ATPM

You Tube and Apple tv are getting hitched!

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

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[1]http://www.atpm.com/about/support.shtml

Welcome

Welcome to the June issue of *About This Particular Macintosh*. This issue includes:

MacMuser: Who Needs an iPod?
Mark Tennent ponders if the day of the iPod has passed—at least for him.

MacMuser: One of Leopard's Hot Spots
Mark Tennent shares thoughts about Apple's answer to the Windows Messenger Whiteboard—iChat Theater.

Next Actions: What Do You Do With a Full Inbox?
Continuing his series, Ed Eubanks, Jr. reveals how to process the items in the Inbox that have been gathered in the collection stage.

Photoshop For the Curious: Conjuring Speech/Thought Bubbles
Forget those novelty crack-n-peel labels. In just moments, you can create your own speech and thought bubbles on your digital photos.

Desktop Pictures: Easter Island
Reader James Craig is spending a year on photo assignment at Easter Island. Finally obtaining Internet access, James decided to share some images for this month's desktop pictures.

Cartoon: Cortland
Cortland and Angie are at odds on what to do for a night on the town, and the latter ends up babysitting the office with Todd. Our favorite skull-wearing hacker introduces our fare damsel to the wonders of *ahem* online movies, while the two take a walk on the wild side with the contents of the office fridge. We hope they don't encounter any ROUSes behind the old Pepsi.

Review: Aluminum Desktop Stand
A laptop stand that improves on past designs, but not enough.

Review: Hacking the Cable Modem
Not for the faint of heart, if you scoff at "this will void your warranty" warnings and almost always have a soldering iron within reach, this book about cable modem hacking may be for you.

Review: Live Interior 3D 1.0.3
Hitting the mark for those without 3D program experience and for basic personal use, Live Interior 3D has some growing up to do if it's to be used by a small interior design company.

Review: Rip-Stop Backpack
Christopher Turner indulges his computing backpack obsession with a look at Incase's offering, the Rip-Stop Backpack.

Review: SimpleMovieX 3.0
Solid movie editing software but needs better documentation.

E-Mail

Always Use Digital Rights Protection[1]

You mention that the EU have a complaint about iTunes pricing and you don't see its relevance to the DRM controversy. You are right. It's not relevant at all. The EU was set up to make it as easy to trade between EU member states as it is in the US to trade between individual states in the US. Their objection to current iTunes practice is that prices vary between countries in the EU, and (this is the important bit) if you are resident in one EU country you cannot buy from the iTunes store for another EU country. They want us to be able to buy from any iTunes store. And, by the way, the UK is a full member of the EU but is not a user of the Euro, as not all EU members are. The EU doesn't mind what currency people use provided that they are free to go for what they see as the lowest price. I hope this helps. (I happen to be based in the UK, which is why I know this).
—*David Barry*

Photoshop For the Curious[2]

Even though I'm probably sounding like a broken record, I'll remind you to never work on your original photo file. Make a copy and work on that. Keep your original safe—no matter how much color correction it needs.

I seem to recall a comment from a reader's letter in a UK camera magazine, with which the editor agreed. You should not work with JPEG files in Photoshop, as the file degrades with subsequent saves. I now always work with a PSD copy until satisfied.
—*Ian Deare*

You're absolutely correct.

My directive to work on copies of files, however, is not given for the issue of JPEG degradation, but rather so that you don't perform some edit/adjustment and come back to that photo at a later date wishing you had the version without that edit. Or, even worse, something goes bad with the photo and it can no longer be opened.

But your point is equally valid, especially since most "original" photo files are JPEGs that come out of digital cameras. If you perform some adjustments to a photo and plan to save it as a JPEG, that's even more of a reason to be working on a copy. Re-saving a JPEG does, indeed, degrade it, although some people mistakenly believe that if an image that remains open on your screen is saved as a JPEG, *is not closed* and then saved again, it degrades. That's not true. The degradation occurs if you save as a JPEG, close the image, and then open the JPEG you saved.

