ATPM

It comes in colors... again!

iPod mini

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

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Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the February issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* It's been a month to remember. At January's Macintosh Expo, Apple Computer announced the iPod mini. Retailing at $249, there's nothing small about the price. The Mac maker's high margins on well-designed products haven't changed, but the perception of Apple Computer as a technology and design leader is gaining new ground. In this issue of ATPM we will look at many of the changes in the world of Macintosh computing and explore the platform's renaissance with consumers and creative pros.

When Last We Left You

In January's *Welcome* we talked about the BCS system for selecting the top two teams in NCAA college football. The BCS computers selected Oklahoma and Louisiana State University as the top two teams in the nation. This left USC, the nation's top-ranked football team, out of the national championship game and LSU to face third-ranked Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl for the BCS championship. Not only was the nation denied an opportunity to see the top two teams in the nation face-off in a championship game, but it highlights what happens when we put too much emphasis on computers and too little emphasis on common sense.

USC and LSU won their respective bowl games, so the two teams share a split national championship designation. USC is the year's AP champion, and LSU received the national top spot from the BCS. We not only recommend to the folks who run the BCS that they revise their computer point system for selecting the top two teams in the nation, but we also recommend that next year the BCS should use Macs. You never know. A Mac might have selected the correct two teams for the national championship game.

Gateway to Acquire eMachines

What happens when you combine a floundering computer company with a maker of really cheap PCs? We are about to find out! Gateway Computer, the computer company turned electronics retailer, has announced it has purchased eMachines, the maker of budget-line PCs.

Gateway's purchase of eMachines roughly doubles Gateway's US market share and launches the company back into foreign markets. It also provides Gateway entry to other retail stores. Faced with a fall off in PC sales, Gateway turned their Gateway Country Stores into electronics stores in order to pay the rent. With the increase in sales through the eMachines acquisition, Gateway may choose to close many of the company's retail stores as the leases on the spaces begin to expire.

Pixar Dumps Disney

The "other company" headed by Apple CEO Steve Jobs has chosen to break off talks with the Walt Disney Company on a new distribution deal. Pixar Animation has announced an end to the most recent round of talks with Mickey & Co. and that the company will look for a new distribution partner following the end of its current deal with Disney. The five-movie contract with Disney expires toward the end of 2005.

Meanwhile, *Finding Nemo*, the current Pixar-Disney release, has become the ninth-highest grossing motion picture in history and the top animated movie of all time. At press time *Nemo* has earned about $850 million at the worldwide box office.

Pixar is dumping Disney in favor of a search for a new deal that will leave the company with a larger piece of the box office profit pie.

How Much Is Too Much?

That's the question being asked by investors following the release of Apple's most recent quarterly numbers. iPods represented 13% of revenue and represented a significant portion of the company's rising profits. Apple surpassed Wall Street estimates on better than expected revenue and earnings. For the December quarter, Apple earned $.16 per share after extraordinary items on sales of about $2 billion. But the Street is now concerned that iPods comprise too much of the company's overall sales mix and worries that G5 sales should be higher. Go figure.

I Fought the Law, and Pepsi Paid the Fine

That seems to be the case after watching Pepsi's Super Bowl advertisement announcing the $100 million iTunes music giveaway. The ad features people busted by the RIAA for illegally downloading music from the Internet. The message: through the iTunes promotion Pepsi makes it legal and free for winners to get music off the Net. No doubt the

appearance in the spot by the former music lawbreakers did not come about for free. A happy ending for everyone? Over the next couple of months, we'll know for sure. The Pepsi bottles with winning bottle tops will be on sale through March 31, 2004. Winners must redeem the bottle caps for songs by the end of April.

Meanwhile iTunes rival Napster may get help from parent company Roxio's release of Creator 7, a product that provides users with functionality similar to iTunes. We'll see if the new product invigorates Napster's seemingly moribund music sales.

Debt Free

Later this month Apple Computer will retire its remaining long-term debt, paying off $300 million in loans. That will leave the company with about $4.5 billion in cash and no long-term liabilities. Aside from sharing a CEO, Pixar and Apple have another thing in common: business models that make lots of cash from popular products while allowing the companies to finance capital expenditures from cash flow. This includes the costs of Pixar's new corporate headquarters.

Until Next Month

Thanks for reading our February issue! We'll be back in March with another look at the state of Macintosh computing and more reviews from our editors.

The ATPM Staff

Our February issue includes:

The Candy Apple: Technology & Values

Ellyn Ritterskamp summarizes some ideas from a class discussion of a piece by Emmanuel Mesthene, a distinguished professor of philosophy.

Bloggable: Fairly Quiet on the Blog Front

In spite of January marking the Macintosh's 20th anniversary, Wes Meltzer finds that things like Apple's much-heralded foray into RSS feeds and the "H-Bomb" were last month's biggest news.

Quick Tips in Design: Part 8—Pattern

In this month's installment, Andrew Kator discusses the role of pattern in visual arts.

About This Particular Outliner: Outliner User Interfaces

Ted Goranson continues his survey of outliner features this month. The focus in this column is user interface details. All outliners are compared.

Web Accessibility: Part 2—Text and Language

In her second installment, Raena Armitage explains how everyone—and not just those with a disability—benefits when a little care is given to presenting a page's text.

How To: Panther Meets NTFS

Sylvester Roque explores the perks and caveats of using an NTFS-formatted drive with Mac OS X.

Cartoon: Cortland

NeoCort confronts the Agents.

Cartoon: iTrolls

The iTrolls ponder entropy, free software updates, the hassles of flying, and Soundtrack's price reduction. Plus, a parody featuring Howard Dean and Steve Ballmer was inevitable.

Desktop Pictures: Remembering Summer

Reader Dave Trautman shares his summer memories—pictures of Canadian prairies and some images that say "summer" to him.

Review: Cyborg 3D USB Gold

While not perfect and technically having no Macintosh drivers, Joe Kudrna believes the Cyborg 3D is a better choice than its closest competition from Logitech.

Review: iFire

Andrew Kator has no complaints about this device which makes Apple Pro Speakers compatible with computers (and iPods) that don't normally support them.

Review: iView MediaPro 2.0.2

Though it costs nearly twice as much as the 1.x version, Gregory Tetrault discovers greater stability and a number of useful new features in this version.

Review: Greppie 1.0.1

Following up on his AquaGrep disappointment, Eric Blair finds that Greppie has potential, but its version 1 edges are a bit rough.

Review: Old Fart's Guide to the Macintosh 2nd Ed. (book)

Kirk McElhearn thinks that seniors who look to this book for a little help getting started with a Macintosh may do better to look elsewhere.

E-Mail

Bloggable

This kind of article is why I read and support ATPM. Nice to see a blog column. Keep up the great work.

—Jan

ATPM History

I still remember downloading the first issue in DOCMaker format from AOL. Sniff…I miss the blazing fast speed of what was my new 14.4K modem!

—Robyn Lyons

Ethernet Cabling

I have a problem getting two G4s to connect to the router. I have in my setup a cable modem, a D-Link 604 router with the computers, an 8600 and G4s, 50 feet away. The 8600 connects fine, but the G4s will not connect. I have found if I put the G4s by the router it connects no problem. I have tried another card in the G4, and that did not work. Is there something I can install to improve the signal so the G4 will connect? Because that would be the easy solution. I really don't want to have to install a longer cable to move the modem closer to the computers that would mess up too many walls and floors.

—John Volk

A 50 ft. run should not present a problem. The signal loss over 50 ft. is negligible for Category 5 wiring. In fact I use a 50 ft. cable in my own apartment and connect with no difficulty.

Given that when you place the G4 "by the router" (which I assume entails using a shorter cable) I suspect your 50 ft. cable may be the culprit. Try substituting a different 50 ft. cable and see if that resolves the problem. Bad Ethernet cables pop up now and then.   *—Evan Trent*

Networking

Great site. Kudos for the networking section; now I can finally play Marathon against my nephew without buying a book to figure out how to connect two Macs…

—*Thomas Giatras*

Apple Predictions

Your "Maxi-POD" is similar to something I would really like to see from Apple—the home server. Call it the iServe, if you will. It would be a stripped-down, headless Mac that would be the gateway to all incoming stuff such as TV, telephone, Internet, etc., and have a honking huge hard drive for storing all of it, a SuperDrive for backing it all up, AirPort Extreme, possibly wireless FireWire, and it would be able to serve up all that digital goodness throughout the home in true Apple style.

—*DD*

When I first read your mention of wireless FireWire, I was, like, "Huh? What have you been smokin'? There's no such thing." I was wrong. Anyone who doubts can <u>check this out</u>.   *—Lee Bennett*

Technology & Values

Valuing is more important than values.

This column comes from a discussion in my Philosophy of Technology class. Many of the ideas here are not my own, but came out of that conversation. This is my reframing of it.

We read a piece by Emmanuel Mesthene, in which he says the way we value things shifts as we make technological advances. Our actual values don't change, as we want truth and justice and things like that regardless of the way we frame those things. What does happen is that we reconfigure our wants, our preferences, and our behaviors. Our actual tastes change, in the sense that at first we appreciate the speed of the microwave dinner because it allows us to spend more time reading Shakespeare. Over time, it sometimes happens that we come to prefer the taste of the microwave dinner over whatever personally-cooked dinner we used to eat. This doesn't mean our values have changed in some way that makes us ashamed; we still appreciate a meal that is nourishing and tastes good. It just has come to pass that our understanding of what tastes good has shifted. Since this happens all the time in other contexts (We learn to tolerate the taste of beer, or we come to appreciate a foreign cuisine.), there is no need to attribute horrible techno-anxiety to it.

Mesthene's commentary said technology means change. He reminds us of Heraclitus's idea that we cannot step twice into the same river. The idea there is that when we try to step into the river a second time, it has changed, and so have we. We are changed by the passage of time, and by the experience of having stepped into the river before. When we apply his idea to computer technology in particular, I can think of a couple of changes from the past several years that are useful, helpful, and good in some way. There are lots more, of course.

• Speech recognition software is one of the coolest ideas to come to fruition, especially for those with limited access. If mouse and keyboard functions are outside your scope due to physical limitations, voice-activated computer functions are a blessing.

- The world is more accessible to those with Internet access. Online newspapers and other publications (like this one) expose us to perspectives and cultures different from our own. We can only become better citizens of the world for learning more about it.

Mesthene says technology introduces new possibilities. This raises questions and issues that were formerly irrelevant. For example, if 10 people are in need of a kidney transplant, and one kidney is available, who receives the kidney? There are many similar questions within the fields of medicine and biology. Plenty of technological tools are available and we choose not to use them, perhaps because they are too expensive, or we are content with what we have. Their mere availability, however, changes our options.

Mesthene's third point is that "technology alters the mix of choices." First off, we have some new way available of doing something. We have to decide if it's worth the trouble to learn the new way, if it's worth the cost, whatever. Second, and this is very important, once lots of people start to use the new method, the old one will become clunky or less attractive. People will stop gathering around the radio at the country store to listen to the baseball game. We won't purchase vinyl albums anymore, despite the loss of the attractive covers.

Mesthene's conclusion was that we need to be less concerned with specific values and how they shift, as we need to be concerned with the actual process of assigning value. The ways in which we think about what is important to us may change slightly over time and with newer glasses to frame them, but the actual things we think are important will still be important when the day is done.

Fairly Quiet on the Blog Front

Have you ever wondered, upon entering an empty classroom, whether you overslept and didn't get the e-mail about no class that day? I have, and it is not fun. Take it from a current college student.

January felt that way to me. Maybe I'm wrong, but this month isn't even going to be especially focused on about the Mac blogosphere. A better description for this month's column might be, "It is the 20th anniversary, you know." By the way: happy twentieth anniversary, Macintosh! If only your weblogger devotees were shouting from the hilltops, but we've grown complacent in the years since the Revolution.

All right, enough with the odd references. This column will be, because of what I've mentioned above, different from last month's. This means we can play the *schadenfreude* game, in which you enjoy the fruits of Wes' frustration. However, there is, slipped in below, a Reader Challenge for the month. Here we go, for January.

Leading up to Macworld San Francisco, there was a good deal of rumor-mongering, about which I'm not going to write because most of it was dead wrong. I imagine you've all seen the various rumors discredited. Unless Steve Jobs releases iWrite, the video iPod, a G5 Cube, or your other favorite rumor before February 1—in which case I'll have to eat crow—I am going to declare that dead. This rather lowers our signal-to-noise ratio for the month.

As far as useful knowledge, discussion and articles from the Mac blogosphere, I came up with five topics which you may find interesting:

- Apple has discovered RSS, and now both the iTunes Music Store and the Knowledge Base have RSS feeds. This means that now you can see a feed of selected tracks from the music store, as well as the list of top songs, and also a set of feeds of current and

new Knowledge Base articles on a variety of Apple products. (For those of you unfamiliar with the term, RSS is a reasonably sophisticated way of syndicating headlines in a series of different formats and on different devices.)

- The above item raises an interesting Reader Challenge idea: would anyone besides me be interested in a kind of directory of feeds of selected music? I'd publish a feed with my Most Played smart playlist in iTunes, or just music I feel like listening to that week, kind of like the Critic's Picks selection at a video store. E-mail me, and you can get a mention next month as well as eternal gratitude, as I would love critic-reviewed playlists for my iPod.

- Have you ever spent four months without your Mac, in an environment remarkably hostile to the platform? Noah Kravitz has, teaching in a PC-only school in New York City, and he thinks that although OS X and Macs have a substantial leg up on Windows XP and PCs, there are still some kinks that Apple needs to work out, like proprietary video connectors. In his second column, he reinforces his argument, saying that although the one-button mouse may be Grandma-safe it's certainly not any good for teaching. Also, he explains why it is that I'd never used a laptop until I was in eighth grade, which is that little kids and portable, flexible computing are incompatible.

- OSViews ran a nice piece by Benjamin Horst after MWSF failed to usher in iWrite, explaining why Apple should use OpenOffice.org as AppleWorks's core. The idea is sound: "[F]ollow the example Apple created with its Safari Web browser…based on the KHTML rendering engine. Apple could use the OpenOffice.org code and build its own custom Mac OS X GUI on top of it." Just like KHTML, OpenOffice.org's code is licensed under the GNU General Public License; and just like KHTML prior to Apple's development of Safari, using OpenOffice on Mac OS X can be a very un-Mac-like experience. Could be a good marriage.

- Bruce Tognazzini is rather famously a critic of OS X's GUI. He weighed in again on OS X in January (unfortunately replacing his old column; this is weirdly Orwellian, by the way). This time, it was on why the Dock still sucks and what Apple can do to fix OS X. I'm not sure I agree with him, but I know Kirk McElhearn sure didn't.

- I saved the biggest news for last. Hewlett-Packard announced January 8 that they had agreed to license the iPod, to be rebranded with an HP logo on the back and sold only in rigor-mortis-corpse blue. Gadgetopia was hardly alone in observing that Apple has a poor track record regarding clone licenses. John Gruber, my favorite analyst and curmudgeon, calls this "the H-Bomb," and he's right. HP is huge, and this is a big deal.

I hope you enjoyed this whirl around the Mac blogosphere, even if it wasn't strictly the Mac blogosphere *per se*. By now you know how to get the latest updates to the iTunes Music Store and Apple's Knowledge Base; know what it's like to spend four months with no water, err, working with a PC-only lab; can wonder if Apple should use OpenOffice.org code as the basis for AppleWorks 7 or iWrite; can see what may be wrong with the Dock, from the perspective of Apple Employee No. 66; and have my permission to talk your next-door neighbor's ears off about the HP iPod.

Hat tip from last month: an anonymous reader showed me Jeremiah Cohick's blog. I've never been to Boston or to Emerson College, so I have no frame of reference for his writing, but it's nice to know that Switchers are real people too.

Also, Phil Ulrich is still welcoming beta testers for Userspace. I bring this up because a reader commented last week that he couldn't find a download link. Please e-mail Phil if you want to use Userspace.

Did I miss anything? Let me know.

Part 8: Pattern

Pattern is a repeating visual element that can be created by duplicating size, shape, position, symmetry, frequency, value, and color. Patterns are usually stronger when combining two or more repeating elements. Most often, people associate size, shape, and position of visual objects with pattern, but value and color are also strong pattern tools.

Patterns are easiest to recognize when they combine multiple visual elements. This pattern uses shape, size, position, frequency, symmetry, and value.

Pattern in visual arts is used for building larger objects, decoration, organization, association with other patterned objects, and meaning.

When a unit is used for building a larger object, patterns are created. When the shape of the units is similar, the pattern becomes more pronounced. Media such as textiles, ceramics, jewelry, and masonry use repeated smaller elements for the construction of a larger work. Because of their methods of fabrication, these media are naturally suited for the creation of decorative patterns.
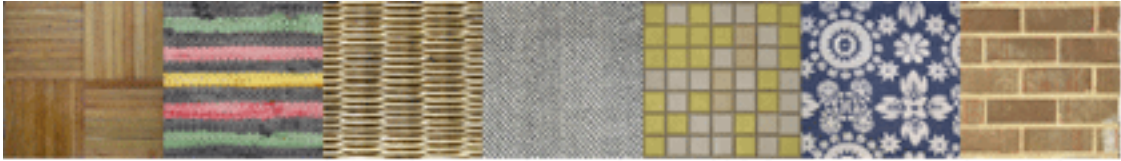
Objects that use smaller units for their construction are naturally suited for the creation of decorative patterns.

Pattern can be used to allude to these media, or it can borrow from them to suggest less direct associations. A pattern similar to one seen on a woven silk damask may suggest wealth, expense, quality, and conservatism, significantly more than just an association with fabric. Using pattern in design to create associations with patterns in the real world is a simple and effective method of pattern application.
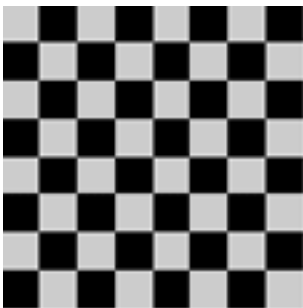
The same shapes used to create a gameboard or race flag become a tablecloth when the colors and frequency are changed.
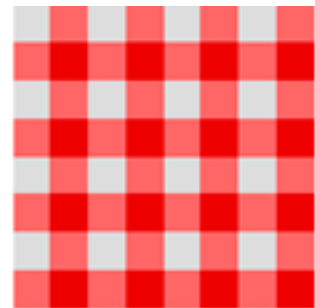
Patterns have cultural, religious, and philosophical significance. Many patterns have traditional meanings that symbolize the place of mankind in relation to nature and the universe. While this symbolism can be found in patterns from most cultures, it is very prominent in Islamic art and architecture where pattern is used for the philosophical discussion between humans and God.

