



Smoking Apples

The Magazine



Smoking Apples.

The best of reviews. The most unique tips. And comprehensive news updates on everything and anything Apple.

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The Editor's Space

In the month of January, it was about crossing milestones. It was the first month where we crossed 100,000 hits (in that month), which was way over the previous month. If that's something huge, we've also crossed 1,500 RSS readers, 2,000 followers on twitter, 2,000 comments on almost 450 posts. This is of course all thanks to you, our readers.

So what's the future then? These new statistics has erupted something behind the scenes, and we're working on some super secret projects that will depart Smoking Apples from its current 'blog' status (*I do feel we're a little more than that already*).

That's enough of news about our workings. The new iLife apps we've noticed are not entirely compatible with PPC computers. Garageband's major upgrade 'Learn to Play' is Intel-only, as well as some iPhoto slideshow transition effects.

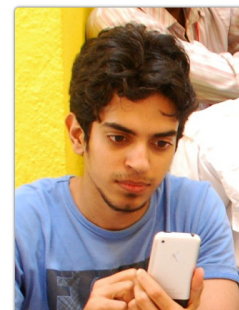
Several sites of course dissed Apple for ignoring their loyal customers, being that a PowerMac G5 Quad would very well be able to go through such processing. I wrote about it on Smoking Apples, and I will say it again. Apple has always been about moving forward. If it wasn't for that we would still have been running Classic apps designed for Mac OS 6.

We've run a poll about this on the blog, and only 5% of the votes said they had a PowerMac, which would be the only PPC Mac capable of running these features. Note that this demographic will be far less in the real world, as most of our traffic is still dedicated Mac fans.

Should Apple waste time and effort developing consumeristic features like "Learn to Play" and "slideshow effects" for such a small number of users? Thank god Apple is able to take bold decisions (floppy disk?).

This leads us of course to Snow Leopard, and the possibility that PPC users will be left out. In fact, I hope that Apple drops support. I also hope they drop support for 32bit Macs altogether (my iMac included). Why? Snow Leopard is about the future. It's not about features. It's about bringing speed to the Macs we'll be using for years to come. Apple right now has breathing space to undertake something like Snow Leopard. They should do it right. PPC users on the other hand should be content with Leopard. After all, isn't Leopard good enough?

Yours, Milind Alvares.
milind@smokingapples.com



New
Mailplane 2.0!



Mailplane

You like threaded conversations, googling your inbox, and you prefer labels over folders. You really love Gmail.

If yes: You are on the right track. Continue to use the Gmail web interface you know and love, but from Mailplane instead of your web browser: Mailplane makes you more productive and saves you precious time.



Drag 'n' Drop Attachments

Attaching files and folders has never been easier. Drag 'n' drop your files and folders to Mailplane. Watch as they attach to the message and instantly upload.



Use Unlimited Gmail Accounts

Add unlimited Gmail accounts (or Google apps for domain accounts), and switch between them without restarting Mailplane. And there's no need re-enter passwords every two weeks. Mailplane store them safely in the Mac Keychain.



Get Notified

Mailplane lets you know when new mail arrives - by playing a sound, displaying your unread messages in the application icon, or by the Growl notification system. Plus: Monitor all your accounts using the Accounts Drawer or the Status Item.



Send Optimized Photos

Picture-sending made simple. Mailplane automatically resizes and optimizes your pics to reduce the size of your message.

And many more »

To see the many new features, screencast, and download a free 30 day trial, visit Mailplaneapp.com »

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We've taken a look at Keynote, Pages and the brand new iWork.com to see what they bring to the table. [Read More »](#)

Layers Turns Your Mac Desktop Into Photoshop! pg 18

A brand new way of taking screenshots, Layers grabs your whole desktop into a Photoshop document. [Read More »](#)

MacDrive pg 24

Need to access your Mac disks on Windows. MacDrive 7 promises plug and play support for HFS+ partitions on any Windows machine. [Read More »](#)

Things Finally Gets Out of Beta. Reviewed. pg 21

The task management app that everyone's taking about was finally released at Macworld this year. [Read More »](#)

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We asked our readers what they thought were the best of widgets, and here we are, with 8 smoking hot must haves! [Read More »](#)

Interview

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One of the lead developers of Multiplex, David Martorana, gives us some insights into what went behind the creation of this app. [Read More »](#)



App Store

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We at Smoking Apples don't just by the company, but rather by the product. And so far, Windows LiveSync seems to be a solid Microsoft offering. [Read More»](#)

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What's the status of people's productivity suite? Are they using Apple's iWork or is everyone still on Microsoft's Office. Check out the reader survey [Read More »](#)

Hide Your Desktop Mess pg 26

If you're pained by looking at the mass of icons building up on your desktop, know that there's a way out. It'll be your own little secret. [Read More »](#)

Tutorials

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The Mac is totally geared towards keyboard control. Using it to write long prose, you can use these keyboard shortcuts to navigate efficiently. [Read More »](#)

Create a Flashy HTML Signature in Apple Mail pg 37

Who likes a boring signature with just plain text? Grab the attention of your clients, friends, and random people by having a nice elegant HTML signature. [Read More »](#)



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Linked list

The linked list brings you interesting news stories, articles, and opinions on anything and everything Apple. For a more comprehensive and up to date linked list, news updates, and little tips, follow us on twitter @smokingapples.

10 Secrets of iMovie 09

A few tricks you might not know about Apple's latest movie editor.

<http://tr.im/28kf>

iPhoto insists you are Jobs!

Playboy republishes Steve Jobs' interview from 1985. It's long, but a must read for any fanboi. Seriously, go read it.

<http://tr.im/dljo>

Jonas Rask has some nice replacement icons for your Mac

Nice replacements for Safari, iTunes, iPhoto, etc.

<http://tr.im/ex4f>

App Store for OS X?

James Stoup at AppleMatters thinks an App Store for OS X would be a mistake

<http://tr.im/ew17>

Pogue on the App Store ecosystem

David Pogue writes about the iPhone platform, the awesome Ocarina, and how a \$0.99 business model actually works!

<http://tr.im/ev01>

Apps for a web developer

15+ Incredibly useful Mac apps for the Web Developer. A good list.

<http://tr.im/err4>

Multi-Touch and GPS for the Mac

Snow Leopard to bring in iPhone like CoreLocation and MultiTouch™ tools. Or so says AppleInsider.

<http://tr.im/erpe>

iMovie '09 review

One good review of iMovie '09. Also look at the comments.

<http://tr.im/ep9s>

Need to get a task done?

Possibly the biggest list of task and project management apps for the Mac.

<http://tr.im/eja9>

The best productivity environment

Ryan Faas compares work scenarios with iWork '09, Office 2008, and Google Docs.

<http://snipr.com/5denu>

Freebies at Rogue Amoeba

CNET looks at another interview of Jobs: Year 2003 with the Rolling Stone magazine. Thoughts and link to the interview.

<http://tr.im/dq7v>

Bring back the white!

Someone unhappy with the two tone finish Ive's designs took matters in his own hands. "The most pretentious keyboard"

<http://tr.im/dp78>

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<http://twitter.com/smokingapples> »

Submit links from your blog or any other by
posting an @smokingapples tweet.

THE SMOKING APPLES DISCOUNTS

Tags

Tags aims at providing you with a central user interface to tag basically everything on your Mac. In our opinion the best tagging app currently available for the Mac.

Review: <http://tr.im/evqv>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGAPPLES



EventBox

We've spoken almost too much about EventBox. The best twitter client for the Mac also includes an elegant integration with Google Reader, Flickr, Facebook, and much more. Must have for a social network nerd

Review: <http://is.gd/iNri>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGBOX



Fontcase

A brand new way to look at fonts, Fontcase brings elegance, features, and jaw-dropping core animation effects unheard of in something as mundane as a font manager...

Review: <http://tr.im/exjv>
Discount link: <http://tr.im/exjm>



Mailplane

Gmail user? Step right this way! Featuring multiple account support, keyboard shortcuts, and more, Mailplane brings the Gmail experience to the desktop...

Review: <http://tr.im/f55x>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGAPPLES



Picturesque

If you need to quickly apply jawddropping effects to your images, Picturesque will not disappoint. In fact, most of the images on SmokingApples.com are touched up with Picturesque.

Review: <http://tr.im/f3fx>
Discount link: <http://tr.im/f3fw>



Scribbles

The quickest and most elegant way to scribble something on your Mac. Great for all ages, specially so for those kids who complain that you don't have a nice drawing app on your Mac

Link: <http://tr.im/f8ky>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGAPPLES



Desktopple

Hide your desktop clutter and breathe easy. A must have app for any Mac user.

Review: <http://tr.im/f8zh>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGAPPLES



Pixelmator

If you're tired of Photoshop and need something fresh and Mac-like to work with, Pixelmator is your best bet. And it's a whole lot cheaper than 'big brother'!

Review: <http://tr.im/f6qk>
Coupon Code: SMOKINGAPPLES



iWork '09 in the review: Keynote and Pages



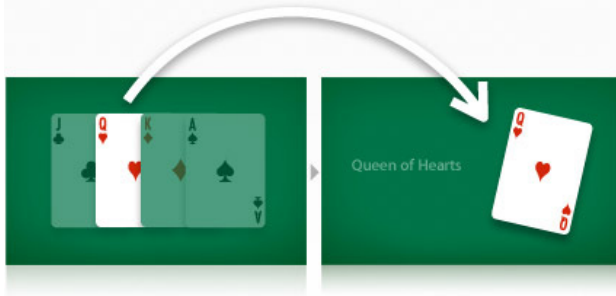
Keynote '09

Among the updates to iLife at the Macworld Keynote presentation, Keynote took center stage for the iWork '09 update. While we got the usual addition of new themes and effects, there were also some other really cool updates. Are these updates worth the upgrade from iWork '08? Continue reading...

Magic Move

Probably the biggest update to Keynote and it's pretty sweet. Basically it lets you animate an object between slides or even multiple objects. It's simple to use and you can do some pretty complex animations.

Say you have a stack of photos that you have particular points for. In last years Keynote you would basically just have them all layed out and then use multiple effects combined with reordering of the object sequences to make the objects appear as you click through. With Keynote '09 you can give this much more visual appeal using Magic Move. Collect all those photos into what looks like a stack and then use Magic Move to make them all spread out rather than just fade in. Basically, Keynote will change the size, angle, opacity and animation of a single object from one slide to another. It's a nice touch and really does add to the overall quality of your presentations. Just one more thing that gives Keynote superiority over Microsoft's Powerpoint.



Even though this feature is really useful there are a few problems with it. I'd like a little more control over what I can do with the animation. As it is right now it's pretty much just move this to here. Having the ability to edit the animation would be nice, so say I want the object's movement to go a different way around (on a path maybe) you can't do that right now. Although for most purposes this shouldn't affect the end user, since a presentation really shouldn't be that complex anyway.

Theme Chooser

Standard in all iWork 09 apps, the Theme Chooser has been revamped to have a more Leopard feel to it [Ed: Actually, it's more Snow Leopard than Leopard vanilla] This showcases the themes really well and it includes the skimming from iPhoto/iMovie which now allows

you to see the different designs within the template. It's much more functional than the '08 version and it's more visually appealing. The iWork apps also have a much needed Open Recent drop down menu.

One thing that I feel is missing is Quick Look. When I first opened the Theme Chooser I expected that when I press the space bar I would have been able to see a much larger version of the templates and even now I still find that I make that mistake. Quick Look for me is one of the most useful features to Leopard and really sets it apart from Windows. It's sad to see that Apple hasn't really included this in Keynote when it's such an obvious place to put it. One can argue that the thumbnails can be zoomed in pretty large, but Quick Look is a little more functional than that. No matter though, this is still a much needed improvement over the previous version.

3D Charts and Animation

This for myself is probably the best upgrade in Keynote '09. Charts now have the ability to be animated and they look just gorgeous (you should see them in action

on a large screen!). You can change how the charts animate in quite a few ways by having the option to affect the individual parts of a table. For instance, a bar chart will swirve in while the bars grow. You can even make each of the bars grow separately, giving it a very professional production quality effect. It's very cool and is extremely customizable with different effects and transitions.

If you use charts a lot in your presentations this feature alone is probably worth the upgrade at least for myself. Although like all the other features it could still use a little improvement mainly in making it easier to do [Ed: I disagree with that, adding an animation is as easy as choosing an animation in the inspector].

New Themes, Transitions, Effects and others

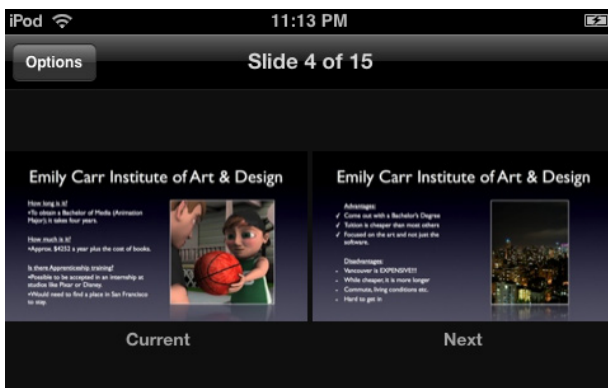
Well it's the one thing we can predict with pretty much any update to an app. Apple has introduced some really clean and simple templates that really work well. Some I don't particularly care for but most are very nice (particularly the Showcase one). New transitions and effects are added but nothing really all that would make you spend \$79 bucks to buy. They are more of an added bonus than anything.



Adding these new effects are great and all but I feel that it encourages people to try and use them all which really takes away from your presentation. A Keynote should really only be a helper and not be the main part of your presentation. Keep the use of these transitions and effects at a minimum in order to make your Keynote really good. For myself, I look at Steve Jobs Keynotes as something to strive for. He doesn't have flashy effects unless he really needs to emphasize a point.

Many features that can't make a headline

Another new feature added is something called Connection Line. This basically lets you create a line connecting two objects. Why is this useful? Because before you had to place the objects and then create a line between the two, but if you moved the arrangement around you needed to move all the objects. Connection Line now allows for you to simply make a line between objects and then you can alter its curvature, placement etc. It's handy and really simplifies things. Keynote '09 also has the ability to publish to iWork.com which



currently is in Beta mode. Check out our thoughts on iWork.com for more info on that.

Keynote '09 also brings in a new Share menu in the menubar. It gives one click access to exporting your presentation as a PDF or a Movie, along with access to the aforementioned iWork.com. Keynote also has a bunch of UI changes that not only make it more aesthetically pleasing (like that gorgeous new presenter display), but also more functional.

Keynote on the iPhone

Along with the release of iWork '09, Apple also has developed a handy remote to go with Keynote. It's simple in function and this is reflected in the pricetag (\$0.99). To connect the iPhone to Keynote it works much like the iTunes Remote does. The iPhone gives you a 4 digit code that you enter into the Keynote preferences and this registers your iPhone with Keynote. From there you can start a presentation and the slides will show up on your iPhone. Having the iPhone in portrait shows the current slide in the top half of the screen and then your presenter notes in the bottom half. Landscape shows the current slide and the next slide. It's simple and does its purpose and given the choice over the Apple remote I'd take the iPhone.

