—there is not much else to do. Support for balloons and typed text would be more useful. By selecting the film strip icon, you switch to movie recording mode. The movie can include sound from the Mac microphone and video from a camera, all overlaid atop whatever is being displayed on the Mac screen. There are many choices for where to save the pictures or movies. The Pictures and Movies folders are to be expected, but you can also save straight to MobileMe or FTP sites. Strangely, you cannot save directly to the Desktop unless you select the Save As option, which prompts you to specify a location each time a picture or movie is made.



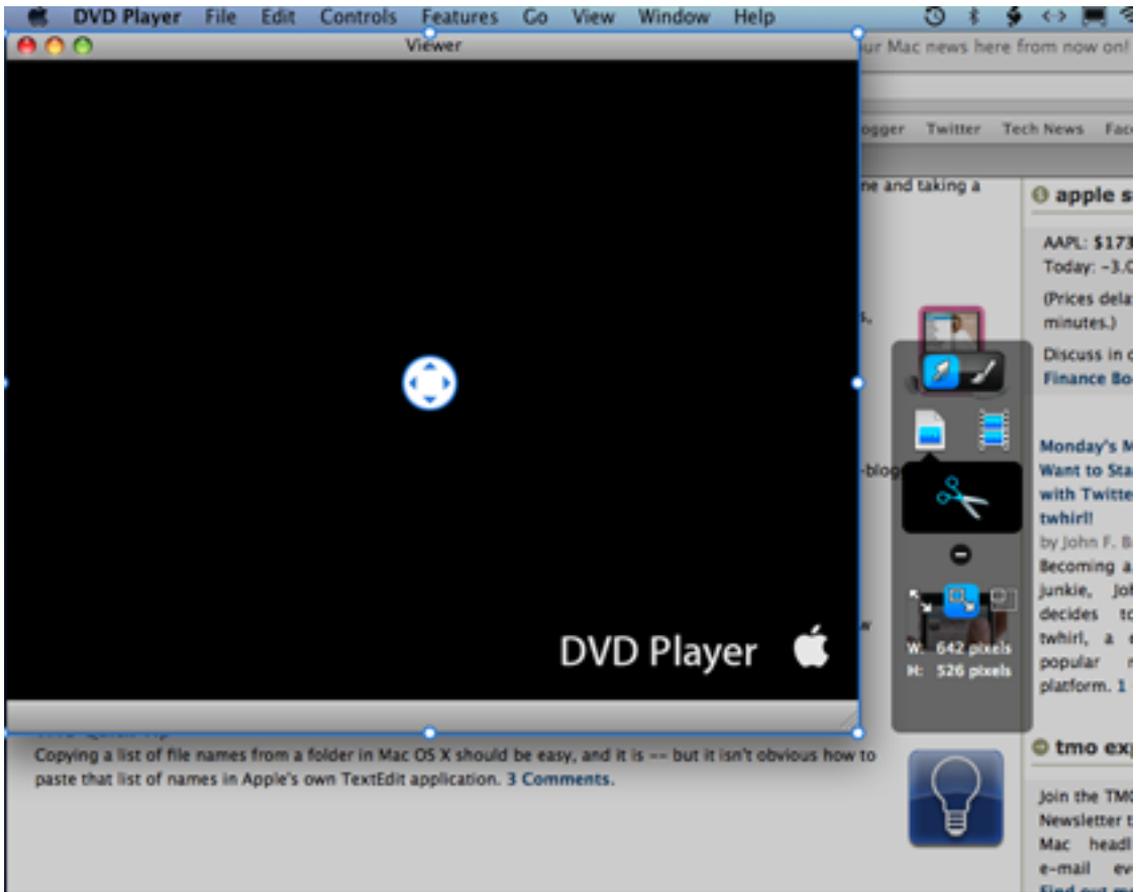
You can draw on top of the screen before capturing it.

Problems Surfaced

As I used Séquence more, many design problems surfaced. For some reason, the hotkeys to invoke Séquence can only be made from the function keys with some modifier keys. This means the transition from the built-in tool to Séquence is not transparent, as you have to learn some different key combo. Naturally, I tried to assign Command-Shift-F3, but nothing happened. I had to go into Preferences to disable the default action assigned to F3 (mute volume), then Séquence's newly assigned key combo worked. I like things the way I have them, so in the end I used Command-F11 instead, but then I came across a limitation. Every time you log in, the key combo does not work until you've launched the Séquence application. A minor issue, but again it makes the experience less pleasant.

In my experience writing reviews for ATPM, I often need to capture an application's window, not an entire screen. With Command-Shift-4 followed by spacebar, I can precisely capture a window without worrying about removal of unwanted background. If I happen to have a memory lapse and cannot remember the sequence, Grab can walk me through the steps. With Séquence, you can only do full screen or a portion of it. There are two ways to capture a portion of the screen, but either way you have to make adjustment manually. You don't just point to a window and make a clean capture of it. It is possible to adjust Séquence's

marquee, but why is there not an option to do so? In an odd twist, if you look up “window” in Séquence’s help file, you are referred to Grab to capture window.



There is no way to cleanly capture a window.

Séquence does not capture full screen that well either. As long as your full screen is not on its own screen, like many games, Séquence captures fine. On the Séquence Web page, someone wrote that Séquence was useful in capturing screens from the game Call of Duty, so I decided to give it a try with a demo of the game. Once in the game, I could not bring Séquence to overlay the game screen. Thinking perhaps that it was running anyway, I blindly pressed Command-N, but in the end no file was generated. I was able to capture a movie of the game, but the result was nothing to drool over. I had to do so by recording before the game is launched, which meant some post production work would be needed. Like many games, Call of Duty’s resolution is lower than my desktop’s. It seems that Séquence did not detect the change, and a lousy movie was made.



Instead of really capturing the game screen, Séquence included some other junk in the final product.

Conclusion

Séquence is supposed to make the built-in way to capture screens look unattractive. Séquence can add doodles and capture movies, and so on. However, it does not support two very basic needs of screen capturing—window and non-Desktop full screen. Unless you absolutely have to use Séquence's movie feature or the limited doodling, I suggest you stay with Grab and its cousins.

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