Types of pattern are associated with different cultures and regions as with these African examples.

Natural icons are common in cultural patterns, especially animals (both real and mythical), flowers, and foliage. Common objects and especially woven objects, such as rope, textiles, and baskets, also become the inspiration for patterned decorative cultural imagery.

Many cultures share patterns, even such "unrelated" cultures as Native Americans and aboriginal Australians which were physically separated from European, Asian, and African cultural influences for millennia. In some cases the only major differences to the casual observer among these cultural patterns is the color usage. Color in pattern can be extremely important in dictating cultural meanings.

There are many excellent and specific books available about cultural patterns, most offering usable examples. A search on the Web for "Celtic pattern"—or any other culture/ region—will usually return a myriad of books containing thousands of patterns, for a good desk reference for anyone using pattern in design.

As with natural shape, natural patterns rarely demonstrate geometric perfection. Adding variation to a pattern will make it appear more natural and add visual interest.

The Golden Mean (Phi)

The Fibonacci sequence is a series of numbers which appear throughout nature. This sequence can be used to calculate the *golden mean* (or the *golden section*) which is represented by the Greek letter Phi. The Fibonacci sequence and Phi can be found visually in plants and seashells, and in the reproductive family trees of animals.

The Fibonacci Rectangle (or Golden Rectangle) is used to create the Fibonacci Spiral which can be seen throughout the natural world.
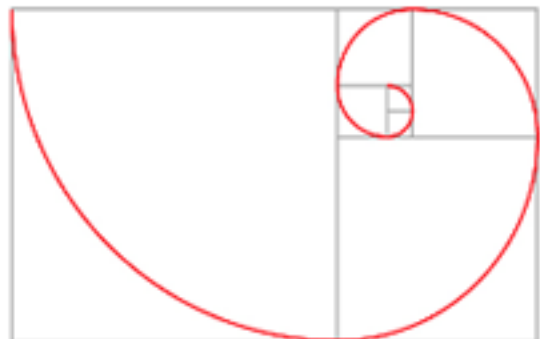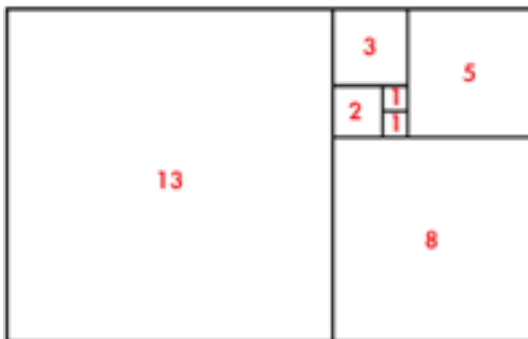
The sequence starts out: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, and continues *ad infinitum*. Each new number in the sequence is created by adding the previous two numbers. For example, the sum of 8 + 13 is 21, making 21 the next number after 13.

Phi, also known as the golden mean, is the ratio between two sequential numbers in the Fibonacci sequence. When 1597 is divided by 987 the result is 1.618034447821682, which rounds to 1.618. The higher the numbers used to create the ratio, the more exact the calculation becomes.

A Fibonacci Spiral is duplicated, rotated around the center, and the circular pattern is mirrored. When assembled the result forms the pattern seen in sunflowers.

Further study about the patterned relationships among mathematics, nature, music, and visual art can be found in Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid by Douglas R. Hofstadter.

Self-similarity

There is a special kind of pattern that is self-similar, meaning the building unit contained in the pattern is the same as the overall completed shape. Cultural patterns often use self-similarity to suggest infinity and visually express other philosophical and existential concepts.
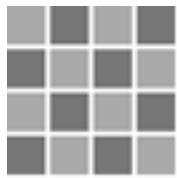
These two patterns are self-similar because the shape of the units are the same as the shape of the whole.
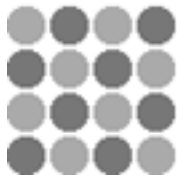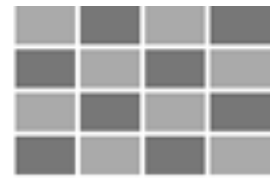
These two patterns are NOT self-similar.

All of these patterns are self-similar.

Fractals

A fractal is a shape that is self-similar and has a fractional dimension. Self-similarity is a required element in fractals, but all self-similar shapes are not fractals. With fractals, an infinite number of self-similar shapes can be found inside a larger shape, or the shape used as the pattern's building unit can be "grown" into infinite detail by using itself as the blueprint. Each of these stages with smaller divisions is called an iteration.

The Sierpinski Triangle is one of the easiest fractals to create. An equilateral triangle is divided at the midpoint of each of its sides to create the first iteration. Each iteration then continues with the smaller equilateral triangles created by each subsequent division.
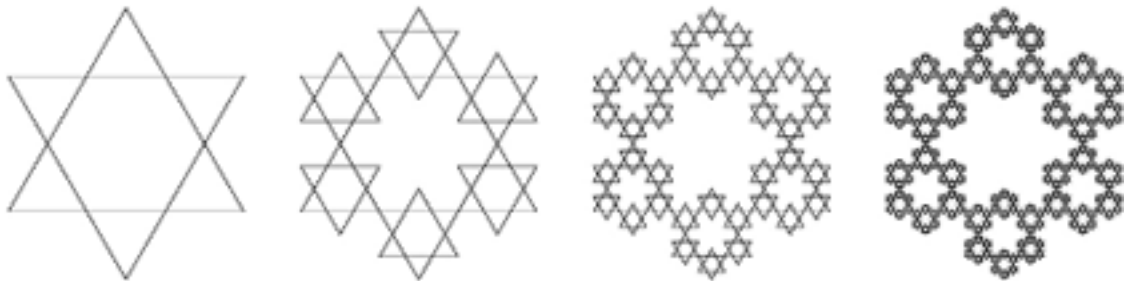
The Koch Snowflake is another simple fractal using two equilateral triangles to create a star in the first iteration. When each iteration is reduced by 2/3 it then fits within the previous shape and creates a new iteration.

Fractals can be used to create an infinite variety of shapes. This simple fractal becomes a tree within a few iterations. Fractals can be used to visually reproduce almost anything found in nature.

Applying Pattern

Pattern is an extremely powerful method to focus viewer attention. The repetition easily seen in most patterns uses all of the Gestalt principles discussed in previous articles. For that reason, pattern is often used in design as a tool for organization, especially when used with text. Common methods for pattern-based organization include:

- Bullets and other shapes to list, outline, and highlight
- Alternating row colors to make individual items stand out, yet still be part of a whole
- Grid-based layout where similar shapes create a common theme, even if the content within the shapes is dissimilar (for example, different photos that are all cropped to the same size and shape and arranged in a grid pattern)
- Color-coding

Because of the power of pattern as a visual element, it is important to use it for desired effect. A pattern can unintentionally destroy the intended message of a visual work by competing with other elements. Even if a pattern is decorative it still must be considered as part of the whole composition as with other complex shapes.

Tiled backgrounds can become distracting and make the other content more difficult to follow because the viewer is naturally drawn to the repetition of the pattern.

Patterns that use grids face another problem. An optical illusion can be created by high contrast areas. This is due to the way the human retina works, and the only true method for avoiding this problem is to change the pattern itself.
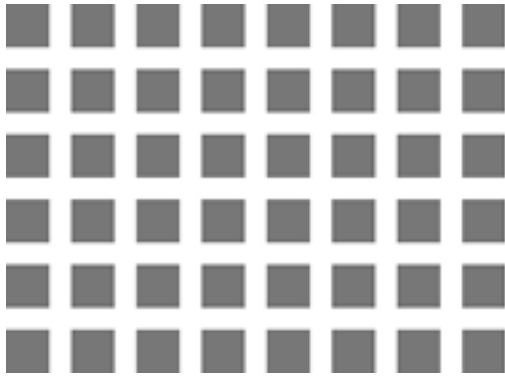
The high contrast and linear nature of this pattern force the retina to work overtime. If you don't want people to see the optical illusion of little squares, the solution is simple: don't use this pattern.

Moiré patterns occur when patterns of different frequencies are used together. This can be easily observed when halftoned images are reproduced using another patterned technology. For example, the halftone printed images from a magazine are already arranged in a pattern that is a different frequency from the pixels created by a scanner and the pixels displayed on a computer monitor. Moiré patterns are also created when striped or checkered patterns appear on video. A solution that sometimes works for scanning is to scan at the highest quality possible and drastically reduce the size using photo software. Applying a Gaussian blur to the image before it is reduced sometimes helps as well, but there is no exact method because each image is different and may be printed at a different halftone screen frequency.

The solution for Moiré patterns in video is simple: don't wear fine stripes or fine checkered patterns when you're going to appear on television.

• • •

Use of pattern can add interest as well as visual information to your project. Patterns can be used to enhance many purely figurative designs, as well as decoratively to complement text. Pattern is a strong visual tool that should not be overlooked.

Outliner User Interfaces

This month we look at different user interface strategies of outliners. If you came late to this movie, we are beginning a journey into the land of Mac outlining that began with a look at history, went to outliner features—a survey that took a second month. We reported two months ago on usage patterns.

Now we turn to how we interact with the outline itself. This is no small matter, my friends, because outliners may be the environment you spend your most creative time in—that time when the Mac is supposed to be special in understanding and supporting.

Good user interface details are like fresh air and bad ones are like a minor toothache you haven't quite noticed yet. This is another of the several elements of outlining that depend on the user; that's what makes this your particular outliner.

So in the spirit of our first columns, we'll survey the various strategies and differences more or less without judgement so that you will know what to look for. However, this time we only cover Mac OS X outliners, avoiding the cross-platform Java and X11 ones.

History of the Disclosure Triangle

Pre-computer outlining relied on complex numbering schemes involving numbers and letters, Roman numerals or "dot-levels" (like section 1.2.5.23). This was all a bit hairy and not visually intuitive. Computers allowed child items to be indented, which was a novel innovation, sort of the "wheel" of outlining. With indentation, you can "see" the structure of the words without reading anything. It was marvelous, and that singular idea elevated computerized outlining beyond anything in the world of paper.

Collapsing was the next brilliant invention. As we noted in the history review, this first appeared in code editors. Those were the days (the 1970s) when coders were real men (usually men) who wrote monolithic programs of thousands of lines of code by themselves and without the handy modularizations common today. They needed collapsing and folding to manage the complex structure of the program.

Exactly who developed the "plus-labels" is lost in decades-old history. With plus-labels you had a way of using characters from the standard font set—namely the plus and minus signs—to denote whether a heading had children or not. ThinkTank and its successor, MORE, brought this convention to desktop outlining.

The screenshot shows MORE in its final incarnation, which used all sorts of extra character-like symbols to provide additional information, as explained in the shot. MORE followed the already established convention: a plus sign meant that there were children under a header, and minus sign designated no children.
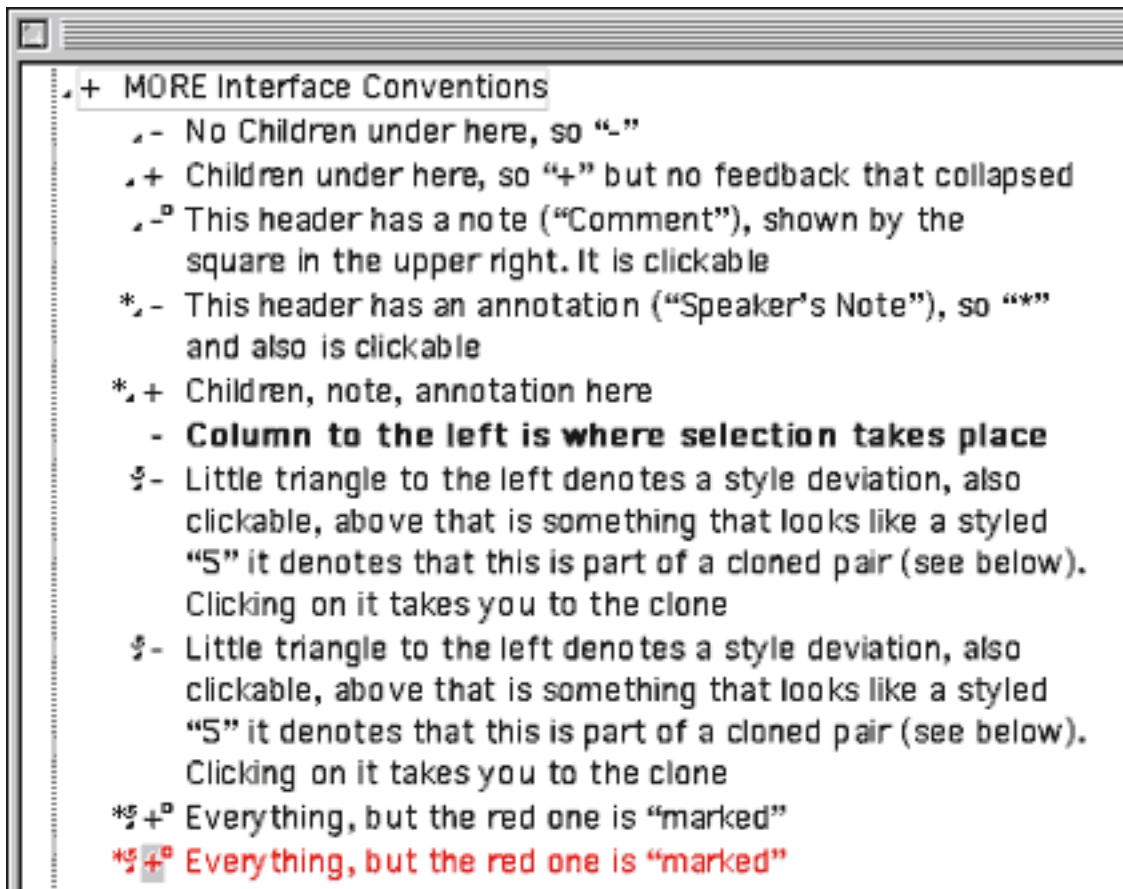

MORE

Unfortunately, this provided no feedback on whether a header was collapsed or not; you had to notice that a plus-marked header wasn't displaying children. The Mac introduced the world of graphical user interfaces, but the Intel world remained stuck with character-based displays for years. Successive generations of Windows only gradually replaced DOS conventions so that even today Windows outliners keep that archaic plus label idea, even in their equivalent of the Finder.

But somewhere along the way—exactly where is lost in the ether—the conventions were mixed: in some outline views a plus means a header has children *and* is collapsed; a minus means that a header has been fully expanded. This at least gives you some indication of state.
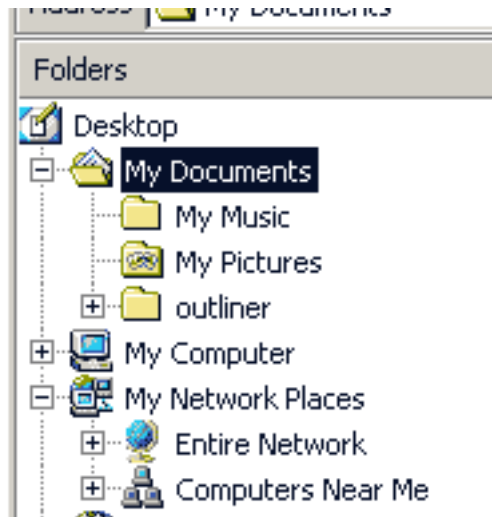
Windows Explorer

So strong is this plus-label convention that Microsoft even carries a graphic version of it into its latest word processor. The screenshot shows Word's outliner, using the MORE convention of plus for headers with children, and minus for childless headers. Word gives feedback on collapsing by drawing a grey line where the collapsed stuff would be.
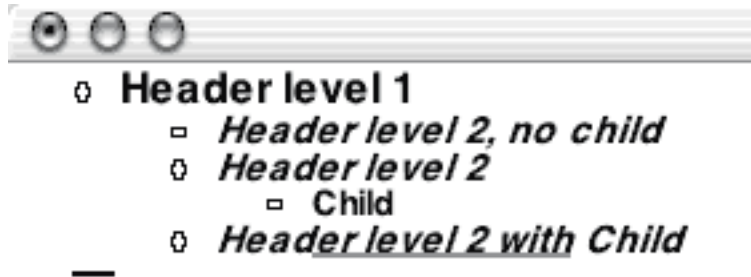
Word Outliner

Fortunately, we Mac users escaped that clumsy convention. Indeed, one of the main discriminators of Mac outliners versus their Windows counterparts is in the use of the disclosure triangle. *ATPO* has sent its Baker Street irregulars into the rubbish bins of Mac history and has discovered a large part of the reason why.

In 1983–4, David Carr wrote a pretty advanced "next generation" DOS database that had hyperlinking and rudimentary outlining. It was called Framework and like Lotus's Agenda, never really caught on, and died when Windows came about. It was sold to Ashton-Tate, then Borland, and finally Selections and Functions, Inc.

Framework had a sort of outline view which used a triangle. David Dunham was inspired by that idea in designing the user interface for Acta shortly thereafter.

Actually, Framework is still supported! One imagines it controls some key military air traffic control infrastructure or something. You can see the very triangle in question at the Framework site. That triangle is not clickable and it does not rotate.

Acta's implementation can still be used in Classic; the screenshot shows it. It is a marvelous invention; a turned arrow "opens" the children. A white arrow has no children. Clicking on the arrow collapses or expands. The world of outlining would never be the same…at least on the Mac.
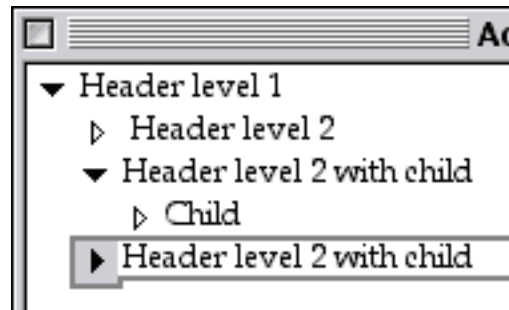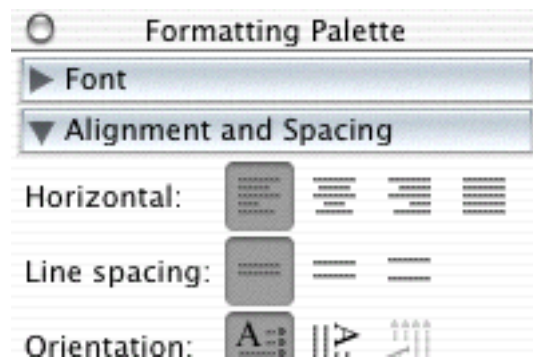

Acta

That triangle became a fixed part of the Mac toolbox. Even Bruce Tognazzini, founder and director of Apple's Human Interface Group, cannot remember when it crept into general use. You can see it all over the place in non-outlining contexts. The screenshots below show a recent Finder Get Info window and Word's formatting palette.