Now there are a few problems with it. Navigating slides you need to swipe your finger like you would when browsing photos. I for one would much rather be able to just tap the screen to advance to the next slide. Along with that, the entire app feels a little bit

too simple for my liking. I'd like a bit more features like perhaps being able to browse my slideshow as a list like in the photo app. The app does serve its purpose and it's a good thing it's not more than \$0.99 because any other price above that I just don't see myself paying for. It turns your iPhone into a remote and that's about it.

So is this year's Keynote a worthy upgrade? I'm not to sure, these updates are something that in any other application would be a free upgrade. I'd like to see some more integration with Core Animation as Apple moves more towards dumping Tiger but it's still really nice. If your on the fence as to spend the \$80 (India: Rs. 4320 single-user, and Rs. 5280 family-pack), I'd ask whether this update suits your needs. Note that it's \$80 not only for Keynote, as you also get Pages and Numbers in the suite. If you want Apple also offers a 30 day free trial and see for yourself, but I think it's a pretty good improvement over last year.

If you are a regular Keynote user, the new version will dramatically improve your presentations. Magic Move will simply a whole lot of slides, and the new themes and effects will breathe in some new life into your presentations. If you just do an occasional presentation, or if you don't like to use animation in your presentations, Keynote 08 will serve you well for now.

If however you don't use iWork, this version is definitely the one which should get you started. Look over at the Poll in the sidebar (vote to see results). More than 75% of the voters use iWork. And that's saying a lot.

iWork.Com, Understanding Apple's Online Office Extension

Along with iWork 09, Apple introduced the much rumoured iWork.com, an online extension to the desktop office suite. At first I was really excited to find Apple had finally managed to convert iWork into a web office suite and was already cooking up dreams of it integrating with iDisk and other such fanboy fantasies.

When I did come to learn the realities of the situation though, I was brought down to earth. iWork.com merely presents your work online. There is absolutely no editing that can be done via the online interface. The only editing that can be done, is adding comments.

Well that's all for the bad stuff. After using the online extension for a while, I understood its true purpose. iWork.com excels at what it's meant to do.

What is iWork meant to do?

iWork.com is meant to send people a draft or final copy of a document. If you want to send a client, publisher, friend a document, instead of attaching it in an email, you merely invite them to view the document online! The formatting is preserved to the T, with colour, graphics and fonts all embedded in the document. The receiving end can then add notes, or download a copy for himself. Besides, if you send the document to multiple parties, those who come in late can already see what feedback has been added.

How it all works

I created a document in Pages 09, and hit the iWork.com button in the toolbar. I then entered my MobileMe ID (or iTunes account or AppleID) which is a one time only thing. The next screen let me enter in email IDs I want to send this document to.

Pages will then upload the document online (very speedy) and send your contacts a fancy email with a link to view the document. You on the other hand get a link for yourself, which requires you to reenter your user ID and password in the browser. The viewers on the other hand view the document without any password.

On iWork.com, you get to view a list of your uploaded documents, as well as view the number of

people and comments for each. The viewers on the other hand only get to view the document that was emailed to them, and add comments and notes to the document, as well as download the document in PDF, iWork, or Microsoft Office file formats.

Why iWork.com will work

I've always marveled at how Apple thinks outside the grid and brings in something what no one expects (case to point: the buttonless trackpad). People don't want to edit files on the web, not with what the web currently has to offer. The cloud has yet to mature enough to be able to provide a rich environment for doing complex tasks. I know so many people who still insist on using Microsoft Word on the desktop instead of using Google Docs in the browser.

What Apple has done is provide an online extension, while keeping the editing features on the desktop. They've also made sure that PC users don't get left out by adding an option to download it as an MS Office compatible file. The seamlessness by which this whole information is presented and transferred, makes it not only easy to use, but usable. I can actually imagine myself sending someone a document with a single click, and expecting no problems in intercepting it on the other end. Will iWork.com get editing features in the future? Surely. But till Apple figures out a way to make online editing actually usable, I'll be happy to use iWork.com.



Pages '09



Ever since I first switched to the Mac I've been a Pages user. That was when it was 1.0 and just a simple sort of got the job done. Over time Pages has evolved into a powerful word processor and page layout application that can be used from simple barebones hacking at the keyboard to *almost*-pro level page layout jobs. Let's take a look at what Pages '09 brings to the table and whether or not we can count on it for our word processing needs.

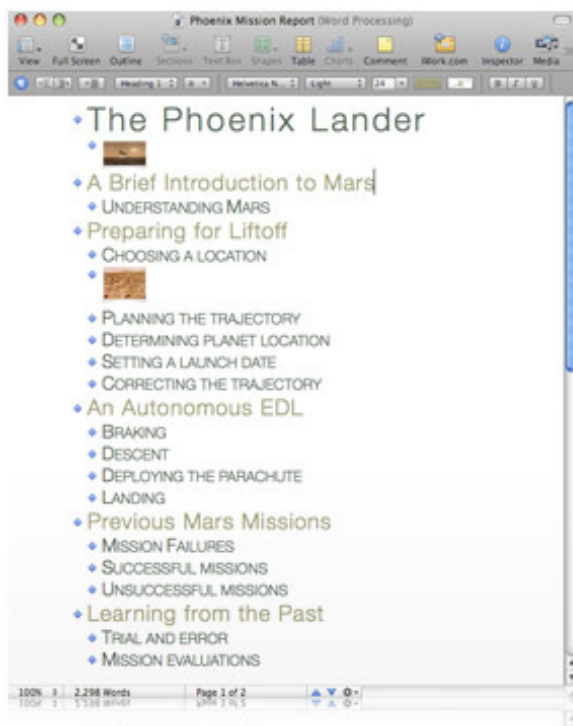
The full screen view

I usually type my posts in TextEdit, although if it's something I need to concentrate on I switch over to WriteRoom. The no-clutter view really helps you keep your thoughts together (twitter is really distracting) so when Apple announced that Pages was going to get this full-screen view feature, it got my attention. While I will continue to use TextEdit for many posts, Pages' full screen view is gorgeous.

It starts with the animation, which slides out of your desktop and puts you in single page fullscreen mode. All that you can see is your text, the page number, and word count. The three most important things when typing a long post. Pages also goes ahead and shows you the format bar when you move your mouse to the top. Moving it to the left side slides out the page drawer. Everything is smooth and slick, and very useful. This is a feature well done.

Outlining

I'm not very big on outlining, considering that I don't write novels, so I'm not the best one to judge this feature. However, considering that I do a lot of page layout in InDesign, I think I can wrestle with this new feature.



What the outliner does, is break your story into parts. These parts are heirarchial, based on the stylesheet used. The headings hold more weight than the sub-heads, and the normal style forms the base. If you move the heading group, all the subheads and paragraphs of text will move along with that. Let me paint the picture for you.

Say you're working on a project on genetic engineering. You can start the outline mode, and knock out your structure. Mark all the headings, and then fill out the subheads. It's all very simple and involves just selecting which style you want to use.

Once you're done with that setup, you move out of the outline and Pages will show you that same structure. You then type out your text, and find that the story needs rearrangement. Go back into outline mode, and move chapters around.

It's almost usable.

The outline mode of Pages is messy. I would have expected one to be able to collapse entire groups, or at least have the ability to collapse base level paragraph text. In it's current implementation, all it does is adds tabs for your existing structure. I would say it's no good

as an outlining program, but a feature that only 'nice to have'.

Mail Merge with Numbers

A single feature where there's nothing to talk about. It works, but well, it should right? Pages also linked Numbers charts and graphs, so when you change something in Numbers, it reflects in Pages. Unfortunately, none of our team members are experienced in using spreadsheet apps so we could not give a proper review of Numbers '09.

New Templates, iWork.com, and a better sharing menu

Again, nothing to talk about. The templates do not stand out from the previous ones, and the sharing menu is just a rearranged Export window. Nice enhancements, but a no-show.

On the whole, Pages '09 is a nice upgrade, but not worth writing home about. If you are still using iWork 08, Pages 3.0 will still hold good. On the other hand, if you are upgrading anyway, you will definitely appreciate the full screen support and the link up to iWork.com.



Buy iWork from the
Smoking Apples aStore

Single User \$75

Family Pack \$95

Awaken 4

Wake up to your music

[More Info ►](#)



EMBRACEWARE
SOFTWARE INC

5.0 Coming soon!



TV Forecast
www.BIGBUCKETBLOG.COM

Lost
BUY
9:00 PM
Today

The Little Prince

Grey's Anatomy
BUY
9:00 PM
Tomorrow

Beat Your Heart Out

House
BUY
Mon, Feb 9
5 days

Unfaithful

Heroes
BUY
Mon, Feb 9
5 days

Trust and Blood

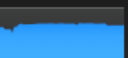
Entourage
TBA

TV Forecast »

Anyone who watches TV shows regularly needs this widget. It not only keeps a track of when the next episode of your favourite show is set to air, but also links up directly to iTunes so you could buy those episodes. Also available for the iPhone, TV Forecasts Widget is a must have.

iStat Pro »

Many would say iStat Pro should be included by default. I agree. This is one widget that makes the dashboard as awesome as it is. Showing you details of every bit of your system, iStat Pro has become the top recommended widget among Mac users.

CPU User: 16% System: 8% Nice: 0% Idle: 76% 	MEMORY Wired: 348MB Active: 1.03GB Inactive: 540MB Free: 96MB 	DISKS Macintosh HD U: 106.4GB F: 127.1GB 	NETWORK AirPort - en1 192.168.1.102 In: 0KB/s Out: 0KB/s Total In: 1.76GB Total Out: 219MB Ext: 59.95.32.203	UPTIME Uptime 8d 7h 53m Processes 85 Load Average 0.28, 0.42, 0.40	TEMPS HD: Macintos... 131° CPU A 128° Ambient 95° GPU Diode 158° HD Bay 1 131° Mem Controller 140° Optical Drive 121°	FANS CPU Fan 1889rpm Hard Drive 1738rpm Optical Drive 800rpm	PROCESSES  iTunes 5.2%  Adobe InD... 4.1%  WindowSer... 1.5%  Adobe Pho... 0.9%  pmTool 0.8%
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Address Book Search

H: 34°
Panaji
L: 20°


28°

QuickCal »

This widget lets you quickly enter events into iCal. It even understands the date and time formats in plain english! Recommended for iCal users...

Quick Cal

Home

Event Information

Dinner with the President of India 3 pm-5pm

Dinner with the President of India

Start: 05/02/09 3:00 PM End: 05/02/09 5:00 PM

The 8 must-have Dashboard Widgets



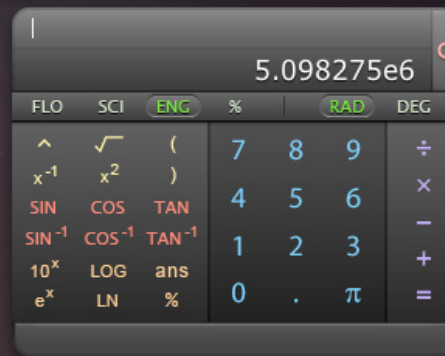
MyTube »

This all-in-one YouTube widget lets you find, play as well as download youtube videos. Plus, it looks like an old TV! Perfect for those crappy resolution videos.



Countdown »

Could it be Christmas? Or maybe your first paycheck? Or better still, the next Apple Keynote? Whatever the date, Countdown can track it down.



PEMDAS »

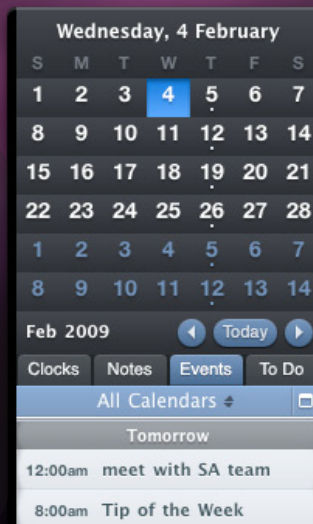
If you find the built in Calculator a bit watered down, check out PEMDAS. Featuring all the mathematical lingo, this calculator is a beauty with brains.

Delivery Status »

Most people swear by this widget. Tracking your packages from Amazon, DHL, FedEx, and what have you, DL can track it. With support for growl notifications and a neat UI, this is hands down a winner...

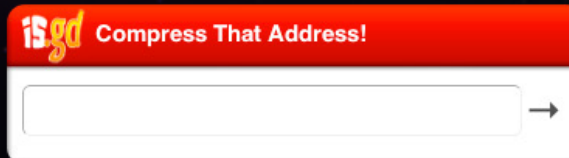
Organiser »

Another beauty from iSlayer, Organiser combines your calendar, Notes, Todos and clocks in one slick interface. If you want to stay organised while saving space on your dashboard, this is the widget you want.



URL Compressor »

If you find yourself constantly tweeting juicy links, this URL shortener will come in handy.



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**ad must be aesthetically pleasing to the eye
(It's gotta look hot!)*

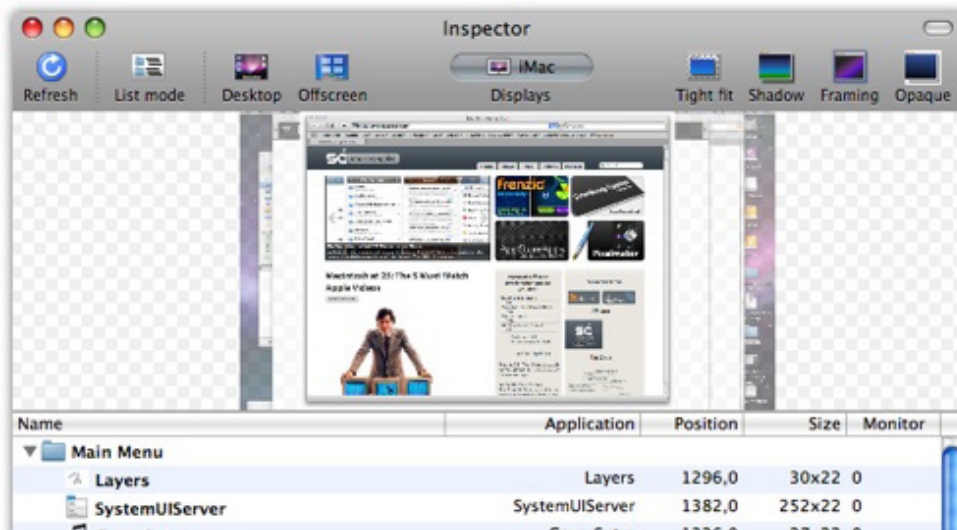
Review

Layers turns your desktop into Photoshop!

We're all familiar with the built in OS X shortcut commands. Command+Shift+3 for grabbing the full screen, Cmd+Shift+4 for grabbing an area, and Cmd+Shift+4 and then hitting the spacebar to grab an application frame, which crops the screenshot to the exact dimensions, including the shadows and transparency intact.

But what happens when you need to grab different UI elements from the screen? Many a times I have found myself taking multiple screenshots and aligning them inside of Photoshop. Enter, Layers.

This brilliant piece of software, captures your entire screen, and saves it as a layered photoshop file. Just hit the keyboard shortcut, and your work is done. You can also grab the frontmost application if you want, but that's just added functionality.



The layered file

What amazes me is the amount of detail that is put into the file. Every window and screen element is neatly marked with its correct name, and these are all clubbed into layer groups. You can for instance at once turn off all the desktop objects, or click away elements from your menubar. You can even remove the window reflections from the dock!

Advanced Capture

Bringing up the Inspector from the Layers app, you get an advanced menu for capturing desktop elements. The UI is very intuitive, with a slick core animation to show you what exactly you are saving. For instance, I could save only the spotlight menubar icon by clicking its name and hitting save. Using the menubar controls, you can also grab just the shadow, application frame, or an pure white shot of a window if you need it.

The inspector allows you to select which display you want to capture from, save the screenshot as a composite, or a bunch of images.

The final word

If you need this kind of functionality, Layers will not disappoint. At \$15 for a license, it is very adequately priced. Casual users of course will not need this as snapping one window at a time is good enough for most part. Check out the trial anyway, you might just be floored.

Reader Survey: iWork

The Smoking Apples reader surveys go beyond normal reviews. We ask the people who actually use the products what they feel about them. No professional reviews here, only what the people think. For this month, we went around asking which office suite Mac users preferred. Do people prefer the cheaper and native iWork? Or do they work in Office due to better compatibility.

Recently, Microsoft posted some statistics claiming that over 77% Mac users in the US use some flavour of Office. We wanted to know how real this figure was. Turns out, Microsoft is only half right. On one hand, they are right in that many people have Office installed, but they are wrong in that more than 75% Mac users of our readers use iWork.

We got a total of 420 votes, 182 of which said they use iWork, but also have Office installed. 144 said they use iWork exclusively. Office users on the other hand comprised of 69 users, with an additional 25 who weren't even aware of iWork. The large number of iWork users have Office installed, count in Microsoft's favour, but only for so long...

Here's what some of the replies on a Twitter poll had to say.

"Been able to make much better documents with iWork. I'm not even a designer."

"I like iWork, but I need to use Office because of compatibility."

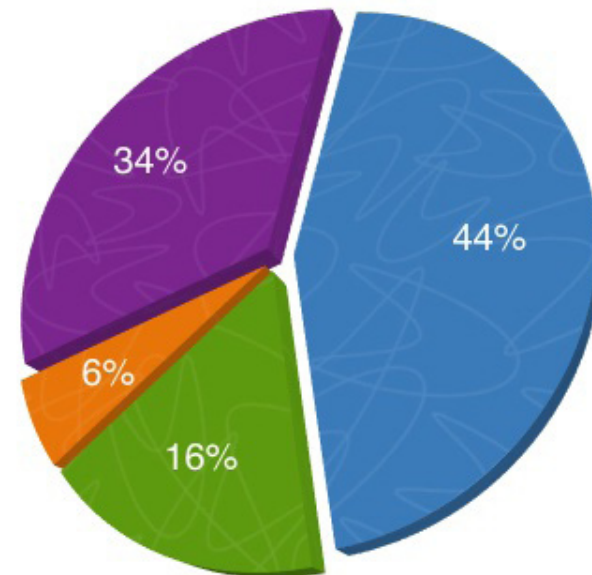
"increasingly iWork...but have old projects which i need to finish in Word."

"I dislike a few things about Pages '08 (haven't tried '09) - no odf support and awful html export are big downsides."

Office Compatibility?

Most of the people who use Office on a Mac are either unaware of iWork, or are forced to do so at the office. It was a mistake on our part to exclude that from the poll, but we gather that the 44% who have office installed by use iWork are largely using it for compatibility reasons.

● iWork Exclusive ● iWork (Office installed) ● Office ● Unaware of iWork



iWork vs MS Office: Which one do you use?

Total Votes: 420

“People are also forced to use Office due to the occasional brain-dead feature omission in iWork. The two most glaring — no split-screen view in Numbers, and you have to use either footnotes or endnotes (you can’t use both in combination) in Pages.”

“iWork out of choice, but I do have office installed on my iMac (in case purposes)”

“I have to have office (installed in XP in Parallels) for absolute compatibility with others in the company (mostly for political reasons). However, I never author anything in Office. If I create documents I use iWork and distribute them as pdf documents.”

Yep, there are some glaring omissions in iWork that Apple just refuses to address. Thankfully, when the job leaves the business-area, iWork becomes dominant.

I am retired now and I do not need to use Office anymore. I used to have to run Office on my Macs at work.

Numbers

Most people are still vary about Numbers. The concept of spreadsheets seems to be stuck in the ledger sheet era, and Numbers doesn’t quite fit in well. I wouldn’t know anything about spreadsheets though, as I have never used one in my life. Those who use spreadsheets professionally generally stay away from Numbers, and for good reason. It lacks a bunch of features, and Apple has yet again not implemented them in Numbers ‘09.

“Numbers ‘08 is a usability disaster”

“iWork is great, but they do need to fix Numbers.”

“I wish I could use Numbers, I really do. The concept is great, and the future is definitely looking good (Excel’s progress is stunted). But right now Numbers is a mess, and cannot be used in professional scenarios.”

Of course, there’s the other extreme as well, but we’ve found these to be very rare.

“I’m not sure why more people don’t use Numbers. Seriously, do we really need to keep the what, 16th century, monolithic ledger sheet as the basis of our 21st century spreadsheet apps?!?”

Pages

The response for Pages is generally good. This is an excellent page layout app, with good ease of use, features, and is way better than Word. The only reason people use Word is due to compatibility in office scenarios.

“Pages for my personal projects, but I have to use Word for when people send me files (or vice versa). I wish I didn’t have to though, Pages is nice.”

Keynote

Hands down, a winner. No one doubts that Keynote is far superior to PowerPoint on any platform. The sheer ease of use, powerful effects, and integration make this application the best presentation tool for anyone. There’s no excuse not to use it.

So what does the **Smoking Apples Team** think of MobileMe then?

Milind: I’m a hands down iWork user. I used to have Office installed, but never upgraded to Office 2008. Honestly though, I write mostly in TextEdit, and ready up posts in the wordpress webapp, so the question of using Pages hardly ever arises. I do like the idea of sharing documents via iWork.com though and have done so on a few occasions.

Corey: I used to have both office and iWork, but now it’s just iWork. The newest version of office to me looks and feels very cluttered and messy and the UI is distracting. I have been a heavy powerpoint user for years I do training for a living and to me keynote is leaps and bounds over powerpoint PERIOD! I have had no compatwblity issues with iWork - Office. iWork.com is real nice I have used it a few times now and will probably get a paid account if it goes to that.

We hope this paints a clearer picture on the current status of the Apple community’s opinion about iWork. If you have any doubts or questions, don’t hesitate in contacting the Smoking Apples team.

Review

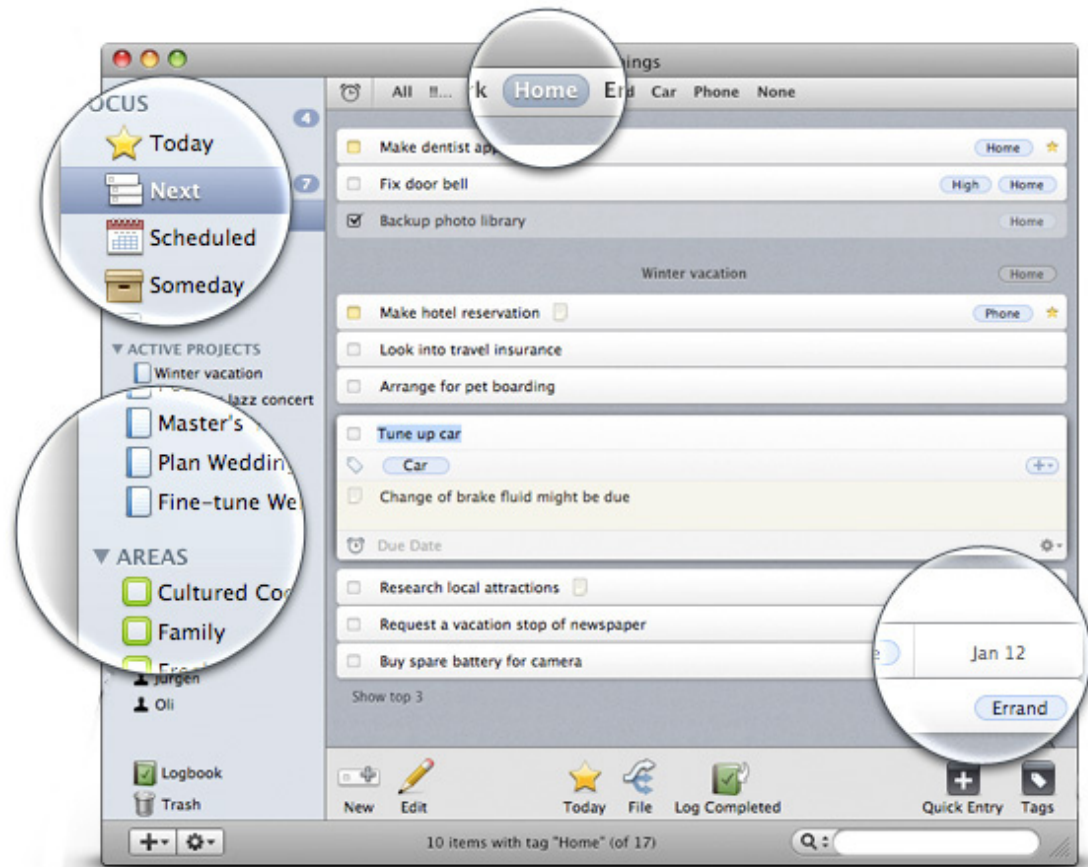
Things finally gets out of beta!

It's been like what, a little over a year now? From the day Things was released for public consumption as a beta, I've been hooked. Cultured Code set out to make a getting things done platform that actually gets you. A year later, I think they did. Read on for what might be less of a review, and more of an encomium.

Your Tasks

Things provides a simple structure for getting yourself organised. At the core of this, is events. These are free floating objects that contain the name, tags, notes and a due date of any task at hand. These events can be dragged around to create any structure you want. Of course, Things provides the very structure that will organise these events for you: Projects and Areas.

Projects are finite, with a distinct end in sight. Projects can be organising everything for your school paper, or designing a client's website. Once all the tasks in the project are done, it can be considered completed. For instance, while designing the SA magazine, my project involved events for 'base structure', 'col-



our scheme, 'font characteristics', and so on. Once these items were checked off, the magazine was complete.

Areas of Responsibility on the other hand are continuing, infinite with no real end in sight. It could be your house work, car maintenance, or considering the apps for review on SA. Once a task is completed, it goes out, but the Area itself cannot be completed. For instance, while a project was required for designing the magazine, an Area is required for continuously organising what content goes into the next issue.

Free form organisational structure

I mentioned that Things provides a free form way of organising your events. Tags helps keep that notion going. Every post can be tagged with whatever you wish. Things maintains a tag database and auto completes them as you type. To quickly add tags, just open up the tag viewer from where you can drag and drop them onto events. With events tagged you can at once you can see all your high priority tasks, or look at all those events that relate to your personal tasks. CulturedCode has taken a lot of time to think about how best to

implement tags, and they have done a very good job. In any space, you can immediately tell what tags are in use, and sort that space to show only those events.

Execution

Well that's all great, but how do we actually get these things done? Today, and Next are what's going to help you. Today will show you all events that are due for that date (by means of a due date on the event), or events that you have manually dragged into that field. Events that are past their due date will also show up in Today with a red tab showing an urgency.

Next will show you a brief look at the top 5 tasks of every Project and Area, those events that are manually dragged in. If you need to see more of a project, Things can also show you all of the events in that Project or Area. In my opinion this is the most

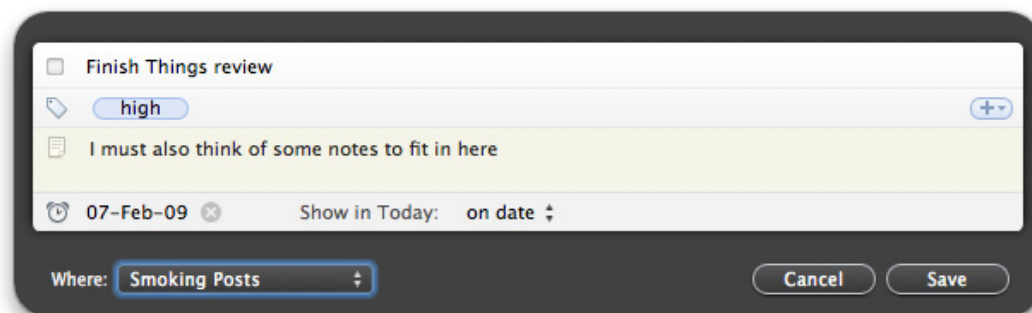
important space that you need to keep an eye on, as it shows you a good overview of all your tasks in a single window.

Things also has spaces for Scheduled and Someday. Scheduled is for tasks that you can on doing at a later date, while Someday is

for tasks that you were supposed to do right now, but want to postpone them. Say you have an event that you promised yourself you would do today, but now that the day presents itself you know you can't. Just drag the event to someday and the event won't bother you for a while.

Quick Entry

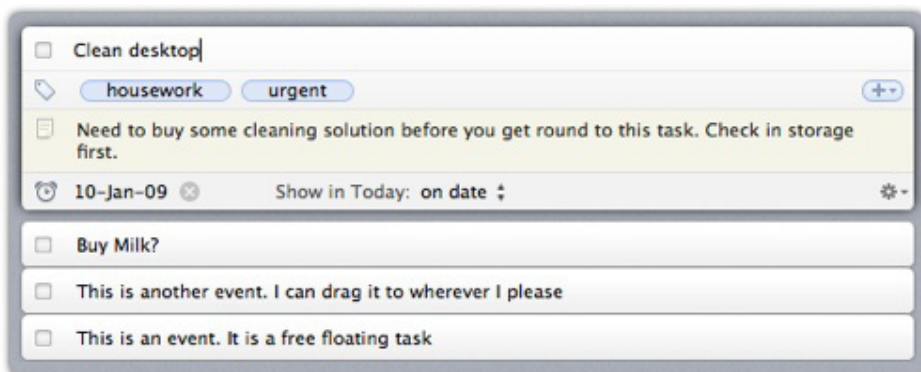
The best part of Things, is that you don't need the main window open to add tasks. You're surfing the web and need to add something quickly? Just use the Quick



Entry shortcut and you can enter all the info needed for a single event, including assigning it to a particular Project or Area.

Integration

Things will sync any events in the Today field with iCal todos. This ensures that you know what needs to be done for the day, without having all of your events crowding iCal's limited space. Unfortunately, iCal todos don't show up in MobileMe online nor do they show up on the iPhone Calendar.



Another much requested feature, MobileMe syncing, is actually already present. While the team is working on a more elegant solution, you can move your Things database to one of your iDisk folders and sync it over to another Mac. Here are some instructions for doing so.

Will it get things done?

As you can see, Things has you covered on all areas of managing your tasks. The interface is brilliant to say the least, and the free form structure of the events gives you flexibility in managing any task at hand. Cultured Code has refined Things, adding little functions, tweaking the UI, and everything has culminated into this brilliant piece of software, Things 1.0.

Things costs \$50 for a single user license. A trial version is available as well. The desktop application, coupled with the seamless sync with the iPhone version will definitely eliminate your procrastinating habits.

Do take a look at TaskPaper 2, which has a much different approach to the same end, and keep a lookout for The Hit List from Potion Factory. Currently in private beta, it looks like a promising contender in the GTD space. Above all, let us know what you think of Things ».