Finder Info

Word Formatting Palette

These triangles are called "disclosure triangles," "flippy triangles," or simply "outline triangles." Two things happened to outline triangles on their way from there to here. The first is rather profound: in System 7, Apple introduced the "outline view" in the Finder. The Finder is just an application like any other, but nearly all of us think of our Macs in terms of the Finder. For us, the Finder is the basic identity of the system, and since 1990 outlining has been the basic identity of the Finder.

The second is that the triangle has evolved from a black right triangle with a point of 90 degrees to a grey equilateral one with all angles and sides equal. The old arrow was designed for use on a black and white screen. The screenshot enlarges one so you can see the black pixels clearly. Next to it is a modern outliner arrow, which you can see depends on the ability to select from more shades of grey.


Old and New Arrows

Several of the more mature (read: older) outliners still use 90-degree arrows: Frontier, Inspiration, Tinderbox, and Schedule. All of these are cross-platform (Tinderbox will be soon) and are unlikely to change. To be fair, Tinderbox and Schedule have been modernized. The screenshot shows the arrows from Schedule, Eudora, and Tinderbox from left to right.

Modernized Arrows

Collapsing Feedback

That little triangle—and indentation—is the fulcrum of outlining. But different outliners bring all sorts of innovation to how they advise on collapsing. In December we described jEdit. It is not a native OS X outliner, rather Java, so it has some interface quirks. But it is free and runs well on OS X. It indicates feedback on collapsed headers by darkening the background and also by telling you how many "lines" are collapsed. Since jEdit is designed as a code editor, "lines" are what writers would call paragraphs.
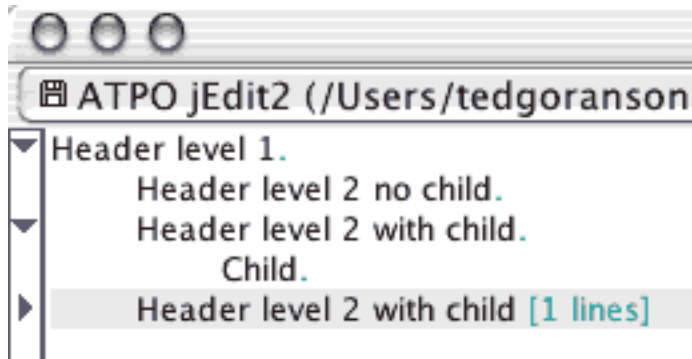
jEdit Collapsed Feedback

You've already seen how Word gives feedback on collapsing, by drawing a grey line. It is an elegant idea because it relates to the matter that is "window-shaded" up. AppleWorks has an outliner we haven't talked much about. That's because it is a different beast from Word's; the AppleWorks outliner really exists to make outlines *within* documents rather than *of* documents. But it is interesting because it allows quite a few different labelling

styles like bullets, several numbering styles, and a "diamond" mode. Oddly, it doesn't offer an outlining triangle. Each labelling style has a different feedback mechanism for collapsing, always in the label.
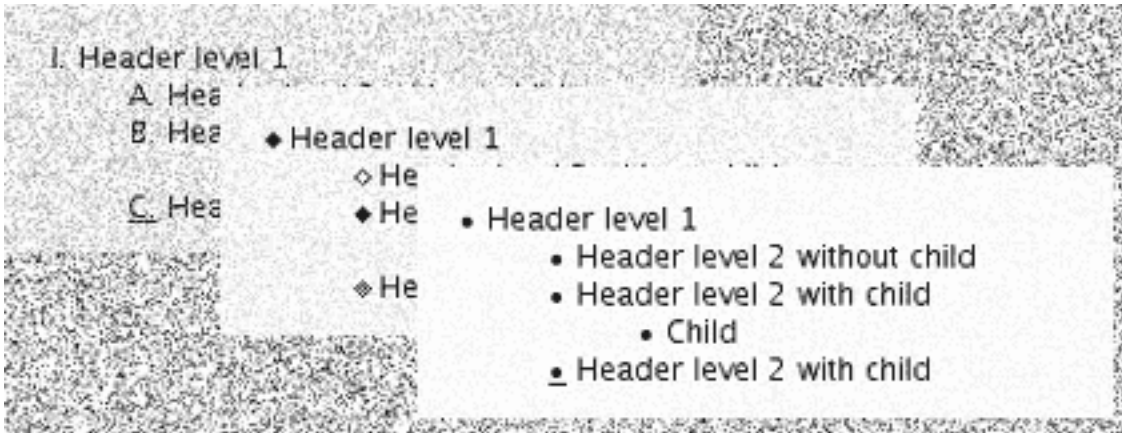
AppleWorks Feedback

NoteBook maintains two outlines. One is a "page" that consists of an outline, and another of the notebook contents which is an outline of outlines. Both use "Aqua-fied" glass triangles, but different user interface conventions. In the regular outline, the triangle simply will not rotate to point right if there are no children. This is a unique approach. It makes sense but you have to get used to a triangle pointing down to nothing, something that is disconcertingly unintuitive.

The screenshot shows the outline-of-outlines behind. This has a different philosophy because that round bullet is a hyperlink that when clicked takes you to the page denoted. In this outline there are two citizens: pages and sections. Again, using some of the same user interface conventions but in a different way takes some getting used to.
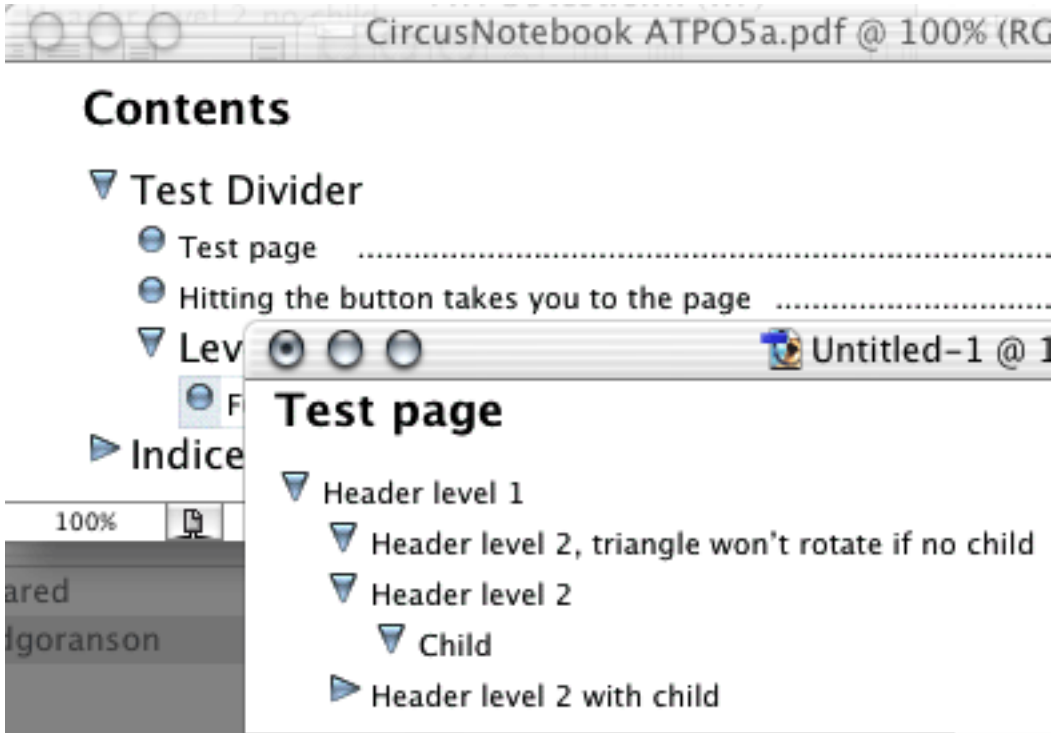

NoteBook

When we do our comparative review between NoteBook and NoteTaker, you'll see how radically different they are. You can get a glimpse of this now in how NoteTaker handles "arrows." The screenshot shows a part of an outline "page" in front. You'll note that it doesn't use arrows at all, but instead uses an "Aqua-fied" plus-label convention—not the "MORE" and Word version, but the Windows Explorer version where "plus" means a header is collapsed, "minus" means it could be but is not, and "blank" means it could not be collapsed.

I suppose this choice is because AquaMinds intends to port the product to Windows in 2004. The window behind on the right is NoteTaker's contents outline. It is similar to NoteBook's except for the plus-labels and the use of a diamond as the hotlink to the page.

But NoteTaker has a drawer on the left that shows the same outline as a fast navigation tool. This one is based on the Mac Finder, but is oddly neutered: you cannot add or reorder headers here. It serves more like the navigation outline on the left of Acrobat Reader.

This outline-of-outlines drawer has another pane below which is not shown. It displays an even higher level: all the notebooks of a user. Thus, in one presentation, you can have three layers of outline, more or less integrated. Handy and cool featurewise, but the use of two radically different outline user interfaces is jarring.
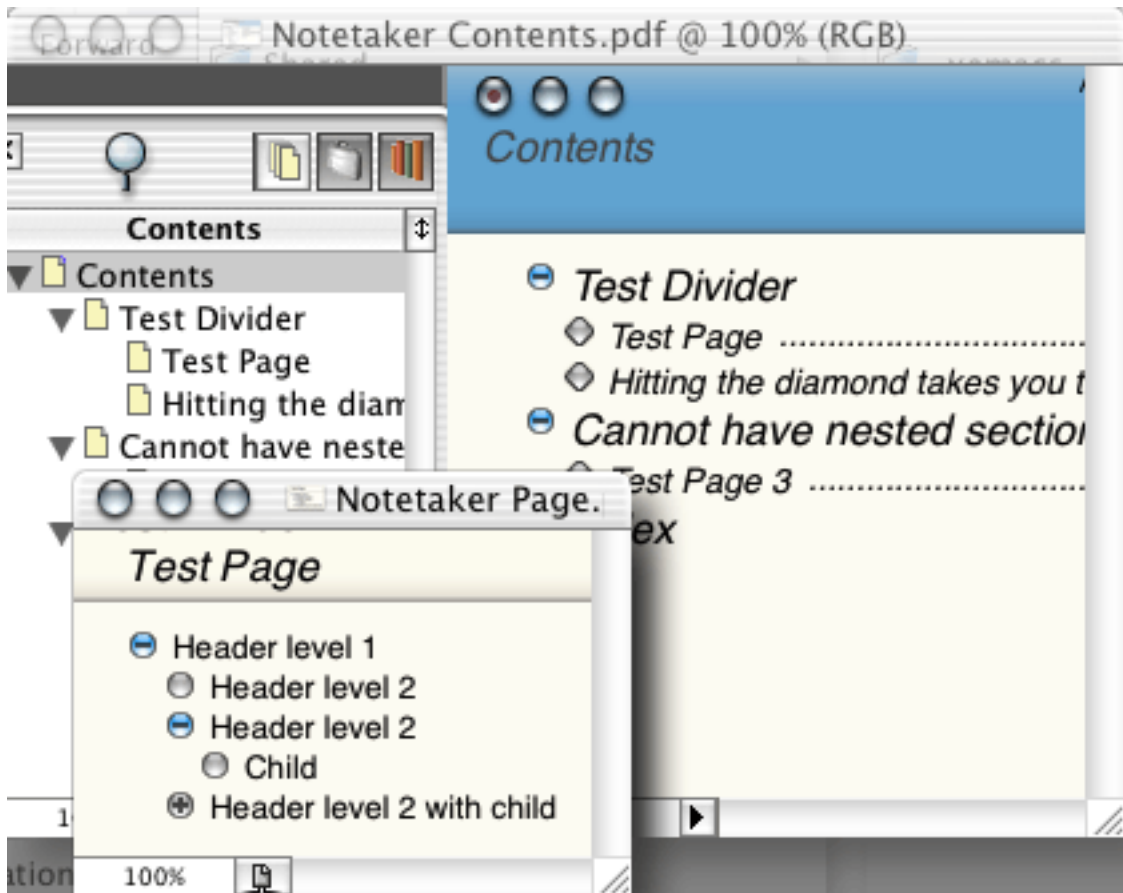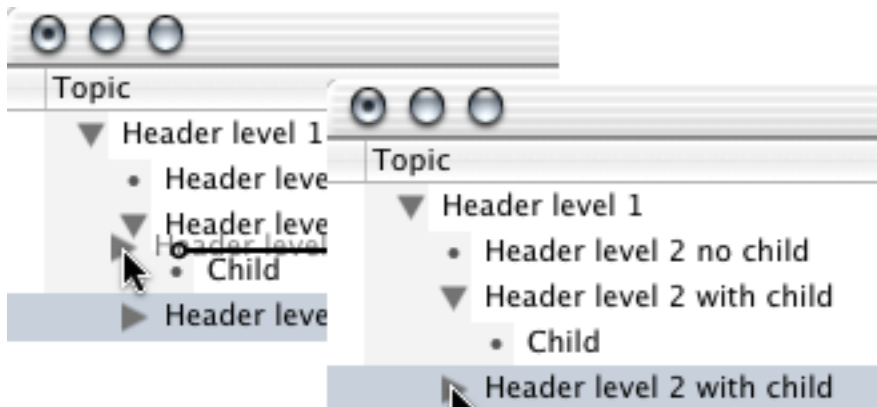

NoteTaker

Selection and Dragging

The nature of outlining is organizing and re-organizing. That means you are going to be moving things around, either demoting/promoting them or relocating them to another part of the document. In another column we'll deal with automation in this regard. But here we are concerned with manual grabbing.

You'll find a wide variety of approaches to selection and dragging. Generally, you need three "zones," because you need to select the text of the header to edit or copy it; you need to select the whole header to relocate it; and you need to select some group of headers to move as a group.

OmniOutliner exemplifies the cleanest approach to this. To grab a header, you simply grab the triangle and drag. To select a group, you just sweep the cursor to the left of the triangles. Look at the screenshot: the colored "gutter" to the left can be removed or changed. It emphasizes the structure. If a header has no children, it has no triangle. Dragging gives clear feedback, both on the position for dropping and in the translucent image of the dragged header.

OmniOutliner Selection

NoteBook and NoteTaker go one better. When they drag, they actually place a shadow the same size as the dragged item to show you *precisely* where it will go. NoteBook's additionally shows the shape of the children's indents.
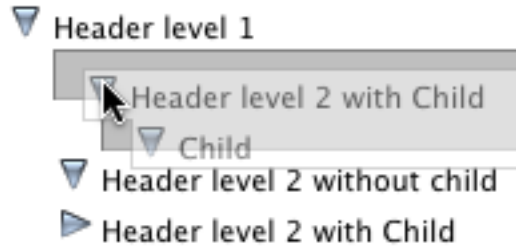

NoteBook Drag

But not everyone works that way. Take Caboodle. In the screenshot, you'll see that it has the good drag location feedback of OmniOutliner, but it needs a new interface element to "grab."
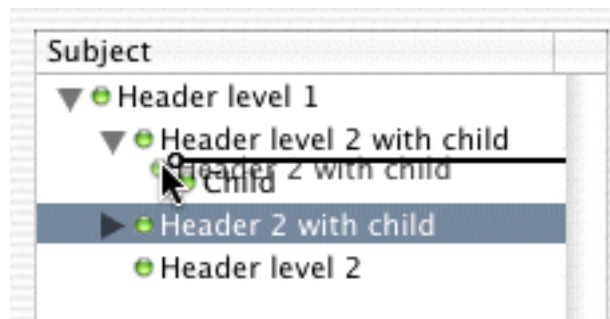
Caboodle Dragging

Inspiration needs a special "selection column." That's the second column from the right. Actually it is unnecessary because you can click anywhere to the left of a header to select that header. In the screenshot, we have selected multiple headers.
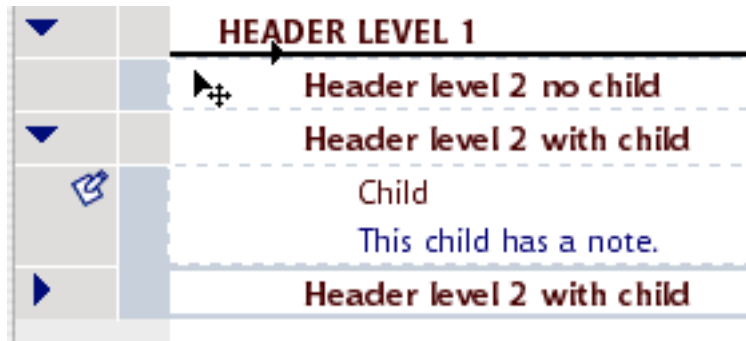
Inspiration

Notes

That last screenshot brings us to the final major user interface widget we'll look at this month: how to show notes. Only a few of the many OS X outliners even have this concept because you must support the feature we noted in the October column concerning two classes of text: headers and paragraphs (often called "notes" or "comments").

Word, OmniOutliner, Tinderbox, and Inspiration support the notion in the straightforward way we mean. All of those have some indicator of notes. (In these outliners, it is also possible to have headers without notes.) Many of the "Finder-Note" type outliners (like Hog Bay Notebook and Skinkhunt Notes) have this distinction too, but in those outliners the "headers" are more like Finder names.

The previous screenshot shows Inspiration's icon for notes, the little pencil/note icon. This supports elegant functionality because clicking on that note icon collapses the note under its parent header. In other words, the icon serves both as indicator of a note and that note's "arrow."

But the award for the most informative of note icons must go to Tinderbox. Take a look at the screenshot below. The rectangles indicate notes. Each note has a color, an important attribute that we'll discuss in the review. Notice how some of the note icons have different numbers of lines? That is to indicate how much text there is in the note.

But wait. There are several other cool things. See how the header labeled "Container" has no text at all? That's because it really is a container, like a folder. You can see that "Child" is cloned twice. I manually made a clone (an alias) and moved it to "Container." But I also made a simple agent that automatically identifies and clones all notes with "Child" in their names. (There is a "Child2" hidden under the orange header that is also cloned.)

Note that the agent is designated as an agent by the thick bar being on the bottom of the rectangle instead of the top.