Watch the Screencast!

How I use Things to manage tasks

Things for iPhone

The iPhone version of Things is a perfect complement to the desktop one. Although both workspaces are totally different, with a different user interface, they both feel like they are part of one another.

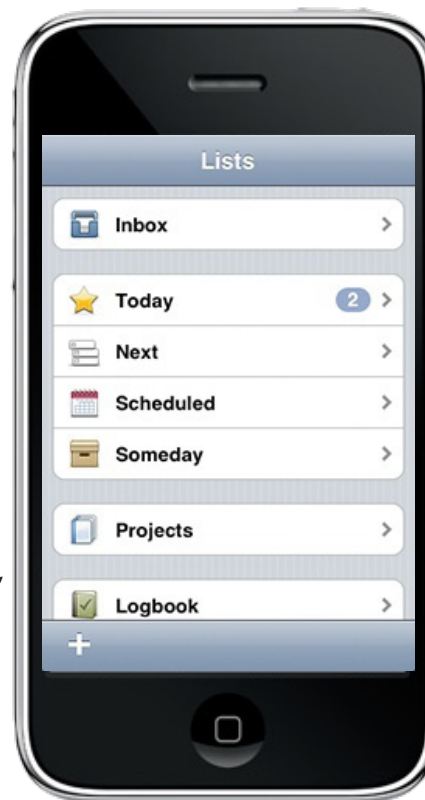
Standalone

As a standalone task manager, Things for iPhone lets you add tasks, move them around, and basically do pretty much what the desktop version can do (with some limitations of course).

The beauty of the UI is the + button at the bottom left. It is always there, so no matter what, you can add a new task. The button will by default create a new task in your Inbox, but if you're already in a project, it will default to that instead.

You can also batch-move items to another location, which is handy for organising your events from your inbox to projects.

Things also carries the concepts of Someday and Scheduled over to the iPhone.



Syncing

The main feature of Things for iPhone is the seamless sync. As long as both, the iPhone and Desktop version of Things are on the same wifi network, it will initiate a sync. The sync usually happens at launch, but it also periodically syncs as long as both apps are open.

Shortcomings

While Cultured Code has been working hard on bringing the desktop features of Things to the iPhone, it still misses out on some. For once, Areas is totally absent from the features list. That is the main feature of the desktop version that I use and not having it on the iPhone is a bummer. However, the Next view will show events from any of your Areas that have synced over, so that's a sort of temporary workaround.

Another feature I find missing is the search feature, or narrowing down by tags. With version 1.3 Things for iPhone supports tags, but they are basically useless for a iPhone only usage.

VFM?

All in all though, Things for the iPhone is a solid GTD extension, and a must have if you have the desktop version of Things. The iPhone version retails for \$9.99 [\[iTunes link\]](#) and is totally worth it.

Accessing Mac Disks on Windows Made 100% Compatible With MacDrive

When you're about to format your brand new external hard drive, the question of file system always crops up. You could either go with the universally accepted FAT32, but forfeit writing files larger than 4GB. You could go with Microsoft proprietary NTFS, but then forfeit (native) write capability on the Mac. Or you could go with HFS but not be able to access your disk on Windows at all.

Most probably, you so want to choose HFS because it works so much better with your Mac. You could even use it with Time Machine. But what does one do about that Windows compatibility? I'm sure many of you know this by now, but for those who don't, Mediafour makes an awesome tool: MacDrive.

I was very skeptical about how MacDrive would perform. I had previously tried HFSExplorer for Windows but it crashed every time it detected a Mac disk. I'm pleased to report that MacDrive provides perfect compatibility with a Windows machine.

It Just Works!™

Once installed, drives mount in Windows explorer just like any other drive would. The only difference is the little apple logo telling you that its a Mac drive. I tried it over USB and Firewire, used it on Windows XP SP3 as well as Vista SP1. Both worked flawlessly.



I then tried a Mac-only DVD, which read just fine, opened up a DMG which again mounted without any issues (password protected DMGs and .sparseimages cannot be mounted), and finally, I booted my MacBook in target disk mode and was able to run a diagnostic. Accessing the Mac partition via Bootcamp also works as you would expect it to. Using the Disk manager you can also partition and format drives, both options I did not try.

Yes, or no?

Overall this is a beautiful piece of (Windows) software, that's transparent, and well, 'it just works'. At \$50 for a single computer, and \$60 for two computers, MacDrive isn't the cheapest app. Also, a more liberal licensing policy based on 'users' rather than 'computers' would have been a better deal. But if you want your hard drive to be 100% compatible across your computers, it's hard to go wrong with MacDrive 7. A fully featured 7 day trial awaits any testing you might want to carry out.



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The same quality Apple products. The same jaw dropping Amazon deals. The same security and peace of mind.

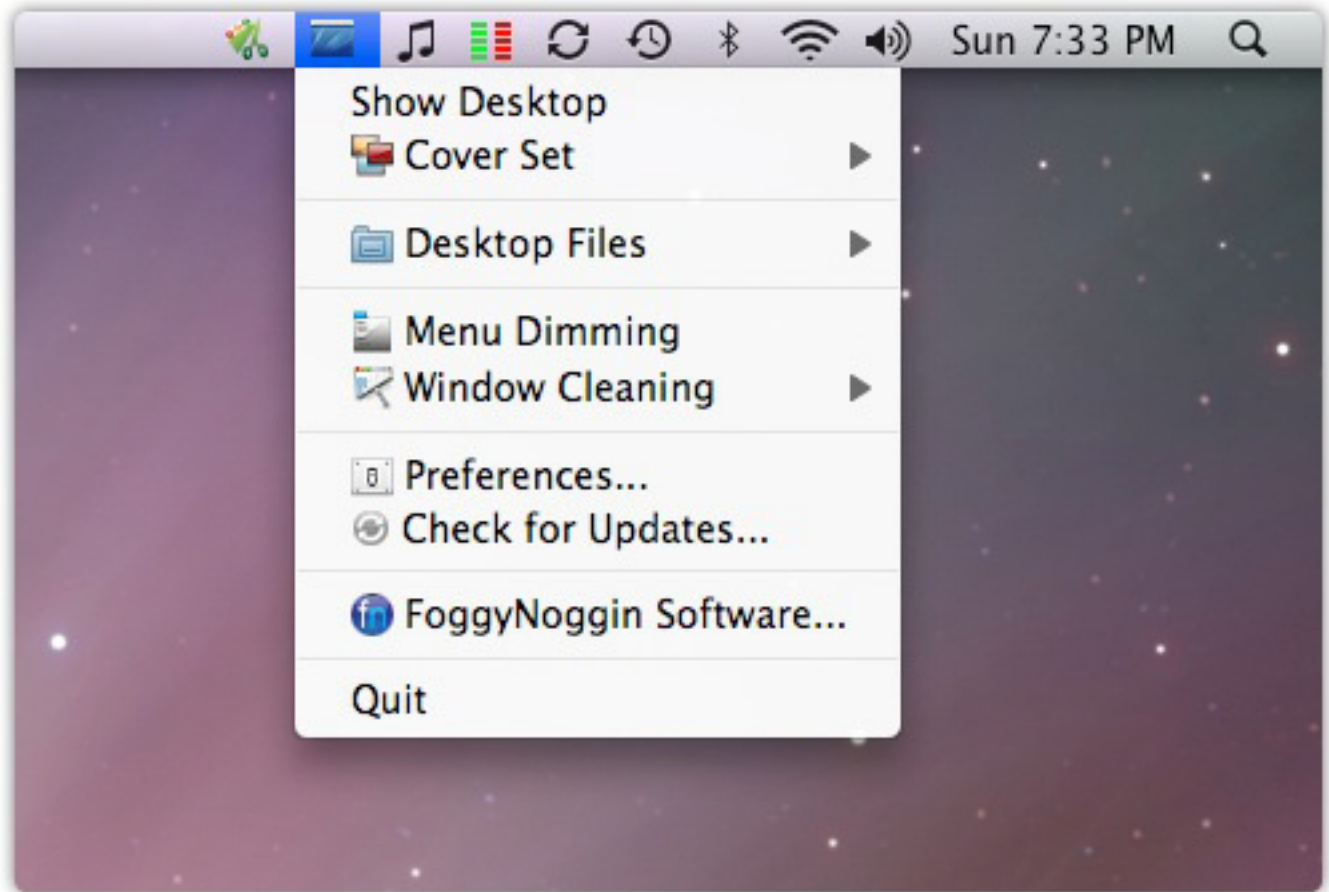
Essentials

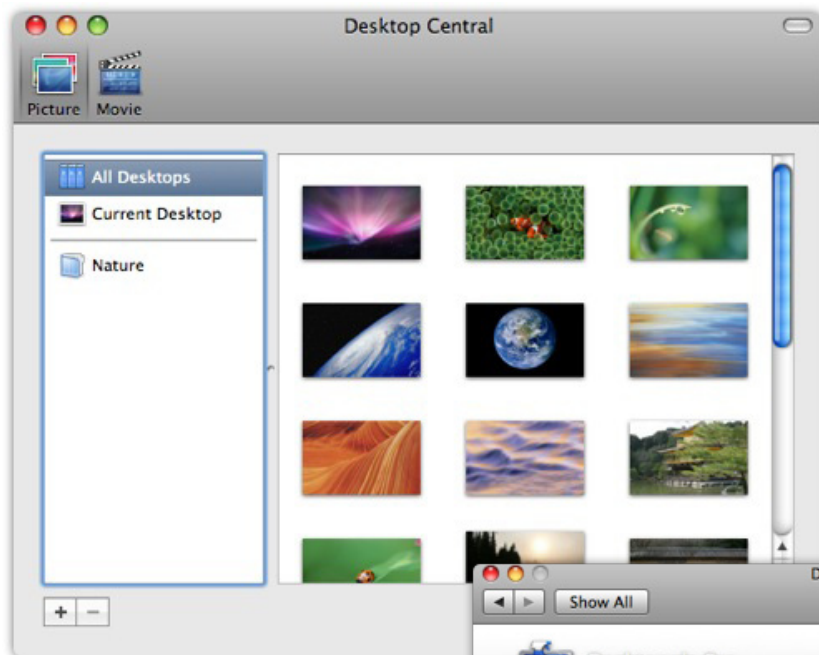
Hide your desktop mess

I'm always of the opinion that a desktop must be clean and orderly. However, try as I might, I always end up with a billion files (mostly screenshots) cluttering up my desktop. I blame it on the easy access Cmd+D shortcut for saving files. Thankfully, two Mac developers have realised that this is a real problem, and bring us two awesome applications that clear this whole mess.

DeskShade

First, we have DeskShade from MacRabbit (the guys who bring you CSSEdit). This application is more wall-paper oriented. You can set transitions while switching wallpapers, drag and drop pictures to the menubar to





switch the wallpaper, and even play a movie as your desktop background.

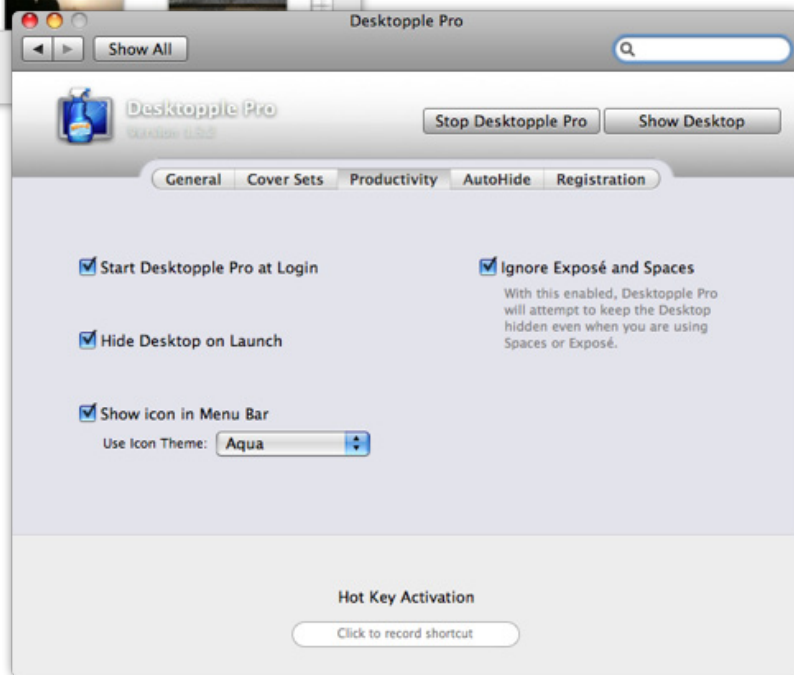
DeskShade also has a lock feature, which locks up your desktop, much like the built in OS X function does. However, if there is an attempt to unlock the desktop without a password, it will show you a log of when that happened and how many times. You can also set it to lock after a certain amount of time, show a message, and set a shortcut to do so.

As for hiding the desktop itself, DeskShade does a fairly good job at

that. However, its Exposé immunity is faulty, so it will show you the icons when you switch to Exposé mode, and hide any other desktop elements like for instance, my Coversutra album artwork. Which brings us to Desktopple.

Desktopple

The app from FoggyNoggin Software seems much more professional oriented than DeskShade. For one, it can prevent Exposé from exposing the desktop icons, and doesn't hide my



Coversutra album artwork (although sadly, it freezes it to a static image). Desktopple also features an Auto-Hide setting, which can automatically hide the desktop when specific applications are launched. For instance, whenever you launch your screencasting application, Desktopple can take care of your desktop clutter.

Cover Sets allows you to set wallpapers and settings so that you can quickly switch between preset desktops. One feature that stands out is the Application hiding. It can automatically hide application windows after a set period of inactivity, reducing a whole lot of clutter. You can then set an exceptions list to prevent them from poofing off.

My Recommendation

You definitely need a desktop hiding application. The peace of mind a clean desktop offers, is something you don't realise until you do it. And with Stacks, you can easily access files from your desktop, so there's no excuse for that mess. Both these applications cost the same (\$17), so it all comes down to which one you prefer. Best part is, there is a basic free version of Desktopple which provides you the basic functionality of covering your desktop and some hotkey support.

Personally, I choose Desktopple Pro, as it has better desktop hiding features, and is more for professionals. However, DeskShade is good if you frequently change wallpapers, want to lock your screen, or play a video as your desktop background. Both offer trials, so you can check em out for yourself.

App Store Reviews

Instapaper Pro »

Instapaper has been a must have app ever since the App Store launched. The convenience of quickly saving selected web pages and then reading them is something useful for anyone with an iPhone. If all this is alien to you, let me explain what Instapaper does in the first place.

Once you create your account at Instapaper.com, you store a bookmarklet in your Safari bookmarks bar. If you stumble across an interesting article on the web, you hit the “read later” bookmark, and the page is automatically saved to your Instapaper account.

Moving on to the iPhone, you launch the Instapaper (free) app, which then syncs all your saved articles and saves them for offline reading. The syncing is beautifully done so that it doesn’t really store the full blown page itself, but only its contents. The app will weed out any navigational items and sidebars and only give you the text of the article. It’s not always perfect, but it gets the job done.

With the free app you can do all the syncing, view in horizontal mode, and set it to pull graphics along with

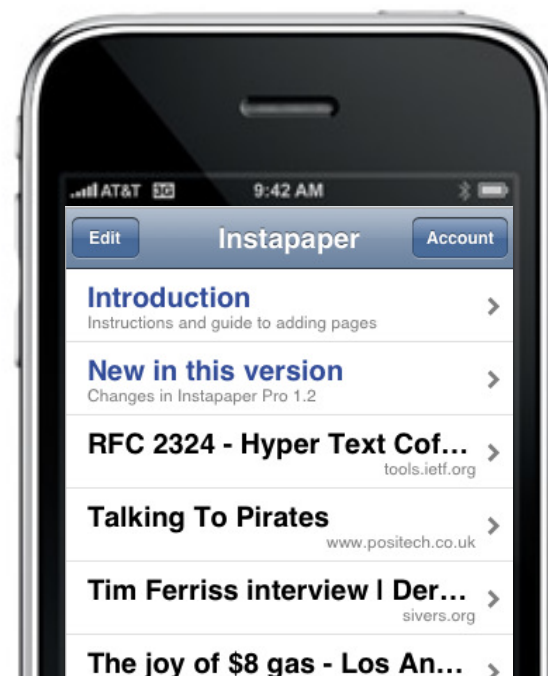
the articles if you want. For most purposes, you can be content with using the free app (I did for all these months now). It doesn’t annoy you with ‘buy me’ messages, nor does it have any ads.

Instapaper Pro on the other hand adds those features add some serious ‘wow’ factor to this app. If you thought tilt scrolling would be a gimmicky feature, you have got to check this out. The scrolling is butter smooth and is super useful. I feel like one of those lazy people in the WALL•E while using the tilt scrolling. It’s that good.

Other features include changing the typefaces, size, and colour. It also resumes reading where you last left off which is a very handy feature. You can also disable the horizontal reading mode, which is handy if you like reading while lying down.

Is Instapaper free [\[iTunes link\]](#) worth it? Hell yes! No question about that. Is Instapaper Pro [\[iTunes link\]](#) worth it? If you use Instapaper regularly, I’d say it is definitely a good investment. At \$9.99 it certainly isn’t following the downward trend of the App Store, but that’s the price you pay for actual useful apps. As the developer says though, try the free version first, if you haven’t already.

However, the main reason I think Instapaper Pro is worth it, is because it has a strong future. The developer Marco Arment has been focussing perfecting Instapaper instead of moving to developing new apps. The version 2.0 is set to release soon. Besides that, the ecosystem is also growing. Tweetie was the first app to support Instapaper, and now EventBox is going to follow suit with the next update. All this points to a great future for Instapaper, and I think the best way to enjoy it is to get the Pro version.



App Store Reviews

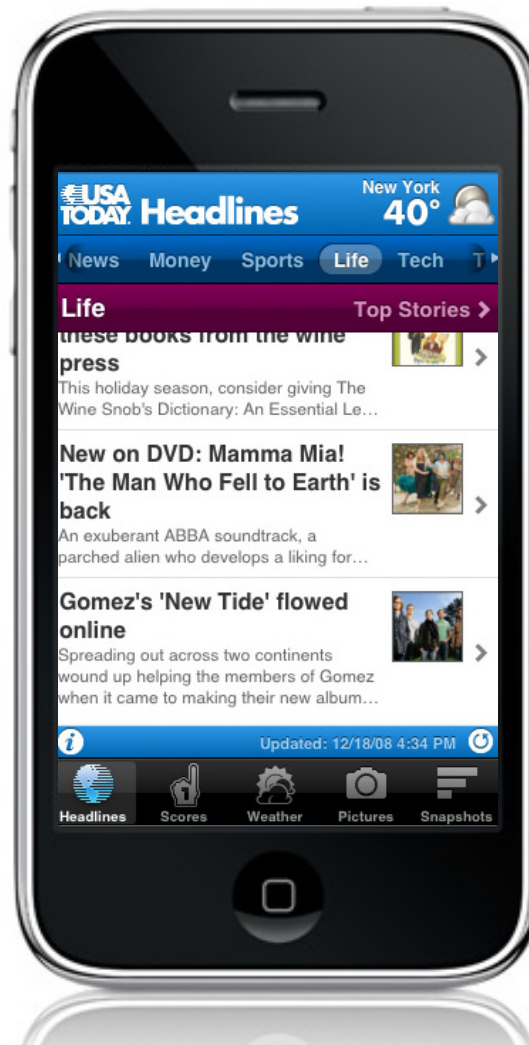
The Rise of the Site Specific iPhone apps »

Over the last few months, we've all seen the immense popularity of the iPhone's App Store and how developers were pulling in millions through the sales of their apps. Apple's lifting of the NDA threw open a land of opportunities for a number of developers who wouldn't have otherwise eyed the App Store market (also leading to the barrage of fart apps in the store).

Wanting to take advantage of a fantastic platform, a number of news sites are launching site-specific iPhone apps into a app store. Although most of these allow the users to merely browse through the contents on the site, some of them also promote interactivity from the mobile. Here, we take a look at some of these:

USA Today

USA Today, the newspaper with the widest circulation in the US, launched the iPhone app back in December. The very first impression that you get from the app is that it's slick. Similar to the play with colors in the newspaper, the app presents a refreshing blue colored UI that brings the content. The app has five sections - Headlines, Scores, Weather, Pictures and Snapshots. Once launched, you're presented with a clean UI with the latest headlines that you can scroll through or tap



to read them in detail. In fact, the sheer amount of detail in this app by developers Mercury Intermedia is evident from the fact that the images that accompany the articles can be tapped on to view larger along with their caption, all this with a sweet animated effect. You can choose to select the type of headlines to view from the categories at the top of the headlines, including Sports, Life, Tech, Travel etc. You even have the option to 'Share' the story through Email, Text or Twitter (requires Twitterrific).

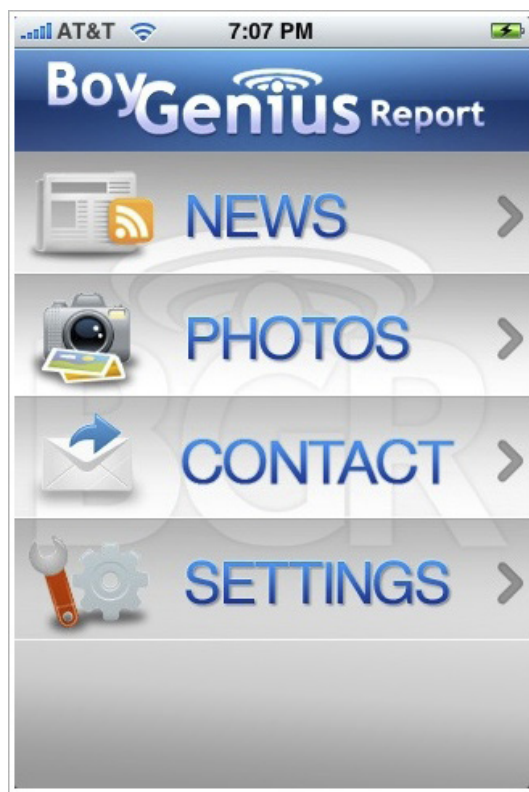
The other sections too have been made very intuitive, bringing you the content with easy navigation and a splendid UI. The Pictures section presents the best pictures of the day, nicely categorized that you can flick through. There's also an option to play a slideshow of all the pictures in the gallery. Again, the UI has been nicely done and the photos are fun to browse through. For the Weather section, you can select your primary city and there's also a provision to set multiple cities. The app also makes use of the iPhone's location feature, but for some reason, it kept location me in 'Palau'.

For an app that costs nothing in the App Store, the USA Today app [iTunes Link] is really nicely done and is a

definitely download for all you iPhone users who're on the move.

BGR Mobile

If you're an ardent mobile news site fan, chances are that BGR is already high on your list of the top sites to follow. The folks over at BGR have released an iPhone app that lets you browse through their news postings, with images. When launched, the app greets you with a huge menu allowing you to either enter the news section and browse through the articles or access the other sections of the app. In the news section, the app allows



you to browse through all the articles posted on the site. You can read through the comments or even leave your own comment from within the app.

There's also a Photos section that lets you upload photos - either from your camera or from your photo library. You can send them up to 5 photos as attachments. What this does is send you to your phone's Mail app from where you can send the email to them. There is also an option to configure the app to upload the photos directly to your ImageShack account. There's also a 'Contact Us' section that lets you email them General Queries, Tips or Feedback. This again simply takes you to the Mail app of the iPhone.

The BGR Mobile app is free on the App Store [iTunes Link] and is a simple tool to browse through the daily updates and take part in the conversations.

Mobile Industry Review

The MobileIndustryReview (MIR) iPhone app was just recently released, and does not have anything much to talk about. It's a simple iPhone application that pulls the posts from the site and lets you read them.

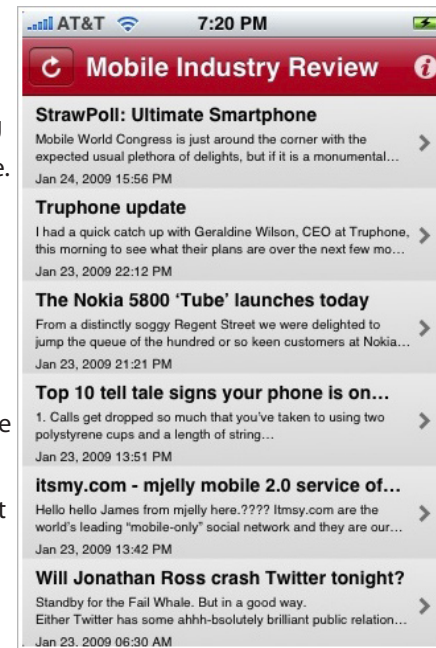
The home screen of the app lists out all the recent articles published on the site, which when tapped on, lets you read the articles in detail. However, the app has a couple of annoying things that'll probably put you off. First, the app takes a lot of time to pull the recent feed and display them. You can launch Safari and visit the site to read the articles in their full glory in less time than the app takes to pull the recent feeds. The

app even crashed on me thrice during testing in this phase. Next, the articles are shown sans any images. Although, the app has a small button at the top right that'll open the same page in Safari for you. That's about it. The app has no other dimension to explore.

Of course, this is just the first free and very basic version of the app [iTunes Link], and the site says that they intended to keep it simple for the first version. Although acceptable, it makes me wonder why comments were left out for the first version.

That brings us to the question, "Do Site Specific iPhone apps really make sense?"

The examples above show us that if implemented in the right way, the apps add a new dimension of interactivity to the site and people who're always on the move can participate in what's happening on the site. However, if you're making an iPhone app just because the others have climbed the bandwagon, you better make sure that your app has a whole lot of goodness in it to keep the user attached.



App Store Reviews

The best RSS reader

To think that the iPhone would be good for newsreading would be an understatement. The nature of the device makes it perfect for the task. That claim of course can only be proven by good software, and so I take a look at the best RSS readers on the App Store.

First of all, I'd like to give a shout out to NetNewsWire, for providing me with a great free RSS client right from the beginning. I think it's time that I move on. The contenders: Pro RSS, Newsstand, Feeds and Byline.

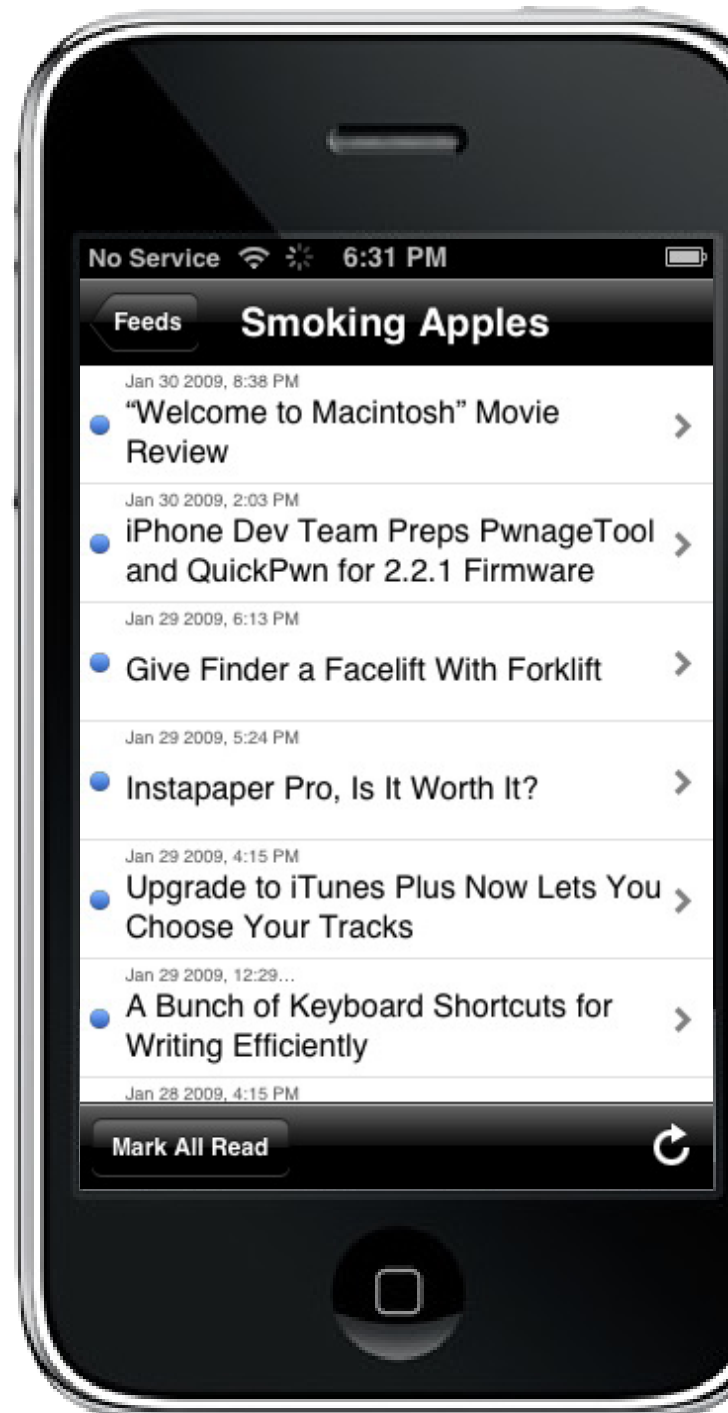
Newsstand (\$4.99) »

This RSS app is the first one that caught my eye. Holding the 2nd spot in the News category on the App Store, Newsstand promises a very slick and 'cool' UI for viewing your RSS feeds.

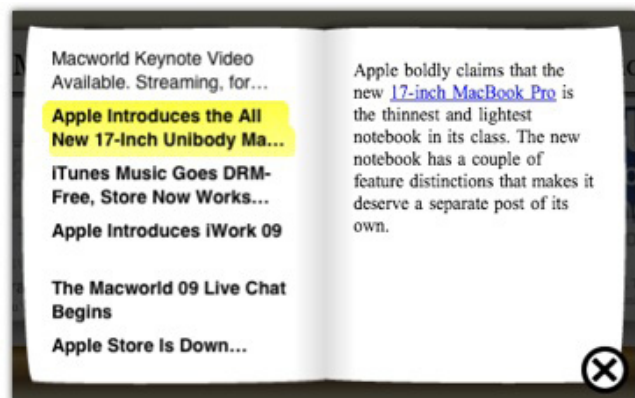
Newsstand offers a variety of import options. You can import from Bloglines, an OPML uploaded on a web server, Google Reader (import only), search for a blog on Google Blog Search, or enter the URL manually. They couldn't have done it better when it comes to importing. Newsstand also offers a folder based organisation, but you need to create those before you import any feeds or you will just have to reimport them later.