One final piece of Mac-like wonder: notice that all the icons but one are filled with grey. That's because I just created them as "fresh" notes. But look at the first header labelled "Notes." I made that one a month ago and it has a brownish tinge. Note icons turn tan as they age; now isn't that cool?
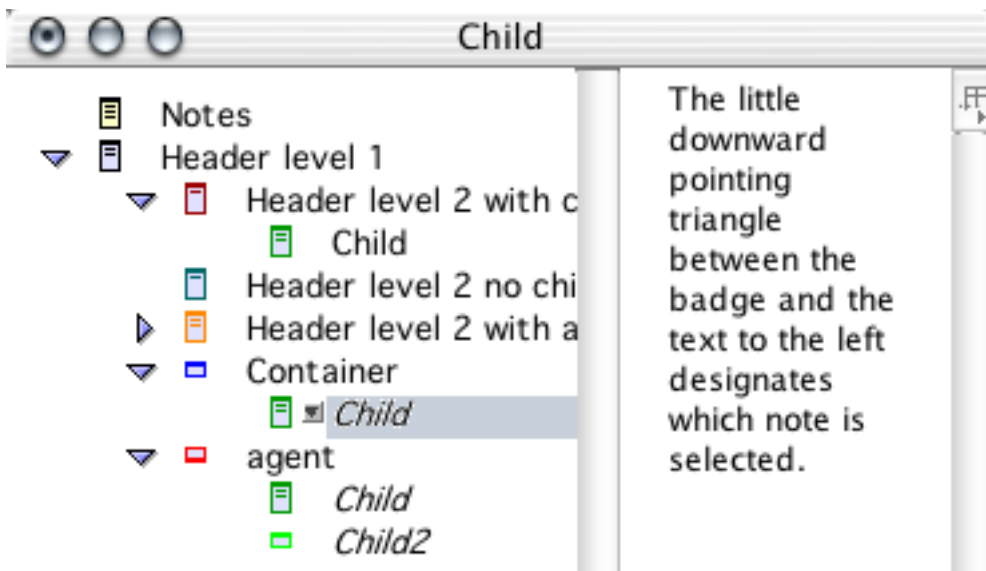
Tinderbox

Okay, with that background, we'll do a quick survey of all our OS X outliners.

AppleWorks

Several outline labels are supported, as already displayed above. These labels are hot and can be used to collapse and drag. Different methods are used to show feedback on collapsing, depending on the label method. The drag indicator is adequate but rudimentary as seen in the screenshot.
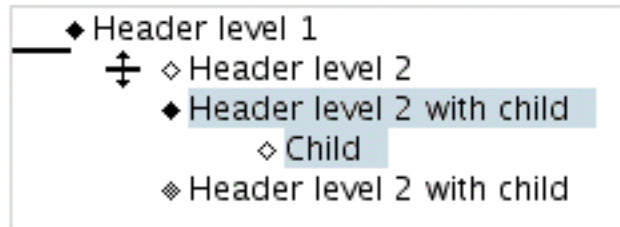

AppleWorks Drag

BrainForest Deluxe

BrainForest is a long-lived application, so it uses the old-style arrows. The arrows are not used for dragging. Instead, you can just select the header itself. This is very handy once you get used to it.

If a header has no children, it has no arrow. The screenshot shows a little dot. You either get that, or a checkbox that goes with some "action management" capabilities. Headers indicate notes with the icon to the right. In BrainForest's case, a note is a sort of annotation on the to-do item.

The drag feedback is nice and clear so far as vertical position, but a little unclear on indentation.
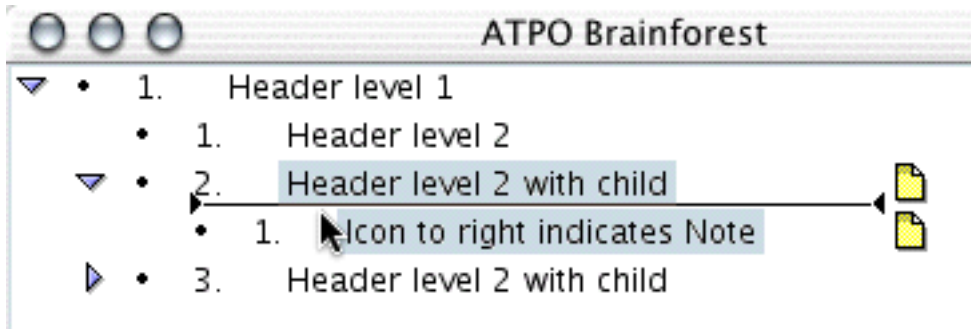
BrainForest

Caboodle

Caboodle uses new-style conventions: modern triangles, no triangle if no children, and the Omni-style drag indicator. This seems to be the common standard for new outliners.

Unfortunately, it uses a green button as the drag handle. The good news is that Caboodle drags an image of the header as you can see from the screenshot above. This also seems to be the new standard.

ConceptDraw Project

This is a new product. You can see that it uses the older style triangles, probably in emulation of its competitor, Schedule. Alas, there is no way to select, drag, or rearrange through the graphical interface—or even from the keyboard.
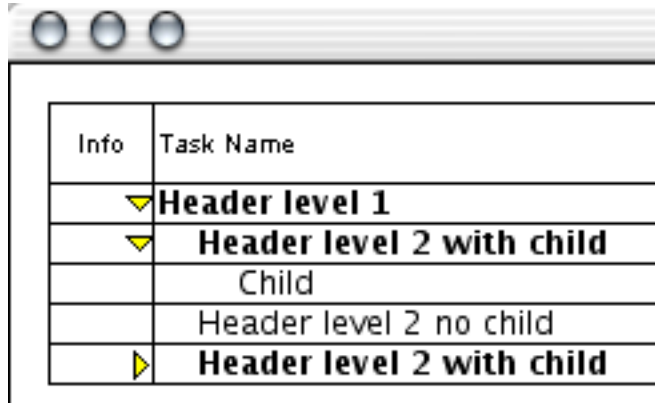
ConceptDraw Project

Deep Notes

Deep Notes, which I remind you is free, uses all the modern conventions. Its drag indicator is of the OmniOutliner style, just like Caboodle's. It carries a translucent image. It is unlike OmniOutliner and like BrainForest in the way you can select the header for dragging by just clicking on it.
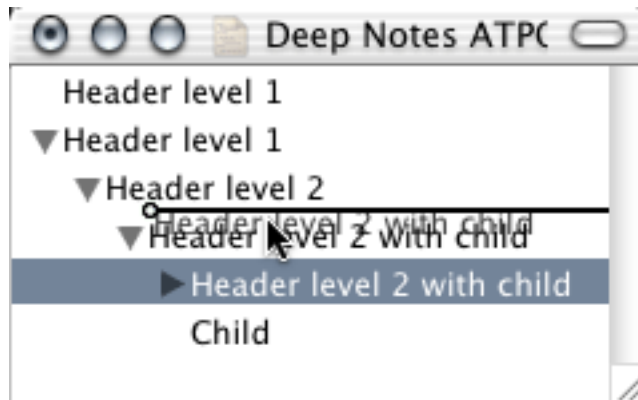
Deep Notes

By now, I assume you've discerned two patterns:

- That we are touching on the "arrow controls" and the "drag controls" with the feedback associated with both, and;

- That there are subtle differences among all these products, differences that could mean a lot to you.

We continue:

DEVONthink

Here is an example of an outliner that looks and behaves like many others. But look closely. The triangles are attached to every header regardless of whether there is a child or not. That way, you get no feedback on whether something is collapsed and invisible. This is the way the Finder works, by the way: you can "collapse" an empty folder.
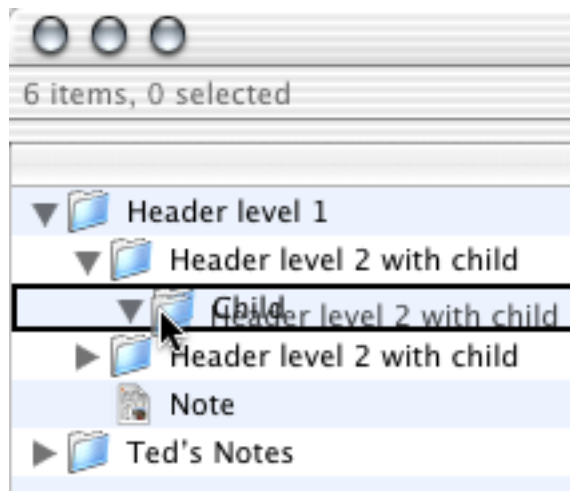

DEVONthink

Look also at the drag feedback compared to the previous screenshot. Deep Notes uses the OmniOutliner method where a line shows position and a circle indicates the indentation level. DEVONthink has a different philosophy; it outlines the header that you are dropping into. This emulates the behavior of the pre-Panther Finder.

You decide which is better.

Frontier/Radio

Now here's an interesting case. Frontier is from Dave Winer, the guy behind MORE, which we showed much earlier. MORE stuck to the plus-labels. Frontier finally adopts arrows, but it does so in the most limited way possible. Frontier's arrows do not rotate; rather they change from grey to black when collapsed. All headers have arrows. A selected header is in reverse text with a black background.

This is a minimalist and elegant solution. The drag feedback is pretty interesting, too. When dragging, the cursor changes to a hand, giving feedback that a drag is underway. That blue arrow at the top shows what the part header would be if we dropped the dragged one. This is, I think, the only color used anywhere in Frontier. So the feedback is not so much tied to where you are, but where you might be placed. In this example, the two are pretty far from each other. The blue arrow can point southeast when the condition demands.
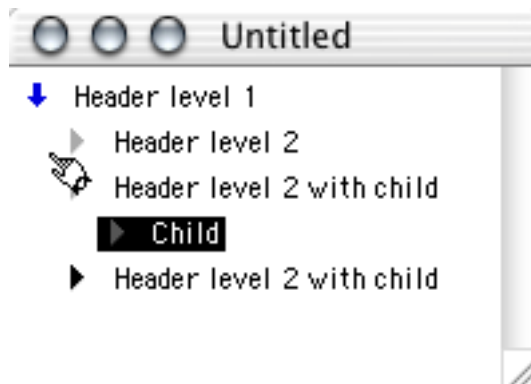
Frontier

Hog Bay Notebook

More variations! Hog Bay's Notebook uses a Finder-like metaphor. It has two classes of objects: folders and notes. It fixes the Finder feedback mechanism though. An empty folder has no arrow. The drag positioner is the familiar modern type. Hog Bay includes a trash can, which is a darn handy idea, for the same reason that the Finder's Trash is.
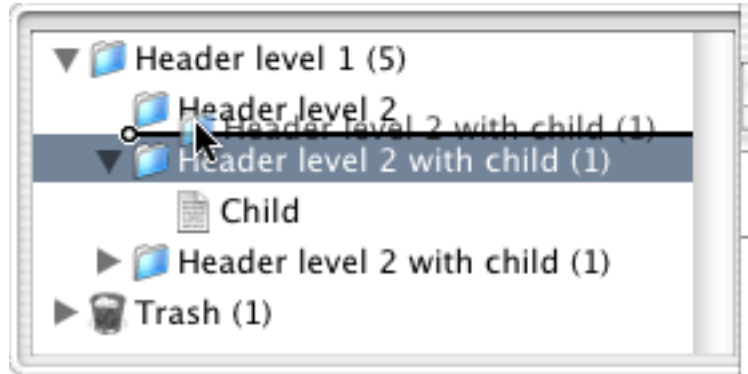
Hog Bay Notebook

IdeaSpiral

IdeaSpiral almost doesn't qualify as an outliner. It supports no mouse-driven reorganization of any kind; instead, a clumsy dialog is used. There is no collapsing.
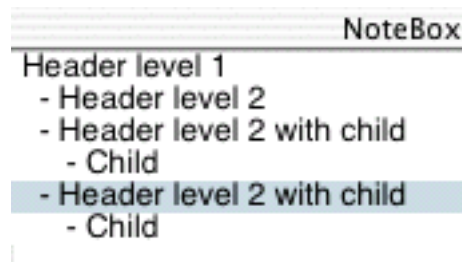
IdeaSpiral

Inspiration

You've already seen Inspiration. It allows discontinuous selection, with the selection shown both in the gutter to the left and by outlines around the text. The cursor changes when dragging. The drop indicator is very clear. Also, it supports the very cool separate "collapser" for folding notes.

Life Balance

Once again, something different. This uses a round bullet when there is no child. You drag by grabbing the arrow or bullet. There is no explicit drop feedback in terms of a graphic. Instead, it uses a "snap" function, so that the dragged image jumps from one potential drop location to another.
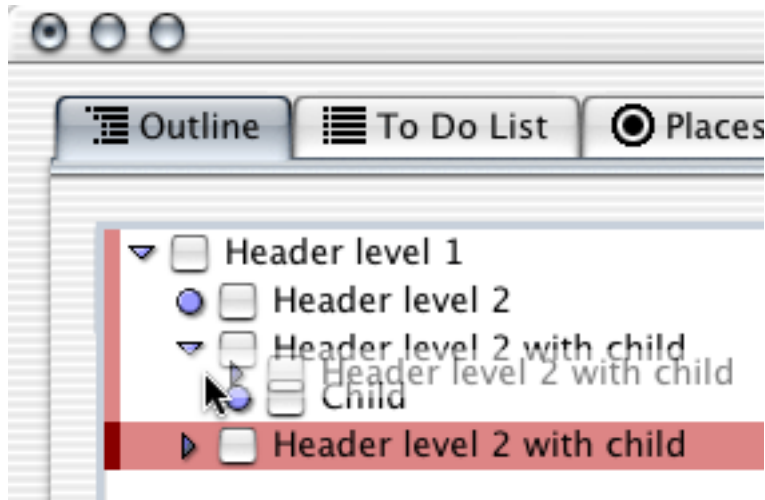
Life Balance

Liner

Liner, on the other hand, does things somewhat differently. You grab the text, so you need no extra button for a header with no child. Life Balance is a Windows/Mac/Palm application, which explains why it stands out. Liner is Mac-only and looks like it.

Deviation from the Macintosh conventions (like Life Balance and Inspiration) could be a good thing if it is done intelligently and it fits the way you like your mind-eye dynamic to work.
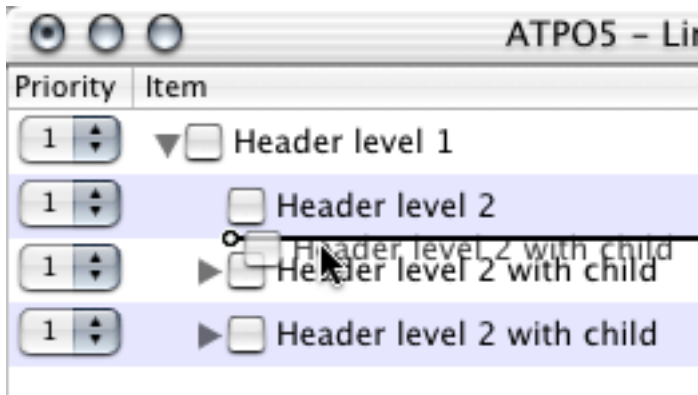

Liner

Mathematica

We haven't mentioned this one before because it costs nearly $2,000. Mathematica is a multipurpose environment for work in mathematics with unique strength in symbolic math. It uses a "notebook" interface consisting of "cells," what we might thing of as paragraphs, but these cells can contain all sorts of things including the input, definition, and statement of any mathematical function.

Mathematica notebooks are one of the more flexible and innovative DTP environments ever created, regardless of the mathematics function. And a key innovation is the way you can nest cells in an outlining mode. The screenshot shows the unique way nesting and collapsing is displayed. The nesting is assigned and manipulated quite independent of the layout and indentation of the text on the page.

The screenshot shows our example headers only. Note that the last header is collapsed, denoted by the small triangle at the bottom of the bracket. The double tick marks at the top of each bracket indicate that it is a text cell.
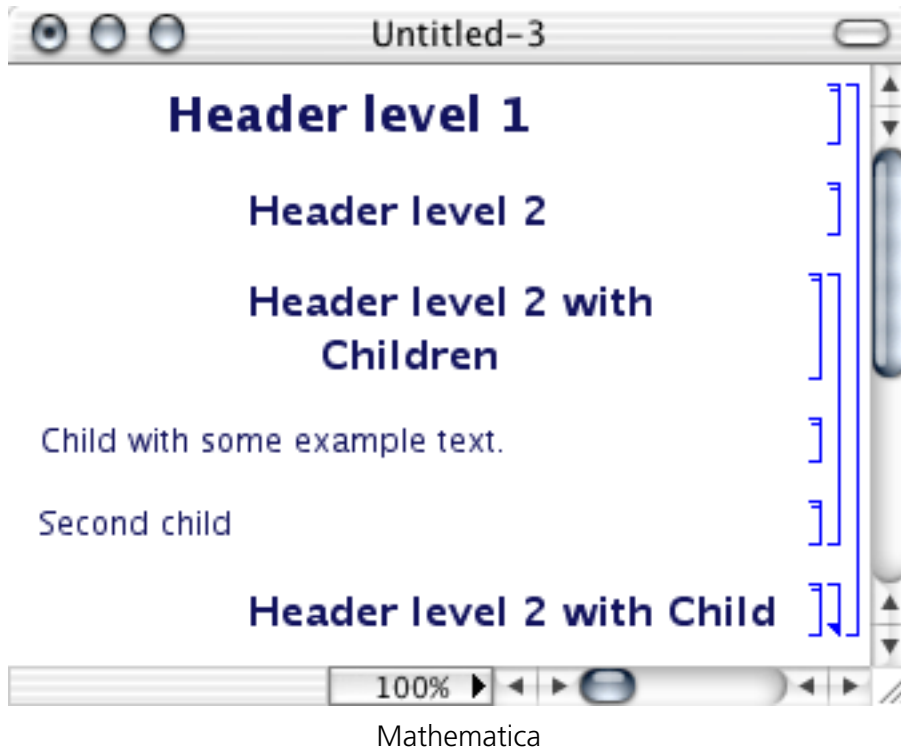
Mathematica

Mathematica exports to XML and is a potentially interesting partner to Tinderbox and/or OmniOutliner (and possibly Word 2004 for Mac if its XML handling is as improved as in Word 2004 for Windows).

MyMIND

This application focuses on the graphic view. The outline uses the common convention: grab the text, no triangle for childless headers, and the familiar drop indicator. Pretty competent donation-ware.
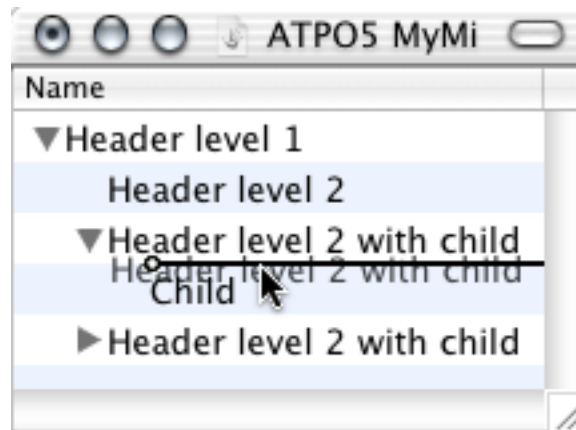
MyMind

NoteBook

We've displayed this above. Remember the unique drop feedback where the space and shape of the dropped items is displayed in context. Attention to detail here. NoteBook has an option to use "un-Aqua-fied," "normal" grey triangles and bullets instead of those in our screenshot.