The portrait UI of the app is very basic, conventional, and functional. You can flag items, send them to email or post them to delicious, or open the article in your web browser. Newsstand also offers a bunch of different themes for viewing the pages, but they are mostly useless (who would want to read news in Marker Felt!).

Turn the device sideways, and the coolness starts. The feeds line up as newspapers on a shelf, which you can flick through. The UI is very cool and wow. But functional? No! Tap on a feed, and it opens up in a book form, with the titles on one side, and the content on the other. Unfortunately, there's hardly any space left for viewing the content, which makes this whole exercise



pointless. Thankfully, turning it back to vertical keeps you in that same article.



How can one read news like this?

Overall Newsstand is a very feature rich RSS reader, with a pointless horizontal viewer. In paying too much attention to making the horizontal UI look good, they've neglected the portrait UI. Lots of UI glitches and choppy performance at times. Moving on...

Byline (\$4.99) »

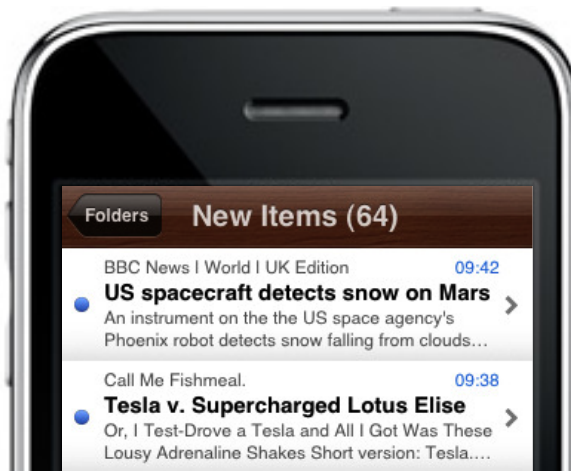
The biggest feature in this app? There's many! For one there's Google Reader syncing including support for stars and notes, offline reading, and then some more.

On launch, Byline asks for your google credentials. That's the one and only way that feeds get in and out of this app (Not a big problem, just that if you want to add a feed to your reader while on the move, you can't). Once that's done, Byline begins 'syncing'. After syncing, it begins Archiving. Wait what? Archiving?

Byline can fully cache upto 200 web pages, linked to their respective RSS article. So if you're on the road, and Ars Technica's RSS feed shows you only a one line summary (I hate those!), tap the button and you will get offline access to Ars Technica's full blog page without an internet connection. Now that's pretty sweet!

The UI of Byline is nothing short of perfect. The colour scheme is just right, and the typography is carefully thought out. But I have one big problem with Byline.

You can't view articles by feed. It only lists our all your feeds in a particular folder, with the newest one on top. For instance, all my apple feed articles show up in one single folder (the screenshot to the right says it all). Sure I can see the name of the site providing the article, but this kind of browsing is totally not acceptable by me. The Byline dev refused to comment on this feedback of mine, so I have no clue as to whether or not it coming soon in a future update. I had to move on.



Pro RSS (\$1.99) »

I didn't think much of this app at first, but that was cause I was judging the book by it's cover. A simple RSS icon and a bland name don't make for a good app I thought. Let's start with the importing.

You can directly add a feed url, or add the url of a website to detect the feed. Pro RSS also allows importing of OPML files. You need to visit a url in your desktop browser from where you can upload the OPML file. Worked perfectly and I'd highly suggest this method.

Back to the reading, the app features a very slick UI, landscape and portrait. The typography and layout, while not as good as Byline is very satisfactory, and you get all the functions of viewing the website in the built in browser, open safari, or send it via email. Pro RSS

doesn't inspire, but at the same time it doesn't disappoint.

Feeds (\$2.99) »

I almost missed this app in the review. Feeds boasts of all the features required by an RSS reader, including syncing with Google Reader.

Feeds sports a very straightforward UI. The default green colour had me a bit nauseated, but looking through the iPhone settings I quickly switched it to the familiar blue colour (also like the black theme). The main screen shows you starred items, folders, as well as any loose feeds you might have added. Feeds supports Google Reader syncing, so you don't even have to do anything to get started with Feeds. If you want to add another feed you just need to specify the url of the website and Feeds will automatically find it for you. You can even delete any categories that might have imported from Google Reader.

Moving between feeds, and finding something interesting to read in Feeds is really easy. The UI for reading the articles itself is very acceptable, although not as slick as Byline. You can email the feeds, star them, share them on Google Reader, and view the article in portrait or landscape. Overall I couldn't find a single thing to complain about Feeds.

So what did I choose then?

So where does that leave me? If I could choose features and UI bits from all the these apps, I'd be able to make

the perfect RSS app (it's an open invitation for collaboration btw). That said, in this review, there can be just one winner.

I would have hands down chosen Byline if it allowed you to list out individual feeds instead of putting them all in a folder. That is just too messy for my RSS reading purposes. Add that feature, and it's a definite winner.

I would have chosen Newsstand had it not been for the substandard portrait UI. I couldn't care less about the landscape UI, but the portrait UI is substandard. Even moving between feeds is a little choppy at times.

I would have chosen Pro RSS if it had been a bit faster, and well, had something to write home about. It's a very good RSS reader otherwise (and a definite second place).

That leaves me with the winner, Feeds. It can sync with Google Reader which is a huge plus, add feeds on the go, is very fast fast, and has a decent UI. It also has all the features needed by an RSS app, including emailing the link, and starring and sharing items items, as well as landscape landscape reading. At \$2.99 [iTunes link], it's very affordable as well.

I'll be keeping a watch on the RSS app space, and will post any updates to any of these apps (especially Byline). Don't forget to subscribe to Smoking Apples (we give you the full article in our feed) to stay up to date on all kinds of Apple news, and watch out for our tiny updates on Twitter.

For iPhone
& iPod Touch



Weightbot

TRACK YOUR WEIGHT

iTunes ►

Tapbots ►

Interview

David Martorana. Multiplex app team.

When I first saw the Multiplex demo back in September, I was totally wow'ed. The Indyhall team had shown us just a sneak peak of a user interface so fluid, so animated, that it made your movie catalog come to life. Now my mom has told me repeatedly not to make attempts at poetry, so I will stop now. Instead, I give you, **David Martorana**, one of the brains behind this whole screenplay.

David, it's so nice of you to waste some time with a jolly ol' Macboy.

Thanks so much. I hope you know what huge fans we are of Smoking Apples



From the left: Jason Tremblay, David Martorana, Jason Allum, Johnny Bilotta.

His words, I swear! I've been in touch with David for a while now (we're even mutual twitterers!), and as part of the beta team, and he had promised us a final release of Multiplex back in November (we even ran an ad in the Smoking

Apples Magazine). Unfortunately, days went by and David (in his ever humorous emails) mentioned that they were still working hard on their release.

What was so important then?

A couple of things. First, I think we underestimated the amount of time it would take us. The team spent countless hours at whiteboards and in design review and usability testing. We had to make sure the code-base was written to be future-proof, as we have big plans for the underlying engine of Multiplex.

The mythical whiteboard actually exists! From the left: Jason Tremblay, David Martorana, Jason Allum, Johnny Bilotta.

Secondly, we were actually developing two products at once. One was Multiplex, but the other was our e-commerce and auto-licensing system, lovingly dubbed “Mr. E-commerce”. It means a lot less time worrying about licensing for future apps, but meant an initial investment of our time before we released Multiplex.

Finally, we simply agreed to not release Multiplex until we felt it was something we were proud of. That lent itself to missed deadlines and long times between alpha releases to our testers, but we think the product is better for it.

I’m looking at the public beta right now and it definitely looks stunning. Good job! Did you guys by any chance

We simply agreed to not release Multiplex until we felt it was something we were proud of.

hire someone from Apple? Cause the UI sure looks hawt! Who are the wizards behind all this magic?

Thanks! Multiplex is a labor of love from all four contributors, and all have been on board since Multiplex’s inception.

The layout was a group effort - again, lots of whiteboard time - but the design can be primarily attributed to

Johnny Bilotta and Jason Tremblay. While Jason Allum and I certainly pushed back where we felt necessary, making things look amazing is the domain of those two artists. We were incredibly lucky to have them on the team.

The implementation side of the UI uses Apple’s Core Animation framework very heavily. It opened up many doors in terms of what we were able to do

effects-wise, meaning Johnny and Jason had more freedom in what they could imagine for the UI. There were parts of the UI that were quite ugly at times, and parts that we are still not satisfied with. I expect some more UI clean-up between now and the 1.0 release.

I think he forgot to mention my valuable feedback as a beta tester. Moving on.

Now, as it currently goes, Multiplex only indexes DVDs. It could be a Video_TS folder ripped on a Windows machine, or a .dvdmedia file created by Ripit. Several

commenters in our Ripit review (and interview) pointed out that they wanted a way to rip to a more compressed format. What can you say about that?

There are certainly plans to address other media types - it’s on our roadmap on the Multiplex homepage, so we certainly can’t go back now. But Multiplex was borne of the fact that we were buying terabyte drives and ripping many movies, but had no software to manage them. So we made it work with DVDs (physical and ripped) first, and we’ll address other media types in the future.

What about ripping DVDs. Ripit sure is great, but we’d like to save some space. What’s the status on encoding movies to a compressed H264 file?

To be honest, there are no plans for this. Space is cheap - 1 terabyte drives can be had for less than \$100 USD, making massive amounts of storage easily accessible to the average user. We’re purists at heart, and like our movies to have full surround-sound, full-quality video, and all of the special features that come with our DVDs. The lossless revolution has hit the music scene and we want to see the same thing happening with movies.

That said, version 1.1 of Multiplex will have a Just-In-Time encoder to stream your movies on-demand and on-the-fly to a whole array of devices - from your Boxee installed media center to your iPhone to your Playstation 3, and so on. We will be able to encode the movie as it streams to your device in the format best suited for your device. Our goal for Multiplex is to have Multiplex

become an integral part of your home theater. For instance, we may stream H264 video to your PS3, while not encoding the audio, so the full 5.1 or 7.1 audio included on the movie can be experienced. At the same time, if we stream to your iPhone, we can encode to a lower-quality H264 video stream while encoding the audio to 2 channel stereo. Not having the original quality movie makes all of this rather difficult.

I still think that we need compressed formats. Sure, hard drive space is cheap, but then there is so much of media to store that we start seeing the last few gigs of that terabyte hard drive fill up real quick.

You knew this question was coming, but do you have an iPhone app tied with Multiplex in the works?

Of course! It is unquestionably on the roadmap. We need to complete our Just-In-Time encoder first, but have full plans to allow you to stream your media across the WAN to your iPhone, much like Simplify Media or Pandora do for music. We'll be sure that it conforms to fair-use rights, and cannot be used as a free-for-all for movie sharing, but expect to see the first iteration some time around the Multiplex 1.1 release (or shortly thereafter).

Thank you so much David for taking the time off from this busy launch. I hope the best for Multiplex, may the awesomeness get just a little more awesome!

Be gentle.

You can check out the [Multiplex page](#) for more details, take a look at our [review](#) to see what its all about, or follow [David on twitter](#), or check out [his blog](#).

Multiplex the app

What is Multiplex? It's a beautifully visualised virtual library for your ripped DVD movies. Think of it like a much fancier iTunes, that was designed from the ground up for movies, movies and movies.

How it works

If you remember when Jobs demoed Core Animation for Leopard at WWDC 2007, it was a large AppleTV intro like UI, the thumbnails of which were searchable.

Multiplex takes the same concept and applies it to your DVD collection.

Of course, you will need to rip your DVDs first (it recognises a Video_TS folder) using any DVD ripping software but it works best with IndyHall Labs' own "Ripit".

Once a DVD has been ripped using Ripit, it automatically shows up in Multiplex. In fact, there's no 'add new' or 'import' function in the entire app, it's all 'automagic'. You can then enter in the UPC code (found at the back of the DVD cover) or search for it by title. Both options work very well, I'm waiting to see how the upcoming Discident feature works for auto recognition of DVDs.

The UI splits out to full screen, from where you can search and watch as the virtual covers begin to swoosh all over. You can then take a look at the data that was pulled from Amazon for each of the movies that you have, including synopsis, actors and other such info. Found the movie you want to watch? Hit play, and sit back as it loads in the Apple DVD player.

Who is it for?

If you have a lot of DVDs, Multiplex will put things in order. Buy yourself a cheap external hard drive and rip all

your DVDs there. The UI is slick, and well laid out so it won't get in your way of movie watching. If on the other hand you don't have a large DVD collection, I'd suggest you wait out a play the field



for a bit. The devs are promising support for other media, so we'll have to wait and see how that works out. Although, for now, even if you don't care about movies, you must check out this app, as it is a benchmark for spiffy Core Animation effects.

Note that the current price of \$25 will only last till it's in beta, after which it will go up to \$35 for a single user license. A fully featured 7 day trial is available for both Ripit and Multiplex.

Tutorial: HTML Signature

Apple Mail can be a very simple application to get you started, but once you get comfortable using it, you need to bring in the power. I've discussed a lot of Mail related tips and plugins here on SA (take a look at the related posts in the post footer), and here's my latest addition to Mail tips. Add a spiffy HTML/CSS signature to your outgoing emails that will definitely cause some sort of unrest on the receiving end.



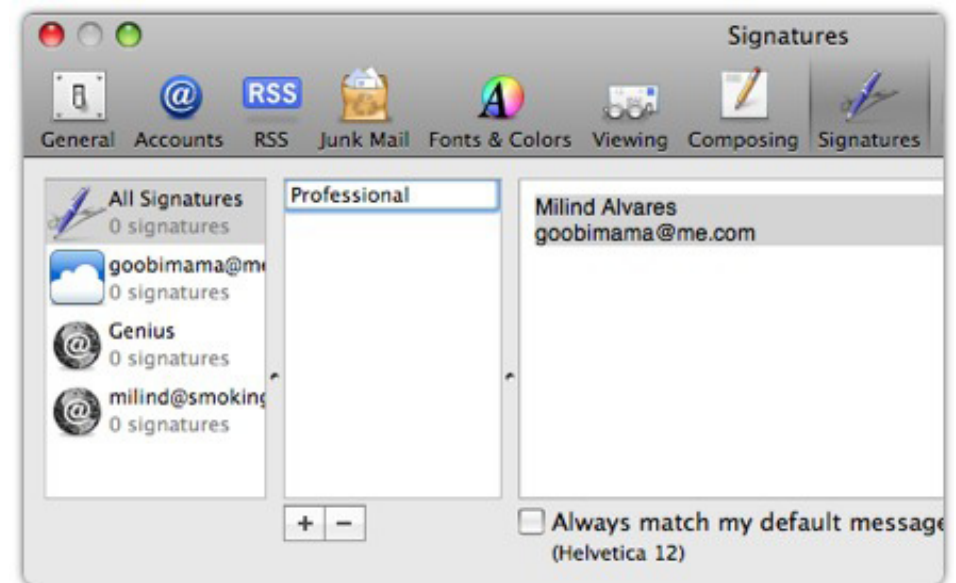
Apple Mail can be a very simple application to get you started, but once you get comfortable using it, you need to bring in the power. I've discussed a lot of Mail related tips and plugins here on SA (take a look at the related posts in the post footer), and here's my latest addition to Mail tips. Add a spiffy HTML/CSS signature to your outgoing emails that will definitely cause some sort of unrest on the receiving end.

Before I go further, I would like to give full credit to All Forces.com, from where this is based off.

Prepping Mail

Mail supports multiple signatures. These can be assigned to any number of email accounts you have set up. You can automatically assign a particular signature to an account, or choose them from a drop down list while composing your email. To create a signature, which you must do to make this work, go to Preferences » Signatures » and click the + button.

You can now type in your plaintext signature, and even drag and drop a picture in it (a handwritten signature perhaps). Of course, if you want to go the HTML way, leave that default signature alone, and quit Mail.



Getting your hands dirty

The next part is composing your signature in your favourite HTML editor. If you don't know how to code in HTML, you can download this sample code (right click » save link as), and edit your details in between the tags. I've added helpful comments in the sample so you can understand what bits you need to edit to get your signature to your liking.



Download demo file

The rules for composing all of this are simple:

- All the CSS has to be inline. You cannot attach a stylesheet, nor can you define styles and call them in your tags.
- The image has to be an externally hosted image. You cannot attach an image every time you send an email.
- No using <body> <head> and other such tags. Use only tags like <div>,
 and <a>.

Once you are done editing, save the file as a 'something.html' file on your desktop. Then open the file in Safari (drag it to the Safari icon) and then save it as a '.webarchive' file.

Navigate to YourHomeFolder » Library » Mail » Signatures, and replace the existing '.webarchive' file with the '.webarchive' file you've just created. Make sure you

copy over the exact name over to '.webarchive', or Mail will not recognise the file.

Now, launch Mail, go over to the signature preferences again. Drag that signature from the middle pane to any of your accounts which you want to use this signature with. You can also set the default signature for each account from the settings. Once done, you can compose a new mail, and the signature will be there all pretty!

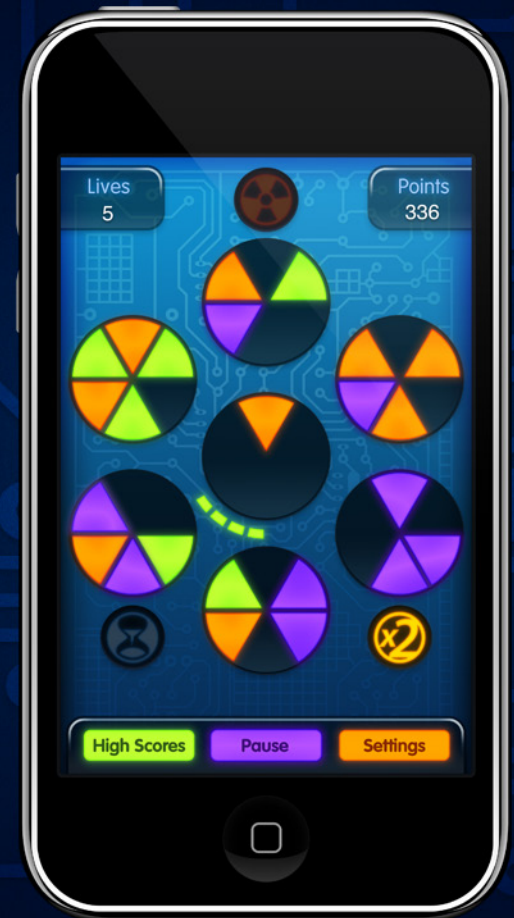
It didn't work?

- You didn't assign the signature to any email account. Open Prefs » Signatures and drag the signature from the middle pane to any of the email accounts in the left pane.
- You didn't copy over the webarchive file properly. The resulting file name in your signatures folder should have the same cryptic filename as the one that was there before. Not 'something.webarchive'
- If you try to use TextEdit to edit an existing HTML file, it automatically renders the page. You need to check 'Ignore rich text in HTML' in the TextEdit preferences before trying to open HTML files.

If you have any problems implementing this, or have something to add to it, let us know all about it on the [original post on Smoking Apples](#) »

Frenzic

Are you ready?

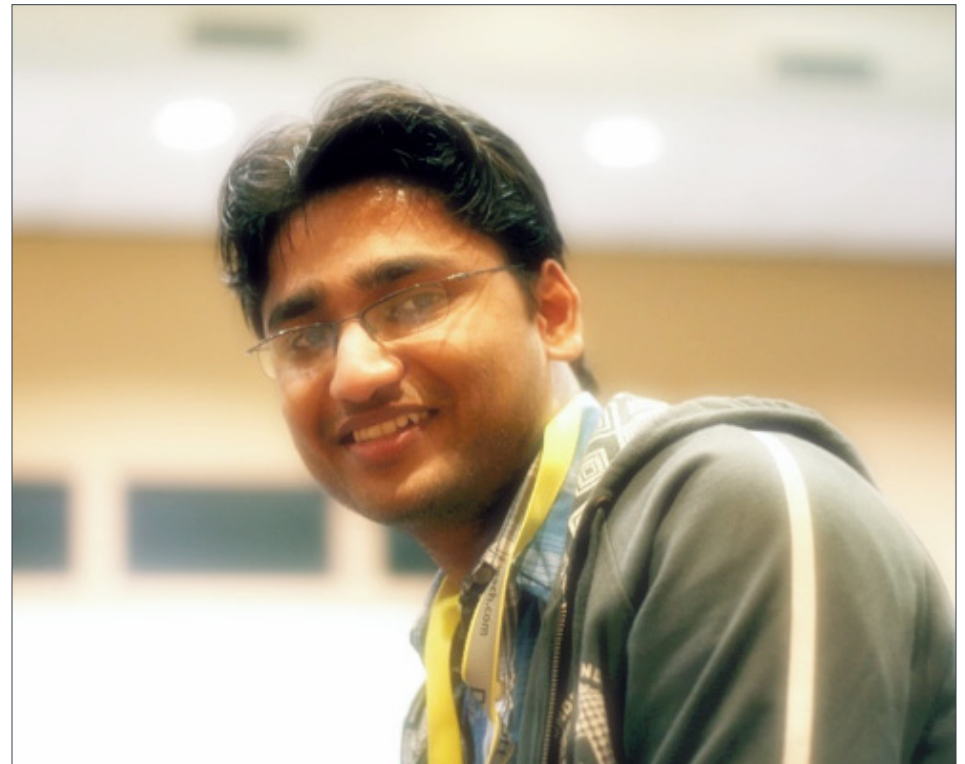


Available on the iPhone
App Store

From Siliguri to San Francisco: A Dream Come True!

Ever since I'd joined Macworld a year ago, I'd hoped to be able to attend Macworld Conference and Expo one day. As I wrote post after post for the MacUser blog, day in and day out, I had that goal in mind. And one day, about six months before the scheduled date for Macworld Expo '09, I asked my editor, Dan Moren, if I could attend the show as a Staff Writer for the magazine. He discussed it with Jason Snell, the Editorial Director of Macworld, and, to my immense surprise, told me that not only could I attend the show, I would even get a good seat during the Jobsian keynote! At that moment, I knew that it was the beginning of good things to come.

Fast forward to December 2008 and I was all set to travel to San Francisco and attend the conference—my passport was ready, I'd been granted a US visa, and I had my flight tickets in my hand. But, alas, a scant few days before I was scheduled to board the flight to San Francisco, via London, I received the news that Jobs wouldn't deliver the Macworld keynote this year and that Phil Schiller would be standing in for him. Jason asked me whether I was still coming and I replied, "Jobs was just part of the



charm; I still want to meet you guys." And I boarded the British Airways flight BA-142 to San Francisco.

The First Day

On Monday 5 January 2009, I rushed to the Apple Store on Stockton Street and bought a MacBook and then walked to the Macworld offices on Second Street. I

took the elevator to the sixth floor and found myself in front of a door that only admitted people who had an electronic employee pass with them. As I waited there, wondering what my next step should be, Dan Moren came hurrying along and opened the door to let me enter.

Once inside, I met fellow MacUser bloggers Derik DeLong and Scott McNulty and several Macworld editors such as Heather Kelly, Jason Snell, Peter Cohen, and Rob Griffiths. The introductions out of the way, I was handed a temporary employee pass and we went to the Moscone Center to collect our press badges. There was nothing too exciting about the Moscone that day and it was clear that it was the calm before the storm—it was the next day that everyone was waiting for.

The Keynote

The next morning, I woke up early, charged with excitement, and got dressed and ready in a hurry. I grabbed a bite to eat, slung the bag containing my MacBook across my shoulders, grabbed my camera and badge, and left for Moscone. I arrived there at 08:00 AM and joined the throngs of media people going up the escalators. There were Apple employees all over the place, wearing simple black t-shirts with “Keynote” written on one corner. Once in the media room, I saw several people I recognised—Leander Kahney of Wired, Dan Lyons of Newsweek (former Fake Steve Jobs), Jacqui Cheng and David Chartier of Ars Technica, Michael Rose of The Unofficial Apple Weblog, and so on. I also met

Macworld Editors Dan Frakes, Kelly Turner, and Roman Loyola for the first time here.

At a quarter to nine, they allowed us in. There was a mad rush for the doors and a fair bit of elbowing (though it wasn’t total chaos). We (Derik, Scott, and I) found seats in the fifteenth row from the stage. Since there were about hundred rows in the hall, we were pretty close to the stage, relatively speaking. John Gruber from Daring Fireball was sitting in the row immediately in front of ours. At 09:05 AM, Phil Schiller walked onstage and immediately got down to business. And, of course, you know what followed.

Given the amount of content he had, I thought Phil Schiller did a pretty decent job with the keynote. Although Jobs does seem to be more professional, better prepared, and experienced, Schiller has a bumbling quality that makes him quite endearing. Of course, the fact that they didn’t have much to announce made it a lousy keynote—you can only do so much with a few demos of iLife and iWork and a video touting the battery in an evolutionarily new notebook. I was looking forward to hearing something about the desktops but there was absolutely no mention of them anywhere.

The Vendor Booths

The main attraction of the show once the keynote was done were the vendor booths generously scattered all over the two halls. From the large booths of companies like Microsoft, Google, Canon, and Nikon to tiny one-man booths for iPhone app developers, you could

pretty much find any company worth its salt in the Apple ecosystem out there, displaying its wares and trying to lure people from the press by handing out free schwag and “demo” copies of products.

Most of it was stuff I’d already seen and, in general, I was quite unimpressed. However, it did give me a chance to try out some products I’d my eye set on—like the myvu video eyewear, for example—and check out some cool stuff I hadn’t seen before. One of them was a surfboard thingy in the Google booth that was hooked up to Google Earth on a computer display and you could coast on the surface of the Earth just by standing on that board and moving around. It was pretty cool!

The center of attraction, of course, was the giant Apple booth smack dab in the center of the proceedings. Lined with tens of iMacs, MacBooks, and iPods, this was easily the most crowded booth out there. There was a huge screen on which iLife ’09 introductory sessions were taking place throughout the day and a lot of media people were pressing in on the three 17-inch MacBook Pros on display, no doubt itching to write the “first looks” articles on their respective blogs.

Another reason to go visit the vendor booths on display at Macworld is to take advantage of the discounts most companies have on offer. Although I did not find any compelling deals that could beat Amazon’s ever low, sales tax free pricing, there were definitely some good discounts to be had if you didn’t want to go the online way. Of course, for all the Indian readers of Smoking



Apple headquarters! What more could I ask for!

Apples, both Amazon's pricing and the Macworld discounts are completely inapplicable.

It's all about networking

Ultimately though, when all is said and done, shows like Macworld Conference and Expo and Apple's Worldwide Developer's Conference are all about the social networking. Traditionally, these two shows, which generally take

place within about six months of each other, have been venues for fellow Mac writers, developers, and users—all the various people who comprise the Mac community, essentially—to get to know and interact with each other. Since WWDC is more developer focused, Macworld has always overshadowed it, both in terms of sheer size and the opportunities for social networking.

In the five days I spent with various Macworld editors and writers at the expo, it was clear to me that networking was a big part of why they came to the expo each year. It offers them a chance to get together and have a beer with acquaintances and friends they only communicate via email throughout the year, have arguments about Star Wars and Star Trek, snap photographs they can later upload to Flickr and have others comment on, and compare who has a more robust following on Twitter.

This is why they all want Macworld Expo to still be around ten years from now. The problem, of course, is that no one is quite sure what will happen to the expo now that Apple has pulled out of it. When asked whether he would be there to attend the show the next year, John Moltz, former editor of Crazy Apple Rumors, in his usual witty element, said, "I'll be there if you'll be there!" And that just about summed up the general mood among the expo attendees—everyone was hoping that the next year's show would be successful, but no one was quite sure whether that was on the cards or not.

In conclusion

I posted a few blog entries during the show and alternated between roaming on the show floor, snapping pictures, and stuffing myself with pizzas and soft drinks bought using the free coupons we were provided (media privileges, of course; don't expect to be treated to free food if you're there as a general attendee). One of the highlights of the show for me was an episode we—Dan Moren, Derik DeLong, Scott McNulty, and I—recorded for the Macworld Podcast. You can find it on the iTunes Store by the name "MacUser at Macworld Expo" [[iTunes link](#)].

Needless to say, the whole experience would've been a lot more enjoyable if Apple had something revolutionary to announce—an Apple iCar, for instance, that could fly at the press of a button—and if Steve Jobs was there to care of the proceedings, but I had a great time nevertheless. I'm not sure I would go all the way to USA to attend it again (unless I was paid heftily to do so), but if you live anywhere near San Francisco and have read this article up to this point, you should definitely pay it a visit come 2010. Who knows, you might get to tell your grandchildren one day that you were the only attendee at the last ever Macworld Expo!

Aayush Arya is a freelance author for Macworld magazine. You can follow @aryayush on twitter, check out his blog at aayush.me, and can be reached at aayush@me.com.

Tutorials: Keyboard Shortcuts

The Mac is all about keyboard shortcuts. You can do almost anything on the Mac using just your keyboard. More than that, keyboard shortcuts play a big role when you're writing or editing text. This is by no means an extensive list, but these shortcuts have definitely helped me save time.

Move to start/end of line - Cmd+left/right arrow

Move to start/end of paragraph - Opt+up/down arrow

Note that holding down Shift doing any of these action will select the bit that the cursor moves. Even Shift+Left/Right arrow will select text as you go. So for instance holding down Shift while performing any of those shortcuts above will select the text as well.

Back-delete current line - Cmd+Shift+Delete (comes in handy when you're just beginning a story)

Forward-delete current line - Cmd+Shift+Right arrow, and then hit delete.

Back/forward delete one word at a time - Option+Backspace/Delete.

The general rule of thumb is that Option goes for whole bits like words, paragraphs and such. For instance, Opt+left/right arrow will jump across each word.

While selecting text with the keyboard is okay for some scenarios, it's important to remember how to quickly select text using the mouse.

Single click and drag for regular selection.

Double-click and drag for selection of whole words. Triple click for paragraphs.