NotePad Deluxe

Now for something completely different. NotePad is from an exemplary Mac citizen, Ibrium, who is behind the open source Mac-on-Linux, a huge contribution to the community. NotePad Deluxe uses elements from all over, including Windows. As with Hog Bay Notebook, the Finder metaphor is used for headers with text as notes and headers without text as folders. You can drag from an icon or text but not an arrow. The vertical

drop location is shown with a line. The left of the line changes according to the indentation of the drop candidate—not obvious, but with those connector lines between levels it is pretty elegant.
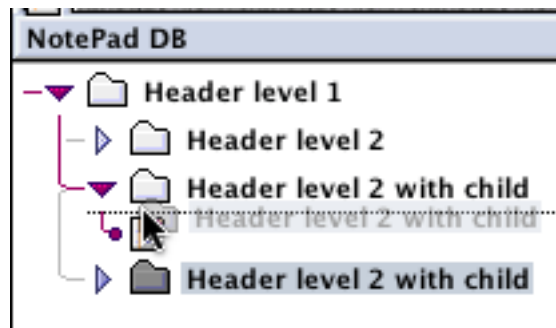
NotePad Deluxe

NotePod

This little application is also unique. It uses a hand dragger. The hand only grabs the "folder" or document icon. The drop location is indicated by a line. Notice that while the headers are indented the arrows are not. NotePod isn't the only application that does this—you have already seen two others. It reflects a design decision to make the arrows a property of the window instead of being associated with the text. Empty folders have arrows.

I hope you appreciate the profound difference this might make to the way you think and work in the outline in addition to the efficiencies. Just look at the differences among NotePod, NotePad Deluxe, and Hog Bay Notebook. These compete with each other and have radically different interface paradigms.
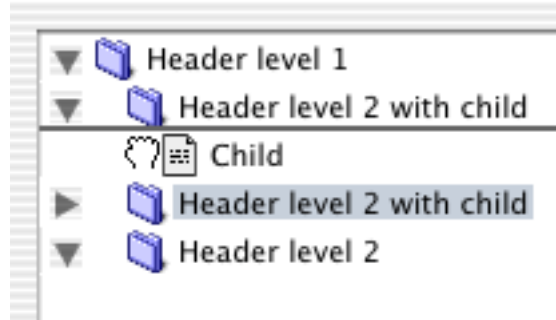
NotePod

NoteTaker

You've already seen the fascinating approach this application has taken: aquafied plus-labels. You must drag from the buttons. The drop indicator is not a line but a box that indicates not only where the text will end up, but also displaces the headers around as they would be when the text is dropped.

Also, NoteTaker has a disconcerting mix of outline display paradigms. On the other hand, it makes some sense to show the Finder-like view in a Finder-like manner.

NovaMind

This application's outliner function has a few deficiencies on the keyboard side.

It leaves a childless header arrowless. You grab the text. The drop indicator is the familiar line-circle variety.
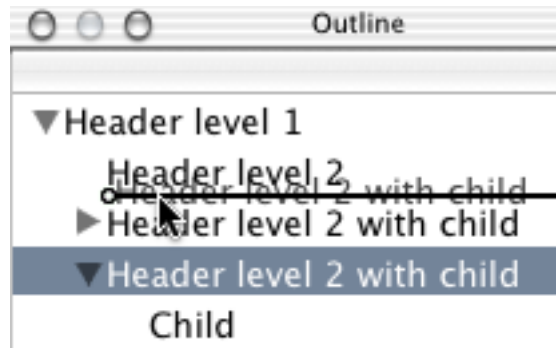
NovaMind

OmniOutliner

This popular outliner substitutes a bullet for an arrow when the header is childless. When the header has text, a "note" icon is displayed. Clicking that note icon does nothing at all, however. In this application, you drag by the arrow or bullet. The drop indicator is the one we have seen many times.

Incidentally, OmniOutliner has an inspector palette with disclosure triangles. They are subtly different from their outlining triangles. Clunkier. Something better is promised in an immediately forthcoming version.

OmniOutliner Inspector

We'll go quickly now.

PocketNotes

Nothing new here as you can see.
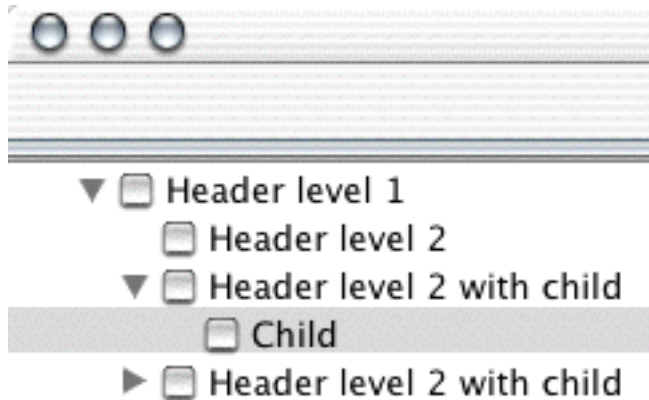
PocketNotes

Schedule

Since Schedule uses columns so heavily, it can limit its drag indicator to the sparse one shown. That second column is for dragging only. Odd, huh?
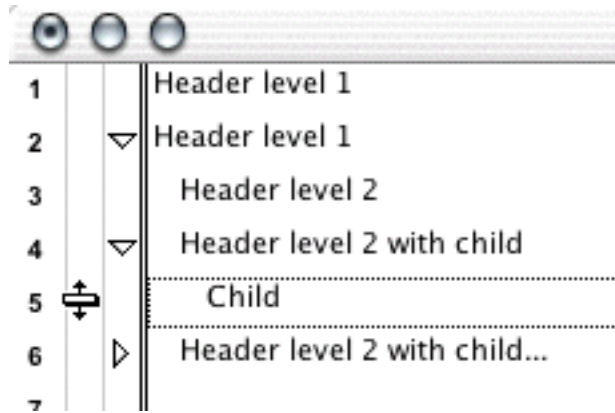
Schedule

Sh-Out ! My Brain

What's novel here is the neat little "notes" icon on the left.
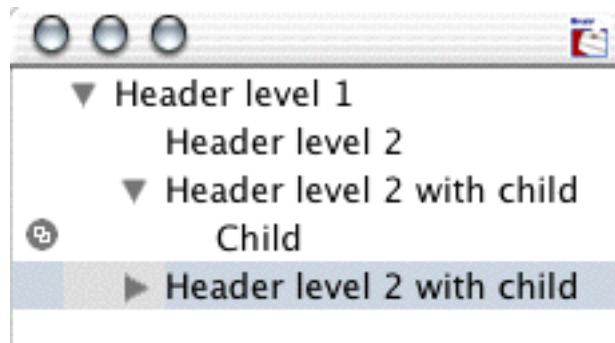
Sh-Out ! MyBrain

Slacker ToDo Lists

Slacker selects and drags by the icon. Notice that only the icon's image is dragged. The icon in this case is Slacker's symbol for a header with a note attached.
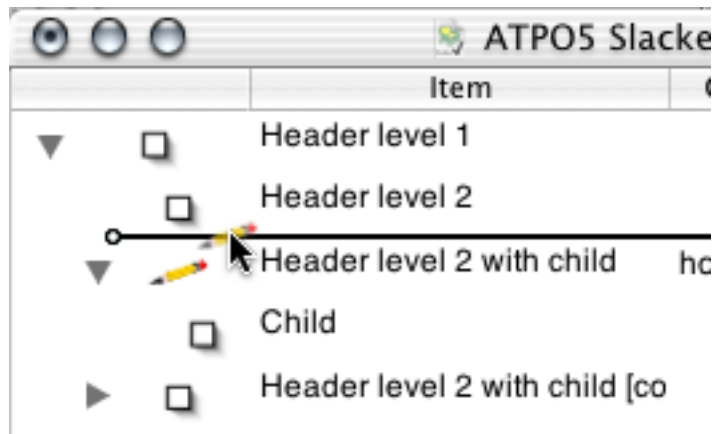
Slacker

Tinderbox

You've already seen the amazing job Tinderbox has done with its notes indicator. One final comment: Tinderbox uses those icons as the hotspot for useful special contexts on the contextual pop-up menus. Even the small grey "selected" icon has a contextual identity.

Microsoft Word

Word's outliner is surely the most widely used. We've already mentioned how it uses the plus/minus-labels. We'll just note the interesting and quirky drop locator it has developed. You grab a header by its icon, then the cursor turns into a box with an arrow at top and bottom.

In some cases, the drop indicator is a horizontal line and in others a horizontal one. You can see the logic about which is displayed if you play with it a bit, but that logic doesn't "read" well in use, even to an experienced user.
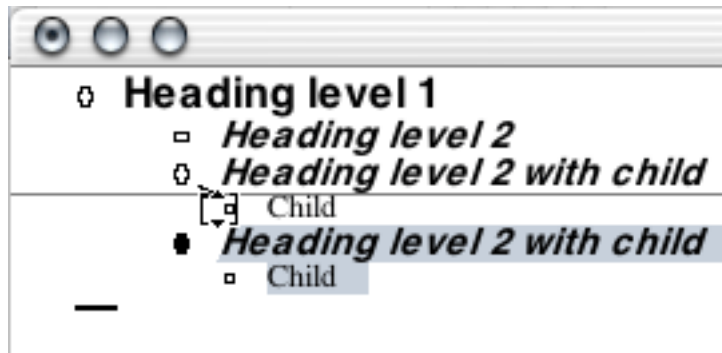
Word's Horizontal Dragline
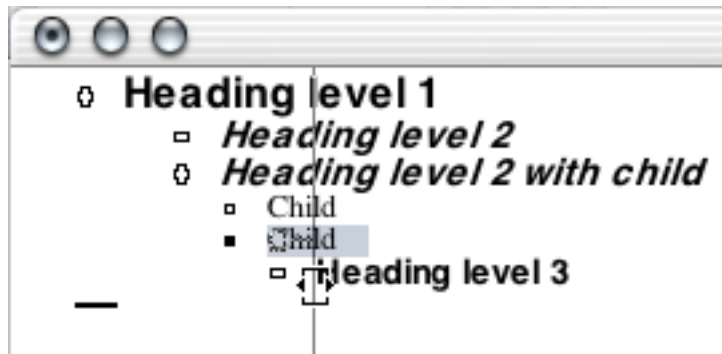
Word's Vertical Dragline

My Own Personal Preferences

The user interface elements surveyed here are only a small part of the outliner experience, and we've ignored essential elements like selecting and dragging sets of headers. But outlines are a graphical arrangement of text, and these elements are at the core of the eye-hand interaction with that organization. That's so even if you never touch the mouse. Selecting a specific philosophy is important because the Zen of outlining is in naturally attuning your thoughts to the way they are displayed.

I hesitate to give my own preferences. The differences among offerings and philosophies have been presented in this lengthy way so that you can select your own particular outliner.

Here goes for myself—

I think arrows should be used, and as a matter of consistency they should look like the Finder arrows. I have a strong preference for the arrows being associated with the header, in other words: indented with the text instead of being part of the window or in columns.

That association should continue further with the arrow being the grabbable element rather than the text. Part of the reason for this is that if the text is grabbable, you need to go through extra steps to enter the text field of a header for editing. OmniOutliner is an example of the several outliners that do this the way I prefer.

Contrary to how the Finder handles arrows, they should not apply to a childless header. That solution takes care of collapsed feedback nicely—if you have a right-facing arrow, something is always folded underneath.

I want to see as much information in the label icon(s) as possible. MORE did a good job at this, and Tinderbox is the clear exemplar now.

Grabbing for me should look like Cocoa dragging: an image of the dragged text should be stuck to the cursor.

The drop location indicator should tell me as much information as possible. Currently, NoteBook's is by far the best.

These are my notions. I hope I have given you enough information to discover your own.

Department of Corrections, Apologies, and Additions

An unfortunate combination of events prevented this edition of *ATPO* from appearing last month as intended. My apologies.

At Macworld Expo, Microsoft announced Office 2004 for the Mac. It will include a separate outliner called "Notebook," which looks alarmingly like the Circusponies and AquaMinds products. On the Windows side Microsoft has taken a completely different approach, offering—as a separate $200 product—OneNote, a freeform sketchpad that includes the most rudimentary of outliners. We'll report on Microsoft Notebook as details emerge.

In my listing of to-do list managers last month, I somehow overlooked Life Balance, an interesting task management system that uses the outline paradigm and syncs with a Palm version.

The outliners keep coming! Check out the just released 0.9 beta for the newcomer FO, which has some unique and interesting features.

Also, in discussing columns in previous articles, I failed to mention that the donationware MyMind supports columns. Sorry.

Next month is the very ambitious survey of "legacy" outliners. If you have something to contribute or suggest, please message me privately.

Part 2: Text and Language

Last month, we took a look at the reasons why it's important to think about Web accessibility: as well as making life easier for the disabled, we can make a better site all-round. This time, we'll be doing something about it—by looking at how we can improve the way we use text and language on our Web sites.

Text?!

Yes, text. It's undoubtedly the most accessible format on the Web: it can be spoken aloud, easily resized, copied and pasted, translated, spidered by Web search engines, and even converted into Braille.

However, that doesn't give you an excuse to slack off, because the way you present your textual content can have some serious impact on the accessibility of your page. Even though text will probably make up the bulk of your site's content, it can often be overlooked in the rush to get the graphics down pat, link your pages properly, and get the site working in a bunch of different browsers.

The good news, of course, is that text is easy to manipulate—much easier than ripping the guts out of your layout or color scheme. That means any accessibility issues with your text will be reasonably easy to fix, and it's a good place for us to start.

Who Benefits?

When it comes to accessibility and text, everyone—and I do mean *everyone*—benefits from some attention to the way you present your text. A lot of these tips improve your site's general usability. From an accessibility standpoint, however, some particular groups are worth thinking about:

- Visually impaired users will often have trouble with reading text in general, and reading it on a computer screen can make it even harder. There's no reason to put extra barriers in their way with sloppy writing and difficult presentation.

- People with a cognitive disability have trouble with mental tasks, and often find text content to be difficult. The same is sometimes true of people with conditions like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. These conditions can affect a reader's comprehension of the text and their ability to concentrate. Your writing style and presentation are both important here as well.

  Note: People with cognitive disabilities can get a great deal of benefit from using graphics, multimedia, or other non-text content. However, this time we'll be concentrating on text.

- It really is the *World* Wide Web. It's likely that some of your visitors aren't native speakers of your language, and their non-native vocabulary isn't necessarily up to scratch. Simpler writing makes it easier for you to get your message across.

- Don't forget about kids! While youth is not a disability, children don't generally have adult reading skills or vocabularies, and there's not a lot they can do about it for now. Like people who don't speak your language, simpler writing means that they can spend more time reading, and less time checking dictionaries.

Able readers will benefit too:

- Usability expert Jakob Nielsen found that most readers will scan a page, rather than actually read it all the way through. Simpler writing and clearly presented text mean that it's easier for people to get to the meat of your writing, without being distracted by the trimmings.

- Nobody likes waffle. Many people find technical jargon, legalese, or marketing fluff to be confusing or even intimidating. Clearer writing makes your readers feel a lot more comfortable when using your site.

- There's usually something else competing for your readers' attention: phones ringing, new mail icons blinking, other browser windows open, and so on. Attention spans are short. If you can get your message across quickly and clearly, it won't be lost in the noise.

Keep It Simple

Have you ever read something like this?

We are currently in the process of consolidating our product range to ensure that the products that we stock are indicative of our brand aspirations. As part of our range consolidation we have also decided to revisit our supplier list and employ a more intelligent system for stock acquisition. As a result of the above certain product lines are now unavailable through jungle.com, whilst potentially remaining available from more mainstream suppliers.

Uh…*what?*

This horrible mangling of the English language comes courtesy of the Plain English Campaign's Golden Bull Awards. Somebody sent a question to online retailer jungle.com, asking whether they still sold blank CDs, and this was the response. A short, sharp "No" would have been rude, but at least it wouldn't make your eyes cross.

When you're writing for the Web—or anywhere else, for that matter—you should try to use the clearest and simplest language possible. It's a good idea for a number of reasons, but from an accessibility viewpoint this will ensure that your writing doesn't compound any other problems that your readers may have. And for those keeping score at home, using the clearest and simplest language is one of the Priority One checkpoints for the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Guidelines.

Clear and simple language doesn't mean that you ought to "dumb it down" to first-grade level: the language you need to use also relies a lot on your audience and the text's purpose. For example, if you're the webmaster of a meteorology site, you can safely assume that a visitor reading an analysis of recent climate data will be someone who is already familiar with meteorology. There's a good chance that they already know about terms like "Kelvin wave" and "positive anomaly," so it's fair to go right ahead and use them. However, people who just want to see their local weather forecast will be more comfortable with everyday terms like "unusually strong winds" or "scattered showers."

Practical Tips
The following pointers can help you keep your writing simple, clear, and effective.

- Keep your sentences short—15–20 words is about as long as a sentence should get. It can be hard to do this when you're trying to explain a complicated idea—use appropriate punctuation (like those dashes) to help turn long sentences into more manageable chunks.

- Stick to one concept or idea per paragraph. If you find that you're writing about two different things in a single paragraph, it's probably time to break them up.

- Choose common words whenever you can. This is of particular benefit to people with a reading or learning disability, who have to work harder to read your text.

- Try to avoid jargon and other "special" words as often as possible. If it's necessary to use them, define them someplace in the document—either with a glossary, or the first time you use them.

- If you're using acronyms or abbreviations, write them in full the first time you use them:

  About This Particular Macintosh (ATPM) is a Web zine about…

There's also a pair of HTML tags that can help: `<acronym>` and `<abbr>`, respectively. When you use an acronym, such as XHTML, you can mark it with the `<acronym>` tag:

  <acronym title="World Wide Web Consortium">W3C</acronym>

Most browsers will show a marked acronym with a dotted underline. When you hover the mouse cursor over the word, the expanded version appears as a tooltip.

Broken Browser Alert: Although `<abbr>` is the better choice for abbreviations, Internet Explorer doesn't support it. And that still doesn't give you an excuse to slack off: write them out in full.

- Use active, rather than passive verbs—for example:

  Jack redesigned the Web site.

instead of:

> The Web site was redesigned by Jack.

They're shorter and more direct, which aids in comprehension. (Not sure about the difference? Check out the [Online Writing Lab](.).)

- When you speak about actions, try to use direct instructions. This is especially important for link text—ideally, a link should make sense when read out of context.

> More information can be found at example.com.