If you've opened a multi-column PDF like this one, to block select text hold down Cmd+Option and drag around blocks of text. Doesn't work in Safari though.

Once you've selected your text, you can move it about like it were a file. Remember to click and hold for half a second before you start dragging. To copy a block of text instead of moving it, hold down the option key while doing so.

Here's a nice trick. If you want to delete the rest of your paragraph from where your cursor stands, hit Control+K and it just take it away. To paste it in another place, hit Control+Y! This will not affect your Cmd+C/V clipboard.

Here's a bonus shortcut for you. If you don't use any GTD app for managing your tasks, you can instantly create a sticky note by hitting Cmd+Shift+Y, after which any selected text will go to a nice sticky note on your desktop.

Note that non-native apps like Microsoft Word and the Adobe Creative Suite use their own stupid shortcuts, so beware of that.

Here are some shortcuts for better typography in your writing. While Word and Pages will generally replace straight quotes (") with Smart 'Curly' quotes (”), you might want to continue that trend throughout the rest of your typing.

The shortcuts for double curly quotes is Option+[for an open curly, and Option+Shift+[for a close curly. For a single curly, use the] key instead.

That's it for my keyboard shortcuts. I hope that helps you in some way. The best way to remember them is to actually make it a point to use them once in a while. You can also check out Aayush's post on typing special characters on the Mac.

If you have any tasty shortcuts, do share them in the comments. And remember, we regularly post interesting keyboard shortcuts and tips in our twitter feed as well, so do keep an eye out for those.

Review

Windows LiveSync. The story so far...

I had been looking into syncing options for the Mac, and Windows Live Sync seems to present a pretty picture. Of course, it's a Microsoft product, but hey, we judge the product and not the company.

Live Sync is a very interesting service, as it allows you to access any of your files, anywhere in the world. You don't need to remember IP addresses or complicated routines. All you need is your Windows Live ID and password, and the information is available wherever you go. Note that for this review I only used this service on the Mac. I don't know how well it performs on a Windows machine.

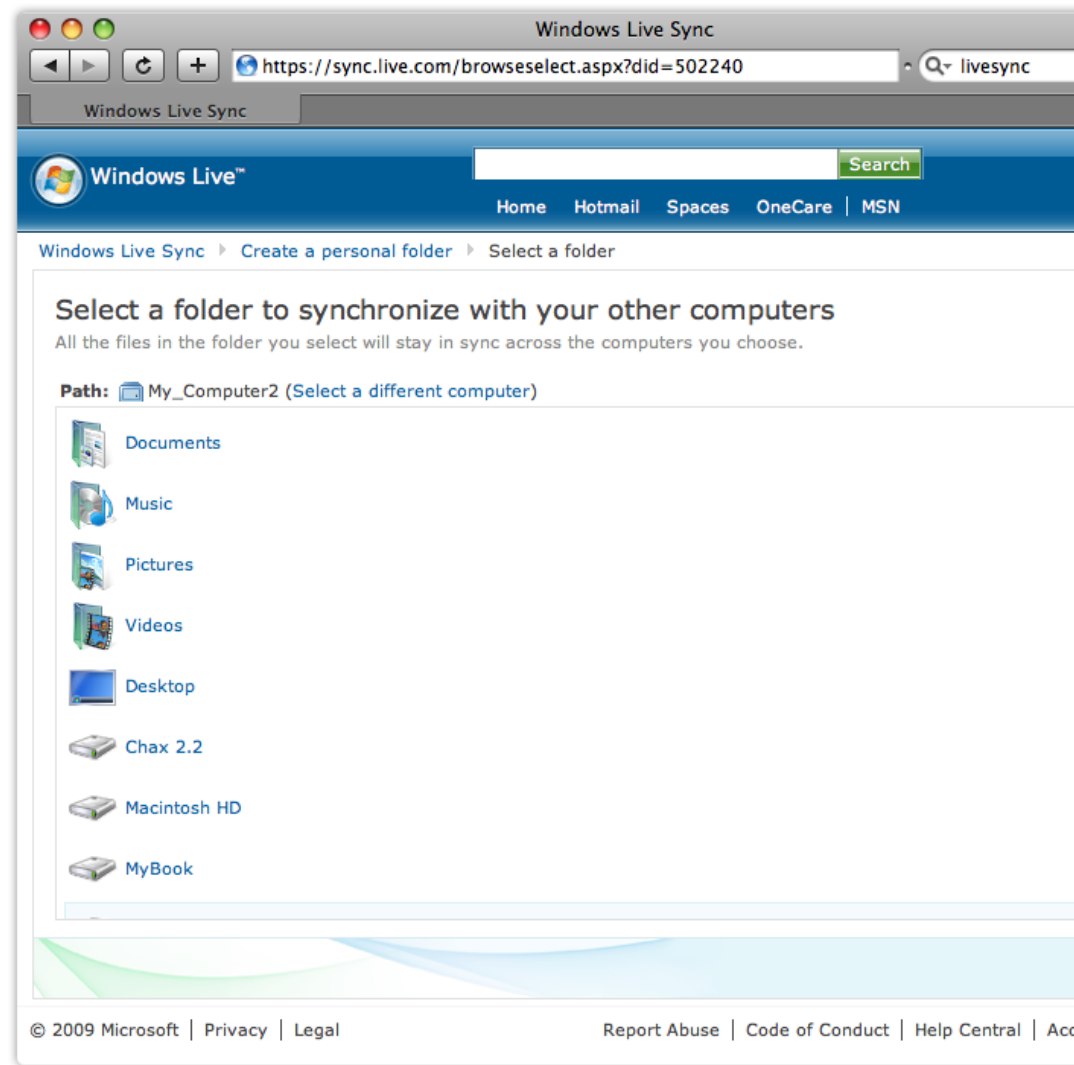
The Client

You start with Live Sync by installing the client app. Using the wizard based install, the LiveSync client finally goes into your menubar. On launch, it asks for your Live ID, and after logging in it is ready for syncing.

Everything is managed from the cloud, as the client is basically a gateway for the Live service to access your computer. The Live Sync page shows three areas of access. Personal folders, Shared folders, and Remote access.

Personal Folders

To add a sync folder, you need to follow the link on the main page. It will show you a list of all your folders on your Mac (including your main Macintosh HD), from where you select which folder you want to sync. Once added, the Live Sync client will begin



uploading that data to the web (as can be seen in the activity pane). Any changes you make on your computer will be carried across to the cloud.

Next, I want that same folder to show up on my MacBook. So after installing the client software, I open up the Live Sync homepage in Safari (yes, it works in Safari). Again, I followed the relatively simple instructions to make that folder I had synced to show up on my MacBook. The results are very good and I had no problems doing so even once.

One caveat however is that you cannot access any of the files in your personal folder on the web. It only lets

you know that x number of files are synced, but you cannot see or download them from the web.

Shared folder

While personal folders are for your eyes only, Shared folders can be seen by everyone. Following a similar procedure I was able to share a folder and access it with a bunch of contacts, with different permission levels for each. The contacts of course need to have their own Live ID and then install the Live Sync client on their computer. This would work great for collaboration among a close group, but the fact that it requires a Live ID means that you cannot just share it with 'anyone'.

Remote Access

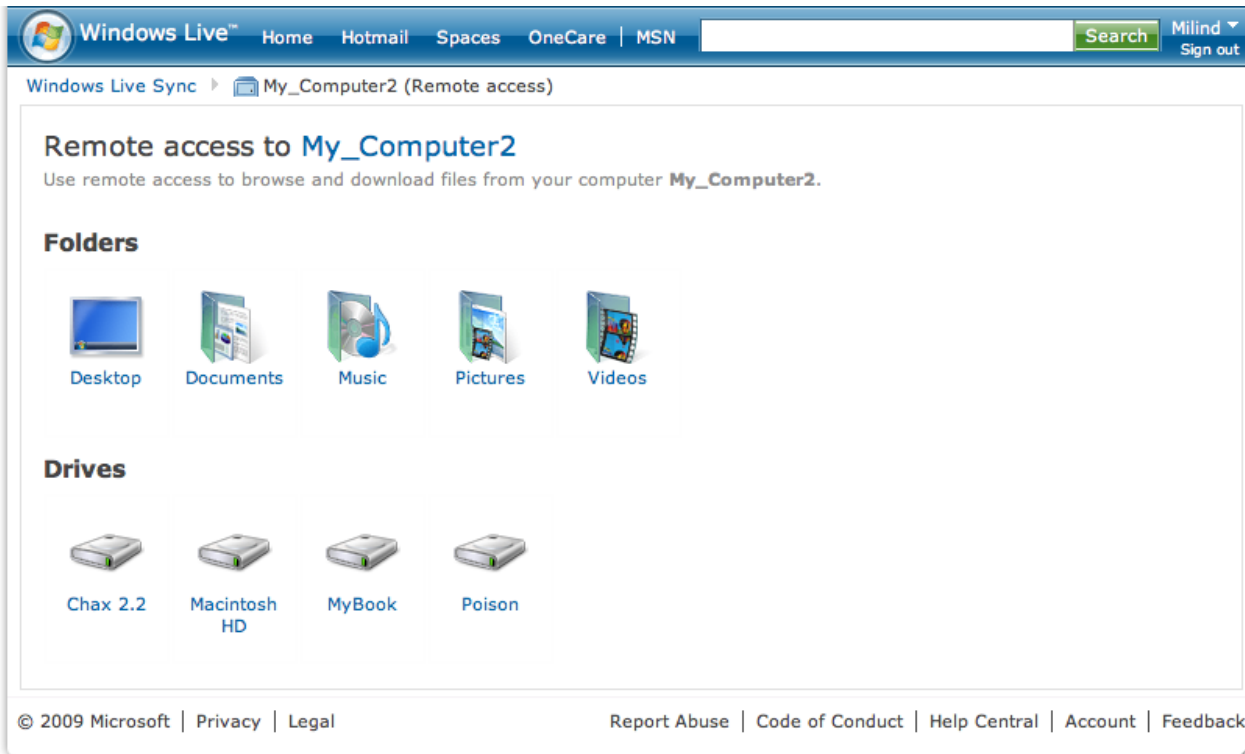
This is one cool feature of Live Sync. Once you enable remote access in your System Preferences, you can potentially access (download only) any file, from anywhere. The thought is a little scary, so I'm glad that Microsoft has explicitly makes you turn on Remote Access instead of having it there by default.

The Verdict

I'm thoroughly impressed by what Microsoft has done with Live Sync. The user experience isn't so great, but the functionality is extremely solid. I have been testing this for over two weeks now and it has yet to fail on me. Overall it's a splendid service, and the fact that it is free for anyone to use is a huge bonus.

When it comes to competing with iDisk, I think both are on different planes. iDisk has a (much) better user interface, on the desktop as well as the web, is easier to set up, and allows you to download or upload files without any client software. Live Sync on the other hand is closely knit in the Live ID, and needs the client app to be installed on any machine you want access to, but offers you a free syncing option that is in many ways more powerful than Apple's solution.

Follow the discussion at [Smoking Apples](#) and [let us know what you feel...](#)



5 reasons why I use iTunes instead of Songbird

The Open Source cross platform media player Songbird got the internet abuzz with its 1.0 release. The media player is said to have a feature set that makes iTunes look like a malnourished cripple. Reluctantly, I decided to use this app for two weeks to see what the big fuss was all about.

Please note, that as an Apple fanboy, I might bring in some negativity towards Songbird into this writeup. I will state facts where facts can be stated, but otherwise I'm afraid some amount of fanboyism will creep in.

Interface

There is nothing wrong with the interface, other than the fact that it's totally non-native. Everything from the window colour, to buttons, scrollbars, to menus all reek of Linux-love. I'm not saying I want an iTunes clone. I just want something that looks at home on my Mac desktop.

Then there are areas where by itself the interface is bad. The tab bar for instance is very badly done. There are a lot of other small kinks that



show a lack of polish. For instance, an artist “The Doors” will come under “T” and not “D” as it should. Also, closing the window quits the app!

Integration

One of the sole reasons why iTunes works, is because it is so integrated with the system. The Media browser, iTunes Store, Spotlight, etc., just spread out your music throughout the system. One of the biggest areas where Songbird cannot perform is Front Row, which is iTunes only. This will naturally cause you to add songs to the iTunes library instead of Songbird, which means that the next time you launch Songbird, you have to reim-port them into that library. The whole process seems a little too much to do for what little Songbird offers.

iTunes Extenders

Most of the time I don’t have iTunes open to play my music. I use Coversutra (one of the many iTunes extenders) to play, rate, and control my music. I use keyboard shortcuts, music search, and have nice album artwork on my desktop using iTunes extenders. None of these work with Songbird. To be honest, Songbird does have Add-ons, but even those are nothing compared to the refinement and polish of Mac native iTunes extenders.

Performance

Songbird’s performance is pathetic. It uses up a whole lot of memory (at any give time it is 3 times that of iTunes), and the CPU usage for simple things like scrolling the music library (iTunes ~20%, Songbird ~80% of a total of 200%) uses up a whole lot of CPU. It actually

idles at around 23% CPU! Songbird comes with it’s own plugin for a rendition of CoverFlow, but the performance of that was totally unusable. Compared to that CoverFlow in iTunes is butter smooth. Overall, Songbird is a performance fail.

Process Name	User	CPU	RSIZE
 Songbird	milindalvare	30.5	123.15 MB
 Mail	milindalvare	0.0	69.25 MB
 Picturesque	milindalvare	0.0	67.85 MB
 Finder	milindalvare	0.0	39.93 MB
 iTunes	milindalvare	0.1	37.42 MB

(I haven’t rigged this screenshot in any way. iTunes and Songbird are both idle)

No Video support

iTunes has become the central hub of managing all media on the Mac. If Songbird wants to compete with that, it needs to make sure there is no reason to use iTunes. Songbird has absolutely no video support. It can play certain videos, but only the audio part of it. What this means is, if you use Songbird, every time you want to watch a movie, TV show or Music video, you need to open up iTunes.

What I do Like

Songbird is not all bad though, as it has some pretty nice features.

The Info panel

This is a really feature rich panel, displaying different tabs for Artist info, News, and a stunning photo view displaying pictures of the currently playing artist. Surprisingly, Songbird has incorporated Videos into this

panel, grabbing youtube video links according to the currently playing song.

Add-ons

Similar to Firefox’s extensions – in fact, too similar – Songbird has a lot of third party add-ons like lyrics sidebars, Fairplay support (iTunes Store DRM’ed tracks), iPod support, different skins, and a whole lot of other interesting functions. All of these add-ons are available in the built in browser that comes with Songbird, with a single click to install an Ad-on.

Built-in Browser

I’m not sure how useful this is (in fact, I don’t), but Songbird features a basic web browser. You can visit websites, perform searches, and do quick and dirty browsing if you need it. Of course, the browser is only there for the purpose of searching for Add-ons, but I’ll mention it anyway.

As you can see, Songbird offers very little for what it takes away. iTunes is still the media player to use on the Mac, and it shall remain so for some time to come. Using Songbird on the Mac will inadvertently require you to use iTunes as well for all the integration it offers, making this whole exercise kind of moot.

What’s your view with regard to Songbird on the Mac. Are you actively using it instead of iTunes, or have you not even cared to install it? Join the discussion on the [post on Smoking Apples »](#)

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- The Smoking Apples Team