That's nice, but:

> Find out more at example.com.

is much easier to read.

- The easiest way to check your work for simplicity is to ask someone to read it for you, and preferably someone who isn't an expert on what you're writing about. When you've spent hours preparing your writing, you're probably too close to the action. No friends? Well, try leaving the work alone for a little while and go do something else. Come back and read it with a fresh perspective.

Keep It Organized

The way you structure your text can have a significant impact on accessibility as well. Headings, lists, paragraph breaks, and good use of white space all contribute to an easier time on the Web. Using these techniques can help break up your text into smaller parts.

What's more, using the correct HTML structure for your text elements can be of great benefit to both you and your readers. It's very noticeable for people who use a screen reader such as [Freedom Scientific's JAWS](), which announces the presence of a heading, tells the user when they are reading a list, and more. To do this, it relies on the structure of the page.

Headings

Using headings and subheadings can be a tremendous aid to accessibility. Headings make it clear where each section of your page begins and ends, making it easier for visually-impaired people to identify each section, and simplifying the process for people who have trouble with reading.

Able readers will also find it easier to skim through the content to pick out the parts they're interested in reading. Search engines are paying attention, too—many will view keywords in your headings to be more prominent than keywords in the rest of your page.

Ideally, headings will be larger, bolder, colored, or a combination of all three. Use short, meaningful headings that accurately describe the text beneath them.

In HTML, the `<h1>` through to `<h6>` tags are used to mark headings of varying levels. A visual browser's default rendering of a heading is pretty dry, but you can spice it up with cascading stylesheets (CSS). For example, using this piece of CSS would make each instance of a `<h2>` tagged heading bold, large, dark red, and set in Helvetica.

```
h2 {
font-size: large;
font-family: Helvetica, Arial, Geneva, sans-serif;
font-weight: bold;
background-color: #fff;
color: #900
}
```

If you like to use images as headings, that's fine too—they can go inside heading tags. Don't forget to give the heading images a meaningful "alt" attribute, though.

```
<h2><img src="/images/whatsnew.gif" height="40" width="120" alt="What's New" /></h2>
```

Paragraphs

The best way to present paragraphs on a screen is to separate them with blank space. You'll notice that we've done that here at ATPM, on both the Web site and in the screen PDF version. It's harder to read large amounts of text on a computer screen, and breaking up your text helps a great deal.

The "right" way to present a paragraph in HTML is to use the `<p>` tag, like so:

```
<p>
Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet landed at Port Jackson in the new colony
of New South Wales on 26 January 1788. Until the American War of Independence,
Britain had sent convicts to America. American independence ended the practice and
the British prisons and prison hulks were full to overflowing. The island continent
at the end of the world seemed a perfect place to send them.
</p>
```

It's common to find people using a pair of linebreak tags—`<br>` or `<br />`—to separate paragraphs instead of the "real" paragraph tag. While this looks similar to the space you see in a `<p>`-marked paragraph, it doesn't really describe what the text *is*. Keep in mind that JAWS relies on structure to make navigation easier.

Lists

Lists should be used when you're presenting a group of items. Again, the visual clue of the list items' markers—bullets, numerals or symbols—makes it easier to identify each part of the list. Screen reader users will be able to tell it's a list, even if they can't see those symbols. For example, JAWS will announce that a list is beginning and ending as it reads the list to the user. It can also tell them at a "glance," as it were, how many items are in the list.

HTML provides a way to construct three kinds of lists: unordered, ordered, and definition. In visual browsers, unordered lists use a symbol like a bullet or square to mark each item. Ordered lists use a numeral or letter to mark each item. Definition lists are handy for terms and their definitions—you can use them to more accurately mark up a glossary, for instance.

It's difficult to give a good and brief example of just how much you can do with HTML lists. For a great explanation on how HTML lists work, check out the W3Schools' detailed examples of lists.

White Space

White space is the term used for margins, padding, and other "blank" bits of the page. Good use of white space can be extremely helpful to people with a cognitive disability, who often find that a "crowded" page makes it much harder to concentrate on the text.

Reduce some of the clutter by adding margins to your text. How you do this depends on the way you've constructed your page: if the text is in a table, you could add a generous padding to the table's cells. If you construct table-free layouts with CSS, you can add padding or margin to the text or its surrounding container.

Increasing the line height (line spacing) of your text can often help as well. There's no particularly easy way to do this in plain old HTML, but adding some CSS means you can adjust the line height of your text.

```
body {
line-height: 180%;
}
```

What About Type and Color?

We'll talk more about type and color in a later article, but the general guidelines for type are these:

- Using high-contrast text, such as a dark text color on a pale background, can make a significant difference. Higher contrast means that the words stand out more clearly, which is crucial for visually-impaired readers. It also makes things easier for some people with a cognitive disability.

- Limit your fonts to one or two choices. A page that uses seven different fonts can be extremely confusing, not to mention cheesy.

- If you're using CSS on your page, relative font sizes like percentages or keywords are more flexible than absolute pixel- or point-based ones. (If you're not using CSS, what's keeping you?) Relative font sizes are calculated according to the preference set in the Web browser: if a reader has set their browser default size to "larger," they expect larger text. Don't stomp on their preference, because it's probably there for a good reason.

  Broken Browser Alert: It gets worse for the 80% of users who browse with Internet Explorer for Windows. If they go to a page with tiny, absolutely-sized text and try to use the View menu to enlarge it, Internet Explorer does absolutely nothing. What a pain.

If all this relative-versus-absolute stuff is gobbledygook to you, there's [a great explanation at Max Design](#).

Again, we'll be covering this in more detail later on.

Where to Start

So now you know what to do: now, where to start?

You really don't have to rewrite every single page on your site right now, unless you've got nothing better to do all weekend. The easiest place to start is by looking at whatever you're working on at the moment. If you're adding new text content to your site some time in the near future, try to incorporate some of these techniques for making your site easier to read.

What you *should* think about changing soon are important and often-used parts of your site. Now is the time to look at them and see if you can't improve their textual content. If you have any of the following, these are particularly useful:

- your "home" (index) page
- the instructions for your search engine
- Frequently Asked Questions or help pages
- product support information
- contact details for you or your company
- your privacy policy

Yeah, I even said privacy policy. Privacy policies are often filled with legalese and technical jargon, but it *is* important to make sure that your readers understand it—disabled or not. Even lawyers and engineers can write like humans when they try.

Further Reading

[Last month's links](#) are still useful for finding information about the best ways to use text. However, these resources provide more specific discussions about text, language, and disabilities.

The Plain English Campaign has [free guides and advice](#) on how to use simple, plain English. (If you aren't writing in English, don't be put off—the principles are still sound.)

Jakob Nielsen's collection of tips on writing for the Web is packed with goodies, including before-and-after examples of improved text.

WebAIM has a section devoted to cognitive disabilities and the difficulties that people can encounter when your content isn't clear. For a great example of what this can be like, do the origami cup activity and see how you fare.

The International Dyslexia Association discusses the effect of dyslexia and related conditions. While they don't seem to have a lot of discussion about dyslexia and the Web, there's a wealth of information about what it is and how it affects people.

Aphasia is a condition that occurs after brain damage or stroke, and affects a person's use of language—speaking, writing, or reading. The National Aphasia Association in the United States provides information about this condition and its effects.

Panther Meets NTFS

Regular readers of this column know that I have been an avid Mac user since System 7 and the LC II. I have even used a few System 6 machines. Unfortunately, I have always attended schools or worked in settings where Mac users were in the minority. That has meant finding ways to make whatever Mac I was using read PC files. In those days, reading MS-DOS disks often required third-party software.

In the 20-year history of the Mac, things have improved considerably. Making use of PC data has gotten easier with each succeeding incarnation of the operating system. By the time Mac OS 9 came along, basic file transfer between the Mac and PC had gotten a lot easier. The OS could read FAT 32–formatted MS-DOS disks and major programs such as Photoshop and Microsoft Office were using many of the same file formats on both platforms. If you had comparable versions of the same program, reading files could be accomplished relatively easily and with minimal loss of data or formatting changes.

All of these changes were great, and those of us who worked in cross-platform environments appreciated all the improvements, but there was still work to be done. You could read FAT 32 volumes with relative ease, but the most recent versions of Windows use the NT File System (NTFS). For a while it appeared as though your options for reading this formatting scheme were setting up a network or go back to the days of third-party software to read PC disks. Well, if that were all there is to this story, I would not be wasting your time.

Normally, I would not worry about reading the NTFS format since my computer at work is still using FAT 32 and most of the data I transfer will fit on a floppy disk. The problem is that my wife's Windows XP box recently had a near-meltdown. We were left with an external NTFS-formatted drive with 11 GB of data. We did not want to plug the drive into the Windows box for fear that it might fall victim to whatever created the problem in the first place. What were we going to do?

Panther to the Rescue?

A few days before our problem developed, I was making my usual visit to MacOSXHints. If you have not been to that site, check it out. You will be amazed at the tidbits of information found there. During one of my forays there I found out that Panther systems can indeed mount NTFS drives natively.

As you can see from the collection of hints, reading NTFS-formatted drives under Panther is usually easy. Most users can simply plug the drive in question into their Mac and the drive mounts with no difficulty. There is one caveat: Panther mounts NTFS drives as read-only volumes. You will not have write access to the data.

Even though you cannot write new data to this drive, you can move data from that drive to another drive on your Mac. Last month I told you about burning files over the network well as a backup plan, just in case something went wrong. I burned data from the NTFS drive to a DVD without using the network. If you are going to do this, make sure that you burn the DVD in a format that both the Mac and PC can understand. Someday you might want to put that data back on the Windows box.

Sometimes Things Go Wrong

I have tested Panther's ability to read NTFS drives under both 10.3.1 and 10.3.2. Before you count on it as the only means of salvaging your data, there are some things to keep in mind. The most common problems will usually occur while mounting the drive or while moving certain types of files.

Under some circumstances, Panther may not want to mount the NTFS drive properly. While I had no problems mounting an NTFS drive, other users have reported that Panther sometimes complains about not being able to recognize the drive. In this case, you will be given the option to initialize the drive.

In my testing, I did not have any difficulty getting Panther to mount an NTFS drive, but it did complain at times about file names. Under 10.3.1, I was able to mount the drive and copy files with no difficulty. Under 10.3.2 on a different Mac I got numerous complaints from the OS about file names that were too long or contained illegal characters. Both problems were most noticeable on a series of Favorites created by the PC version of Internet Explorer. The same hard drive and files were used during testing.

Hey, What About Jaguar?

Right about now those of you that have not yet migrated to Panther may be feeling a little left out. Well, do not give up just yet. Even without Panther installed, you may be able to read that annoying NTFS drive. The same hint that told me Panther could read NTFS drives also contained a comment from someone who reads NTFS drives under Jaguar.

I was unable to duplicate this feat under Jaguar during testing. The files would begin to copy and then stop when the process was partially completed. Sometimes the copy process stopped with the usual error message about illegal filenames. At other times, attempting this feat under 10.2.8 led to a kernel panic. In fairness, I must tell you that at about this time I was experiencing intermittent problems with my 10.2.8 installation. This may have affected the results. If you are running Jaguar and are having trouble getting NTFS support to work, check out a small program called NT FileSystem 1.0d2. I was unable to conduct a fair test of this program due to problems with my Jaguar installation, but other users have had success with it.

Closing Thoughts

As you can see from my experiences, some users are having good success reading the NT File System under Panther and Jaguar while other users are having more difficulty. When this works, it works well. When it does not work, I have experienced problems ranging from difficulty reading some file names to the occasional crash or kernel panic.

If you are going to try this with your system you might want to make your initial tests with data that you don't mind losing until you are sure that the process works. At no point did I lose any data while testing this tip, but why take that chance with irreplaceable information? It is also a good idea to conduct the testing with a stable system. I do not believe this process caused the instabilities that I experienced because the problems were only present in one of the two test systems.
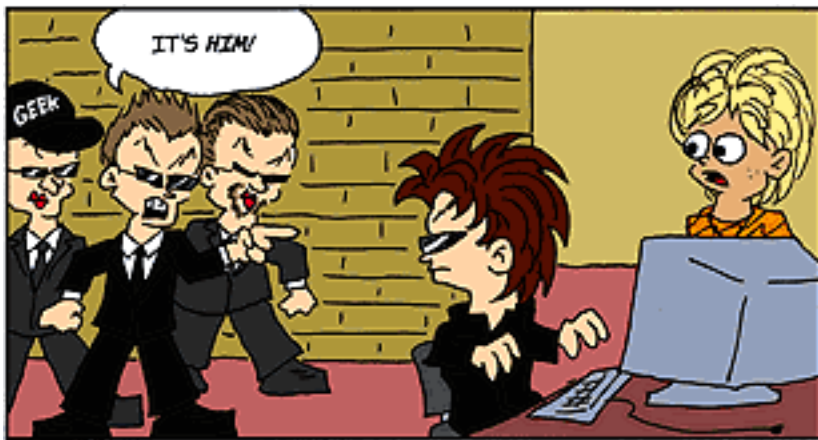
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Copyright © 2004 GMx, http://homepage.mac.com/gregmx.

Remembering Summer

Remembering Summer

This month's desktop pictures are from ATPM reader Dave Trautman:

> I've been a fan of the Desktop Pictures section of ATPM for a long time now and felt I should try and give something back.
>
> This year my part of the world experienced an outstanding turn of the colors which brought an end to a fabulous summer. These pictures represent a small collection of memories for me about what was one of the best summers in my lifetime here. The prairie provinces of Canada are well-known for our big sky. I've also included some close ups of things which say summer to me.
>
> I'm sure you must get all kinds of "snapshots" from readers. I just hope some of these appeal as useful desktop images. They were taken with a Fuji Finepix 3800 under a variety of conditions. This set of images were reduced from 2048x1536 using GraphicConverter for Mac OS X version 4.6.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the desktop pictures archives.

Downloading all the Pictures at Once

iCab and Interarchy (formerly Anarchie) can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once. In iCab, use the Download command to download "Get all files in same path." In Interarchy, use HTTP Mirror feature.

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

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

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

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

Mac OS 8.5–9.x

Go to the Appearance control panel. Click on the "Desktop" tab at the top of the window. Press the "Place Picture..." button in the bottom right corner, then select the desired image. By default, it will show you the images in the "Desktop Pictures" subfolder of your "Appearance" folder in the System Folder, however you can select images from anywhere on your hard disk.

After you select the desired image file and press "Choose," a preview will appear in the Appearance window. The "Position Automatically" selection is usually fine. You can play with the settings to see if you like the others better. You will see the result in the little preview screen.

Once you are satisfied with the selection, click on "Set Desktop" in the lower right corner of the window. That's it! Should you ever want to get rid of it, just go to the desktop settings again and press "Remove Picture."

Mac OS 8.0 and 8.1

Go to the "Desktop Patterns" control panel. Click on "Desktop Pictures" in the list on the left of the window, and follow steps similar to the ones above.

Random Desktop Pictures

If you drag a folder of pictures onto the miniature desktop in the Appearance or Desktop Pictures control panel, your Mac will choose one from the folder at random when it starts up.

DeskPicture

An alternative to Mac OS's Appearance control panel is Pierce Software's DeskPicture, reviewed in issue 5.10 and available for download.

Review: Cyborg 3D USB Gold

by Joe Kudrna, joek@wt.net

Developer: Saitek GmbH
Price: $30
Requirements: Mac with USB
Trial: None

ATPM RATINGS
VERY NICE

While the market for Macintosh gaming in general has steadily improved since the introduction of Mac OS X three years ago, the market for gaming peripherals seems to be in decline, with more hardware manufacturers dropping support for the Macintosh platform. When looking at joysticks for serious gameplay, one of the few remaining products available is Saitek's Cyborg 3D USB Gold.

The Cyborg 3D is a 4-axis joystick with features unique among its competitors, the most noticeable of which is its fully adjustable and configurable handgrip. The hand rest has four positions of elevation, and the thumb buttons can tilt and swivel for the most comfortable position for the user. The hand rest can also be flipped to the other side,

making this the only currently available joystick on the market for left-handers. The stick has a throttle lever at the back of the base, and very thoughtfully includes a hex head driver to adjust the position of the rests.

The Saitek Cyborg 3D USB Gold

The joystick's ten buttons are accompanied by one large finger trigger, which while solid is responsive to the touch. Facing you is its pointy cone-shaped 8-way hat switch, common on this type of joystick, with large buttons flanking the hat and a smaller one below it. These buttons are also responsive, but many will find it difficult to find some of the eight

positions of the hat. The other six buttons are on the base, four of which act as function keys. These buttons are nearly flush with the base, which makes them a little difficult to locate by touch alone.

Here you can see the "shift" button next to the throttle, and the driver in the hex screw used to adjust the hand rest.

Compatibility

Since the big migration to Mac OS X, the sad truth is that few products from the major joystick manufacturers (Logitech, Microsoft, and Thrustmaster) truly support the Macintosh. The Cyborg 3D joystick is no exception, in that Saitek does not provide any Macintosh driver software. Instead, the joystick falls back upon Apple's Human Interface Device protocols and InputSprockets. I do not know of any case where a game could not use the Cyborg; plug-and-play worked as expected. However, Saitek does not provide software to configure the buttons and set "macros," automated series of key presses. Saitek's Macintosh support site, to its credit, provides links to third-party software that can do this, and offers some of the best solutions available for fixing common joystick problems.

Performance

Even after ten months of both Mac and PC gameplay, the Cyborg 3D has proved solid and reliable, without requiring recalibration or maintenance for the most part. There has been no loss of control, nor has motion started to drift (often a result of wear and tear), despite some pretty rough handling. The stick's one flaw is a slight sticking when making small movements (due to the spring-loaded centering cone device), and the adjustable thumb button head not holding position. Fortunately, the latter can be easily fixed by tightening a loose hex screw (see photo), but it requires a driver smaller than the one provided.
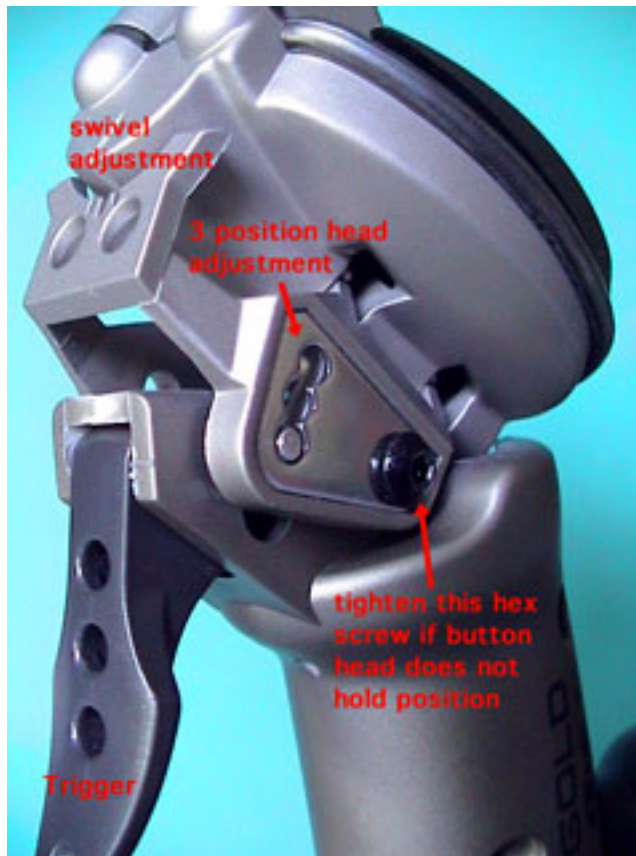
Button head, and the hex screw that may need tightening.

The throttle lever on the back has more friction than one would expect, but it is smooth, and the lever can also be repositioned to the left side. There are keyholes underneath for securely mounting to a base, but you need to supply your own screws and base. With its adjustable nature, this is one of the most comfortable joysticks ever manufactured, with the possible exception of Saitek's new Cyborg EVO.

The Competition

With CH Products completely dropping support for the Macintosh, and Thrustmaster and Microsoft heading in the same direction (both barely mention the Macintosh), the main competitors in this market are Saitek and Logitech. While MacAlly and other lesser-known brands offer low-end joysticks, the only serious competition to the Cyborg 3D is Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro, which retails for $40. The Extreme 3D Pro has a very nice button layout and features a more accessible throttle (for right-handed users, at least), but it lacks the adjustable hand rests found on the Cyborg 3D.

Buyer Beware

One dry winter day, I touched the Cyborg 3D with a fully electrostatically charged finger. The resulting shock not only made me jump, but also fried half of the stick's buttons and all Z-axis movement. My PowerBook suffered no ill effects, and I made a quick trip to the store for a replacement unit. While this incident couldn't be blamed on the stick, I learned my lesson: beware of static electricity!

Conclusion

The Cyborg 3D USB Gold clearly has room for improvement, namely the lack of support software, but for $30 it is a great joystick, narrowly beating Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro in terms of features. With Saitek's new Cyborg EVO destined to replace the Cyborg 3D, what may make the latter stick even more appealing is a possible price drop.

Review: iFire

by Andrew Kator, akator@atpm.com

Developer: Griffin Technology
Price: $40
Requirements: Apple Pro Speakers; computer, iPod, or other device with FireWire and 1/8" audio output (headphone) jack.

In recent years, Apple has included the Apple Pro Speakers with iMacs. These unobtrusive and compact speakers deliver clear sound, and because of their size make a great portable audio solution. Unfortunately, they require a special amplified port that can only be found on iMacs.

Griffin Technology has solved the problem with the iFire Apple Pro Speaker adapter. This device allows for iBook, PowerBook, and iPod users to use the Apple Pro Speakers with their devices. The iFire works by taking the audio from the headphone port and amplifying it using power from FireWire.

The iFire can be used with iBooks, PowerBooks, iPods, or any other device with audio output and FireWire.

Griffin includes the necessary cable that goes between the computer (or iPod) and the iFire, and the iFire itself is a compact package smaller than the Apple Pro Mouse. I had no problems setting up the iFire, and it requires no drivers or special software for use. Setup took less than a minute, including reading the three-step instruction sheet.

The iFire worked seamlessly with an iBook, and it was compact and easy to setup. The difference between the iBook's built-in speakers and the Apple Pro Speakers was remarkable, making the iBook more suitable as a stand-alone media system. The advantages are immediately obvious for those who need greater impact for presentations or a decent portable media solution. It should be noted that as with any FireWire-powered device, using the iFire with an iBook or PowerBook that is running off the battery drains the battery more quickly.

The iFire and included cable (shown alongside an Apple Desktop Mouse) is compact making it a perfect solution to use Apple Pro Speakers for portable audio.

A concern for some might be how the iFire's quality compares to the iMac's built-in amplification. To compare the output quality between the two, I played a CD through the Apple Pro Speakers using the iMac's built-in port, and then played the same tracks through the same iMac using the iFire to power the speakers. While this is an unscientific comparison, any major changes in distortion and frequency range should have been audible. A Miles Davis CD was used for the comparison because the CD offered uncompressed audio and the selection of music offered a wide frequency range with marked changes of instrumental emphasis and volume. There was no significant

difference between the iFire and the iMac's built-in Apple Pro Speaker output. The speakers sounded identical at the same volume levels (neither louder nor quieter with one or the other) and there was no noticeable difference in audio quality using the iFire.

Exactly as it is advertised, the iFire is an ideal solution for those who want to use their Apple Pro Speakers with other Macs or iPods. This makes the iFire and Apple Pro Speakers a good alternative for college students and those on the go who have space and portability considerations. For those who shelved their Apple Pro Speakers to use other speakers with their iMac, the iFire gives a reason to bring the unused equipment back into service.

Review: iView MediaPro 2.0.2
by Gregory Tetrault, gtetrault@atpm.com

Developer: iView Multimedia Ltd.
Price: $160 for downloaded or boxed version ($72 upgrade from iView MediaPro 1.5, $128 upgrade from iView Media or Roxio Toast, $128 sidegrade from a list of competing products)
Requirements: G3, Mac OS 9.1 or Mac OS X 10.1.
Trial: Fully featured (three weeks)

Note

I reviewed version 1.5.6 last year. This review focuses on the changes from the previous version.

Overview

iView MediaPro helps you organize and display a variety of file types: images, movies, sounds, fonts, illustrations, text files, and HTML pages. Files can be labeled, categorized, voice annotated, renamed, copied, or moved individually or in batches.

Installation

The download version is a disk image file that contains the iView MediaPro folder. The boxed version contains a CD with the same folder. Just drag the folder to the desired hard drive location. On first launch of the downloaded version, you will be presented with a registration window. Enter your license number or click the "Remind me Later" button to use MediaPro in demonstration mode.

New or Improved Features in iView MediaPro 2

MediaPro 2 supports drag-and-drop for importing, searching, annotating, and classifying media files. The Organize view displays all the possible organizational characteristics of the catalog. MediaPro 2 provides direct control of the file system (the nested folders that contain the images in a catalog). MediaPro supports individual and batch renaming of original media files. It can change file creators, replace desktop icons with image icons, put caption information into file comment fields, and embed thumbnails and ColorSync

profiles into image files. MediaPro 2 has a version control feature that works on image folders. It tracks all image changes and keeps a log of additions and subtractions from the designated folder.
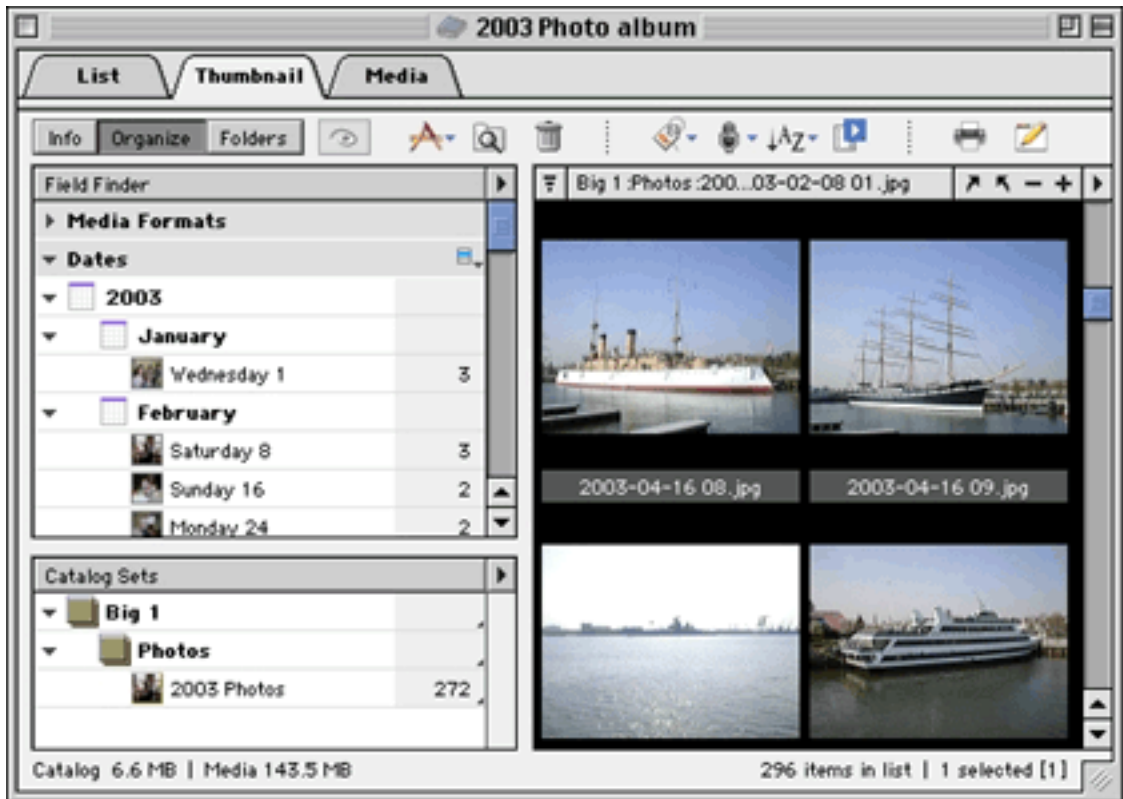

Organize View of Catalog

MediaPro 2 catalogs can contain 128,000 images. The compression algorithm was improved to reduce catalog size. Image importing, thumbnail creation, and catalog creation are faster.

New image editing features include more cropping options, red eye correction, precision rotation, image Auto Enhancement (adjusts saturation, brightness and contrast), and one-click enhancements (backlight, under and over exposure, and color cast remove bias). The enhancement features are based on Minolta Image Enhancing Technologies.

Selected images in a catalog can be used to create custom, high-resolution PDF files with any size or layout. Custom Web pages can be produced, and MediaPro 2 contains better HTML code and more theme templates.
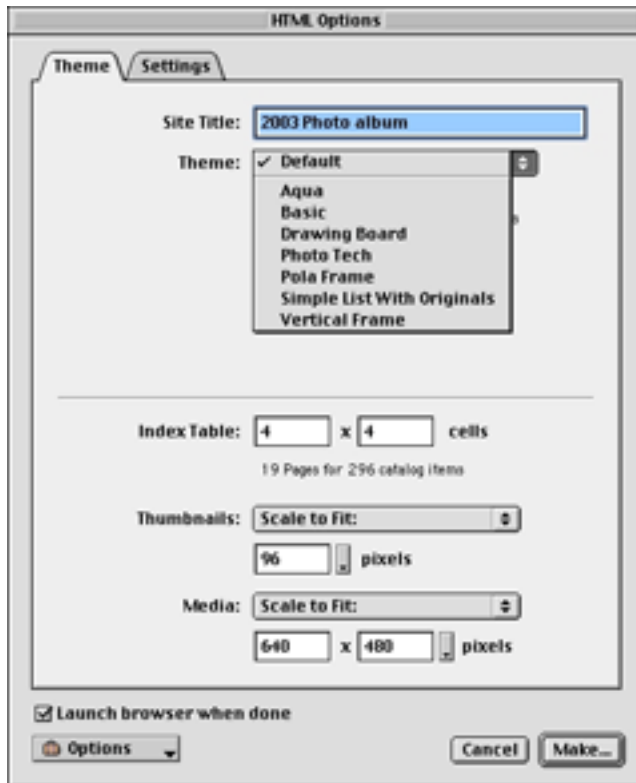
Web Page Creation Options

Slideshow customization options are available with global and individual timings, layout grids, more transitions, and support for multiple audio files throughout the slideshow. To improve slideshow speed, images can be batch-edited to fit common screen sizes and resolutions. Slideshows (including transitions, audio, and file name menus) can be saved as QuickTime movies.

MediaPro 2 added a playlist feature that sequentially plays all the media in a catalog. This allows you to play through a catalog of audio files or movies. It also acts like a simple slideshow for displaying images or fonts in a catalog.


Font Display in MediaPro

MediaPro 2 makes use of QuickTime, rather than internal graphics routines, for many functions. This improved the stability of the application, but rendered MediaPro 2 incompatible with OS 8.

Problems, Bugs, and Omissions

I found Media Pro 2 to be remarkably stable under both OS 9 and OS X. It worked well even when many applications were running. My only complaint is that MediaPro 2 hogged too much CPU time when working in the background on lengthy tasks such as importing a folder of images or creating Web pages.

Documentation

The mediocre documentation of MediaPro did not improve with this version. The application comes with an 80-page user manual (available as a PDF file in the downloaded version). The PDF user manual has bookmark links, but no links within the body of the manual. Neither the PDF nor the printed manual has an index. The user manual adequately describes most features of iView MediaPro. Again, the AppleScript section is very skimpy (only one page). The manual fails to list the AppleScript dictionary changes from version 1.5, though it warns users that older scripts may need to be amended.
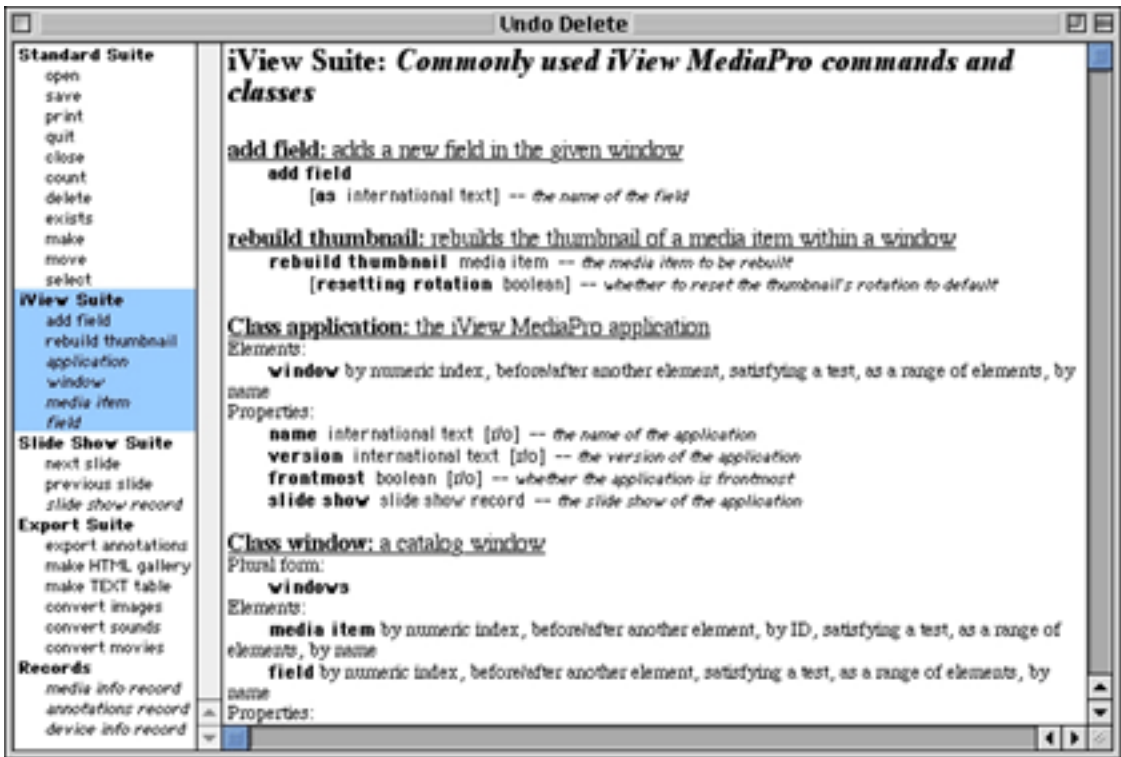
Part of MediaPro 2's AppleScript Dictionary

Technical Support

The iView Web site support area contains tutorials, frequently asked questions, a users forum, a query submission form, and a suggestion form. There is no telephone, fax, or live chat room support.

Alternatives

Users who may not need all the features of MediaPro might prefer the much less expensive ($30) iView Media. If the additional features of MediaPro are desired at a later time, upgrading is seamless. (And, through a strange quirk in iView Multimedia's pricing scheme, you will save $2 by first buying iView Media and then upgrading to MediaPro.)

Users who import many photos from high resolution digital cameras may prefer Photo Mechanic due to its fast importing and cataloging and features designed for professional photographers.

Summary

I gave iView MediaPro 1.5 a "Very Nice" rating last year. MediaPro 2.0.2 is more stable and adds some useful features, but its price is substantially greater ($160 vs. $90). I therefore give MediaPro 2 the same "Very Nice" rating.

Review: Greppie 1.0.1

by Eric Blair, eblair@atpm.com

Developer: Mole 6E23 Software
Price: $15
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.1.5
Trial: Fully-featured (30 days or 30 launches)

Back in 2002, I talked about graphical wrapper applications that attempt to make Unix command-line tools more accessible to Mac users who prefer to avoid the command-line whenever possible. Specifically, I was reviewing AquaGrep, a wrapper around the grep tool.

This month, I'm looking at Greppie, another grep wrapper. Unlike AquaGrep, Greppie goes beyond just passing data to grep and blindly displaying the result; it attempts to make searching with grep like using most other Macintosh search tools.

Searching

The main Greppie search interface is fairly straightforward. There is a text field at the top where you can enter your search terms, and a list box at the bottom for listing the files and folders you want to search.
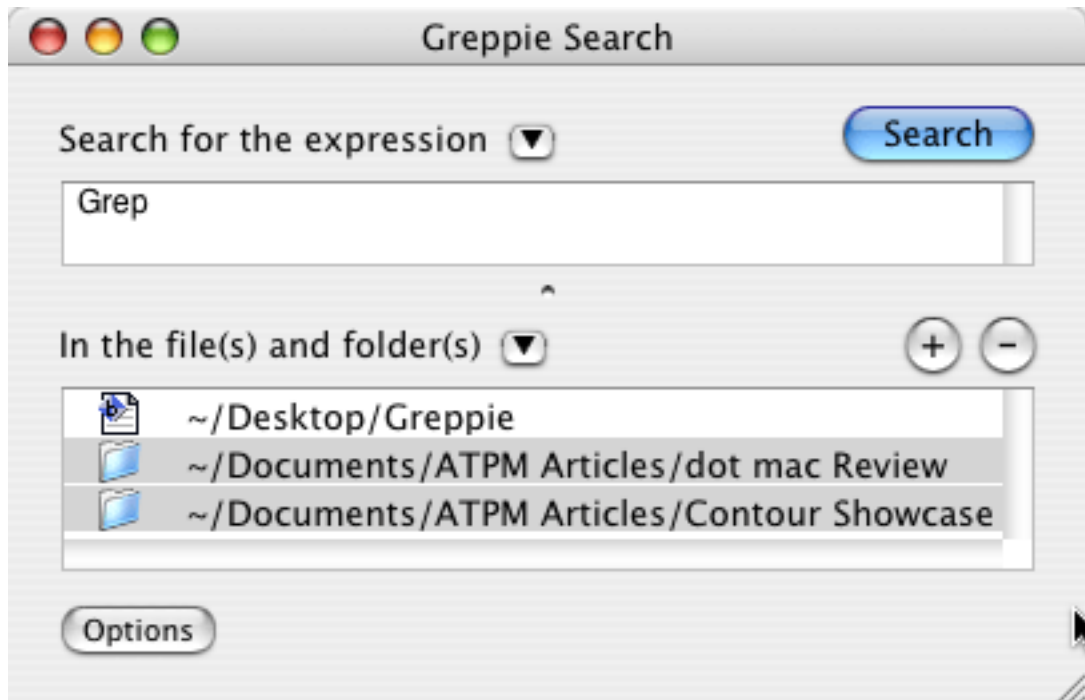
The Greppie search interface.

Greppie offers five options for modifying the searches. You can search nested directories, toggle case sensitivity, use regular expressions, search non-text files, and show non-matching files.

Unfortunately, the search option settings have no impact on the display of the file and folder list. For instance, it would be nice if turning off the "Search non-text files" option grayed out non-text files in the file and folder list.

Greppie offers two different ways to save old searches. The last 10 searches, complete with their option settings, are automatically saved. The search is only saved, though, if the search term is different. Simply changing the search option is not enough to trigger a save.

Also, you can permanently save any search.

The same saving options apply to the file and folder list—the last 10 sets of search locations are saved, as are any sets specifically saved by the user.

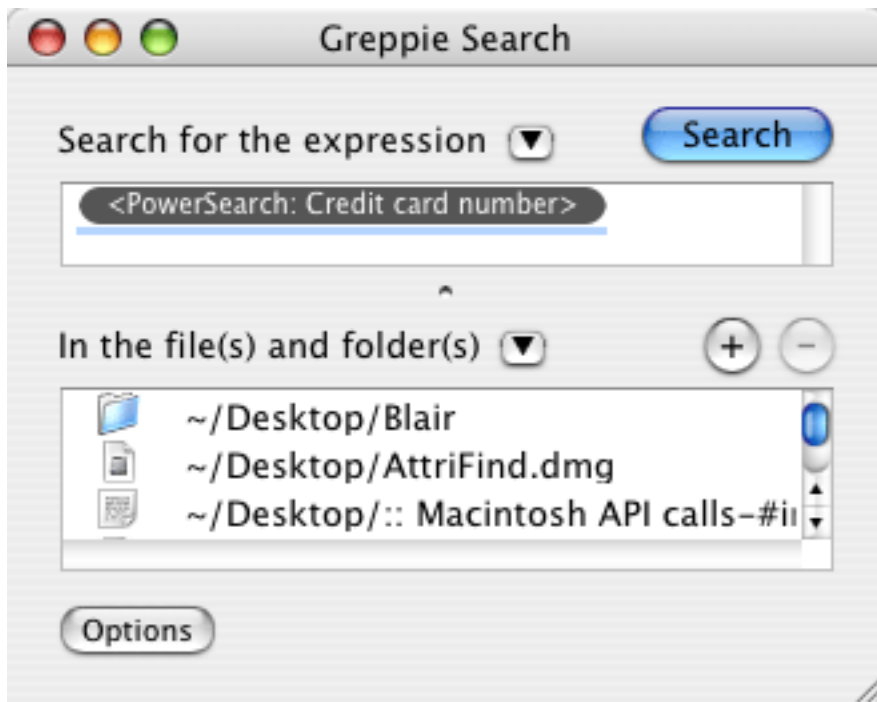## PowerSearch

One of Greppie's useful features is the PowerSearch palette. PowerSearches are predefined regular expressions for common search terms.
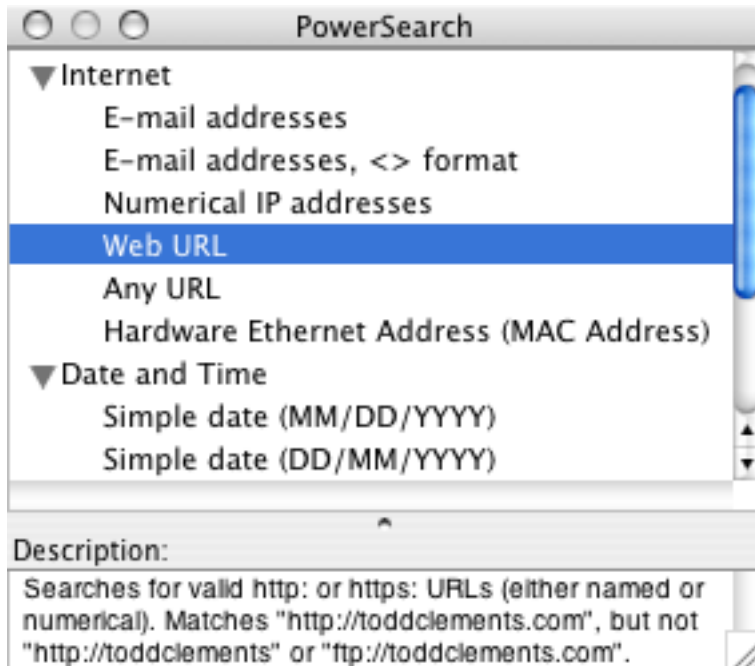
Some of the predefined searches that are available in Greppie.

There are 17 PowerSearches included in Greppie organized into seven different categories: Text, Internet, Date and Time, Phone Numbers, Miscellaneous, Financial, and International.

PowerSearches are not simply text snippets; they are complete searches with their own sets of options. Also, instead of showing up as a complex regular expression in the search text field, each PowerSearch shows up as an icon, although this feature can be disabled.

A PowerSearch as an icon.

The upside of storing PowerSearches as full searches is that you will never forget to turn on the regular expression option before running a search. The downside is that you cannot mix and match multiple PowerSearches to form more complex searches.

There is also an eighth category in the PowerSearch palette—Saved Searches. As the name implies, these are the searches you saved in the Search window. However, it appears that only the options are preserved when you access a saved search from the PowerSearch menu. If you are displaying PowerSearches as icons, the saved search will appear as an icon. If you try to preform a search, though, you receive an error that there is no search term.

It seems as though saved searches should include the search text when accessed through the PowerSearch palette. Another option would be to disable the Search button when either the search field or the file and folder list is empty.

Results

The Search Results window displays a list of the files containing the search term and the number of times the search term appears in the given file. Each text file in the result list can be expanded to show the lines in the file containing the search term.
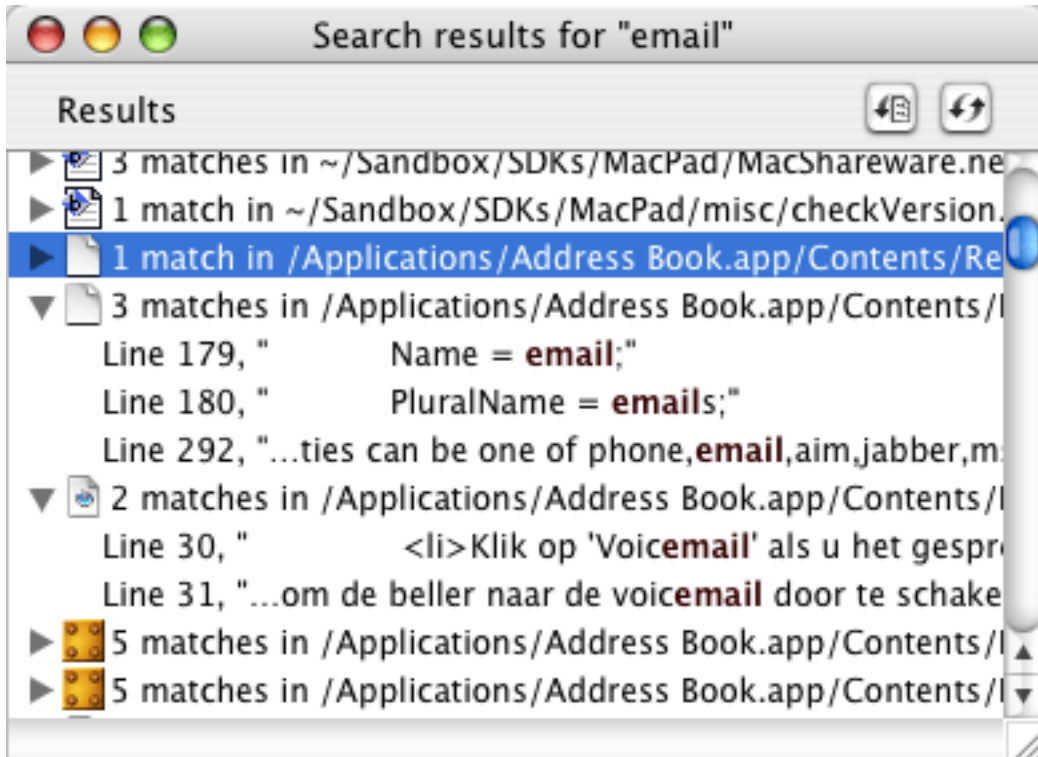
"email" is apparently a very common term today.

Double-clicking on an entry in the result list opens the file using appropriate application. There doesn't appear to be any way to override this so, for instance, you could open a text file with BBEdit instead of TextEdit. Also, you cannot drag and drop entries from the result list to application icons.

Conclusion

It seems like a lot of wrapper applications are simply pretty faces on command-line tools that do not add any additional value. Greppie goes beyond these basics by adding features like PowerSearches and the ability to search multiple locations at the same time. However, there are still some rough edges and shortcomings that prevent Greppie from living up to its full potential.

Review: Old Fart's Guide to the Mac 2nd Ed. (book)

by Kirk McElhearn, kmcelhearn@atpm.com

Author: Aaron Rosenzweig
Publisher: Cocoa Nuts, 2004
Price: $30
Trial: None

The idea of this book is interesting: a book about Macs for people who "didn't grow up with them, paying particular interest to those of us who are over fifty years young." But the author himself is not "over fifty years young," and, while it may be the thought that counts, he just doesn't deliver on his promise.

First, consider the market: you may be a "senior," over fifty, and you want to buy a computer. You may have recently retired, and want to keep in touch with your children and grandchildren, pursue a hobby, or just learn something new. Or if you are younger, you might want to get a Mac for your parents or grandparents, for the same reason. You want to exchange e-mail, send digital photos and even videos of the kids, use iChat for audio chats to keep the phone bills down, and use the computer as a communication device.

You need a book that takes users from the first steps through to more complex tasks, focusing specifically on the things they want to do with the computer: e-mail, Web browsing, digital photos, and more. Considering the needs and usages of these users should be the first step in creating a book designed for such a specific market.

Novice users need a lot of hand-holding, and also need a lot of pictures and screen shots to help them understand. In this book, the tone of the writing is appropriate, but additional help through graphics is sadly absent. For example, take a section on pointing devices in the chapter entitled "What is a Computer?" The author describes what a mouse is, which is fine, since every desktop computer comes with one, but then goes on to talk about trackballs, trackpads, and tablets. Yet not a single graphic is used to help the reader understand what he's talking about. The old cliché "a picture is worth a thousand words," is applicable here. Rather than use a graphic to demonstrate what he is talking about, the author says:

Imagine taking the mouse and turning it upside down, thus exposing the ball. Now envision using your index finger to move the ball, thus directly moving the pointer on the screen. This, in essence, is what a trackball is.

Think how much more effective such an explanation would be with a picture. The author has led his readers to imagine, rather than see, and readers may be confused.

This lack of graphics and screen shots is present throughout the book. Where other books for beginners often use too many screen shots, this one fails by not using enough. And the ones it contains are not very well printed; in addition to the actual printing quality, the paper is not opaque enough, and when there are graphics on both sides of a page they get in the way of each other.

Another aid to the novice is consistent terminology, which is a problem with this book. The author is not consistent in his use of terminology, and, while this is not a major problem, is certainly something to be avoided. When users go to the Apple Help Center and find different terminology, they get confused. The author says, for example, that to change the language of the interface you go to the International "settings panel." And on the next page, this is called a "preferences panel." Apple's terminology for this is "preference pane," and you'll find this used throughout the help. It's bad enough to confuse the reader by giving two names for something within the same section, but it's even worse when both of these names are non-standard.

But all this pales in comparison with the "incorrect" cover text, which says, "Covers OS 10.3 Panther." First, that should be "Mac OS X 10.3," but even worse is the fact that the Panther section is merely an add-on at the back of the book. Nowhere in the many introductions or prefaces does the author point this out, and a user who opens the book to learn how to use their brand new Mac running Panther will be confused at best. All the Finder windows, and many of the preference panes, are different from what is shown and described in the book. Add to that the occasional OS 9 screen shot, and users must be truly confused by what they see.

In essence, this is a "second edition" of a book published in 2002, after the release of Jaguar, with no update other than the final chapter on Panther. One can see, for example, on page 276, the photo of an iPod, which is one of the previous generation models. The prices and capacities mentioned are incorrect as well; this is sloppy work, and one should never update a book without updating everything.

Nevertheless, the writing is good, and the way the author approaches the subject is appropriate for the over-50 market. But this book fails because there was clearly no editor—writing computer books calls for a whole team of professionals, from writer to editor, from layout artist to designer. This book, published by a small press, which seems to be made up essentially of the author and his wife, suffers from a lack of professionalism. The writing is good enough for this to have been a much better book, but the lack of understanding of just what makes a good computer book leads to confusion and is ultimately disappointing.

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FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

What Is ATPM?

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

Are You Looking for New Staff Members?

We currently need several **Contributing Editors**. Please contact us if you're interested.

How Can I Subscribe to ATPM?

Visit the subscriptions page.

Which Format Is Best for Me?

The **Online Webzine** edition is for people who want to view ATPM in their Web browser, while connected to the Internet. It provides sharp text, lots of navigation options, and live links to ATPM back issues and other Web pages. You can use Sherlock to search all of the online issues at once.

The **Offline Webzine** is a HTML version of ATPM that is formatted for viewing offline and made available in a StuffIt archive to reduce file size. The graphics, content, and navigation elements are the same as with the Online Webzine, but you can view it without being connected to the Internet. It requires a Web browser.

The **Print PDF** edition is saved in Adobe Acrobat format. It has a two-column layout with smaller text and higher-resolution graphics that are optimized for printing. It may be viewed online in a browser, or downloaded and viewed in Adobe's free Acrobat Reader on Macintosh or Windows. PDFs may be magnified to any size and searched with ease.

The **Screen PDF** edition is also saved in Adobe Acrobat format. It's a one-column layout with larger text that's optimized for reading on-screen. It may be viewed online in a browser, or downloaded and viewed in Adobe's free Acrobat Reader on Macintosh or Windows. PDFs may be magnified to any size and searched with ease.

What Are Some Tips for Viewing PDFs?

- You can download Adobe Acrobat Reader for free. If you have a Power Macintosh, Acrobat Reader 5 has better quality and performance. ATPM is also compatible with Acrobat Reader 3, for those with 680x0 Macs.
- You can zoom the PDF to full window width and scroll through articles simply by single-clicking anywhere in the article text (except underlined links).
- You can quickly navigate between articles using the bookmarks pane at the left of the main viewing window.
- For best results on small screens, be sure to hide the bookmarks pane; that way you'll be able to see the entire page width at 100%.
- Try turning Font Smoothing on and off in Acrobat Reader's preferences to see which setting you prefer.
- All blue-underlined links are clickable.
- You can hold down option while hovering over a link to see where it will lead.
- For best results, turn off Acrobat's "Fit to Page" option before printing.

Why Are Some Links Double-Underlined?

In the PDF editions of ATPM, links that are double-underlined lead to other pages in the same PDF. Links that are single-underlined will open in your Web browser.

What If I Get Errors Decoding ATPM?

ATPM and MacFixIt readers have reported problems decoding MacBinary files using early versions of StuffIt Expander 5.x. If you encounter problems decoding ATPM, we recommend upgrading to StuffIt Expander 5.1.4 or later.

How Can I Submit Cover Art?

We enjoy the opportunity to display new, original cover art every month. We're also very proud of the people who have come forward to offer us cover art for each issue. If you're a Macintosh artist and interested in preparing a cover for ATPM, please e-mail us. The way

the process works is pretty simple. As soon as we have a topic or theme for the upcoming issue we let you know about it. Then, it's up to you. We do not pay for cover art but we are an international publication with a broad readership and we give appropriate credit alongside your work. There's space for an e-mail address and a Web page URL, too. Write to editor@atpm.com for more information.

How Can I Send a Letter to the Editor?

Got a comment about an article that you read in ATPM? Is there something you'd like us to write about in a future issue? We'd love to hear from you. Send your e-mail to editor@atpm.com. We often publish the e-mail that comes our way.

Do You Answer Technical Support Questions?

Of course. E-mail our Help Department at help@atpm.com.

How Can I Contribute to ATPM?

There are several sections of ATPM to which readers frequently contribute:

Segments: Slices from the Macintosh Life

This is one of our most successful spaces and one of our favorite places. We think of it as kind of the ATPM "guest room." This is where we will publish that sentimental Macintosh story that you promised yourself you would one day write. It's that special place in ATPM that's specifically designated for your stories. We'd really like to hear from you. Several Segments contributors have gone on to become ATPM columnists. Send your stuff to editor@atpm.com.

Hardware and Software Reviews

ATPM publishes hardware and software reviews. However, we do things in a rather unique way. Techno-jargon can be useful to engineers but is not always a help to most Mac users. We like reviews that inform our readers about how a particular piece of hardware or software will help their Macintosh lives. We want them to know what works, how it may help them in their work, and how enthusiastic they are about recommending it to others. If you have a new piece of hardware or software that you'd like to review, contact our reviews editor at reviews@atpm.com for more information.

Shareware Reviews

Most of us have been there; we find that special piece of shareware that significantly improves the quality our Macintosh life and we wonder why the entire world hasn't heard about it. Now here's the chance to tell them! Simply let us know by writing up a short review for our shareware section. Send your reviews to reviews@atpm.com.

Which Products Have You Reviewed?

Check our reviews index for the complete list.

What is Your Rating Scale?

ATPM uses the following ratings (in order from best to worst): Excellent, Very Nice, Good, Okay, Rotten.

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