Wow, speaking of saving, I'd better hang on to a copy of this comment response. It's part of what I'm planning to cover in a future installment: File Format Fever.
—*Lee Bennett*

• • •

I recommend to everyone: use non-destructive image editing. When you open your file, press Command-J and then from the bottom part of the layer palette choose Adjustments. Every adjustment layer can be masked and painted. You can stack your curves/levels/etc. layers in groups, and have real process. In other words, you don't react with pixels in a destructive manner.
—*nubizus*

This is a very good point, and one that I planned to include in the upcoming topic "Effective Layer Effects." —*Lee Bennett*

ATPM 13.05[3]

What a beautiful cover! It feels very soulful, and I love the contrast/tension between the high-tech computer inserted within this turn-of-the-century setting. A great job!
—*Catherine von Dennefeld*

Pimp My Robot[4]

You mention your lawn needing a robotic grass cutter—there are lots out there that boast the ability to handle rough terrain and slopes. For example, the Robomow[5].

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/13.05/bloggable.shtml
[2] http://www.atpm.com/13.05/photoshop.shtml
[3] http://www.atpm.com/13.05/
[4] http://www.atpm.com/13.05/macmuser.shtml
[5] http://www.friendlyrobotics.co.uk

I haven't bothered trying one out as of yet, because I think it would just end up being a chew toy for our dogs.

—*Paul Barker*

Digital Photography Expert Techniques[6]

I am serious about photography but I am not a professional, and I find this book to be a treasure trove of interesting and useful techniques for manipulating photos.

Evidently the author is an unusually creative fellow, and while the book does contain good information about the basics of using CS2, its real value is dipping into the splendid techniques which he has developed for use on a daily basis.

—*Sally Brown*

About This Particular Outliner[7]

When is Ted Goranson coming back?

—*Laurence Vittes*

> Sorry. Soon.
>
> I am doing an in-depth survey of Mac writing tools, and in the process have obligated myself to some rather heavy and complex writing assignments. I haven't forgotten you all. Send me ideas about writing features if you think they will help. —*Ted Goranson*

What Browsers Can Do[8]

I got a lot out of this article and it has made browsing and navigating much easier. I like the "block the pop-up windows" feature. Now I use the "change the size of the print" quite often, even on mail. Lots of people send me e-mails with tiny writing, and I do the Command-Plus and it works. For large print I just do the Command-Minus and it works. Thank you for writing this article. I also love the status bar when a page is coming in telling me what is happening with the page. These are wonderful features to Safari. I love it.

—*Heather Isaacson*

> I'm glad you found this useful, Heather. Thanks for letting us know. —*Miraz Jordan*

• • •

Good article!

Let me add two tips from my experience.

I often enlarge the type to 18 or 24 point; at this size, multi-column layouts often are confusing to read, if legible at all.

Another barrier can be the colors chosen by Web designers. They may think yellow on a green background is pretty, but I can't make it out. The style sheet approach works on many sites, but not all.

I get around these problems with two tiny programs I have installed on the favorites bar in Safari, iCab, and OmniWeb (haven't tested others). These are JavaScript programs called "bookmarklets," so you need to have JavaScript enabled for them to work. The site below explains how to install these tools.

The linearize[9] bookmarklet breaks down multi-column designs into a single column.

Once "linearized," even complex layouts—like NYTimes.com—are easy to view in very large fonts.

The zap colors[10] bookmarklet strips all the color out of a file. Text is black, links are blue, background is white. Much easier on the eyes.

I installed both of these at the left end of my favorites bar. I can choose either one with Command-3, so two quick keystrokes change a multi-column, squinty-color site into easy reading.

—*Jesse the K*

> Thanks for the tips, Jesse. Those bookmarklets sound really interesting and useful.
>
> I'm glad you liked the article. —*Miraz Jordan*

Parallels Desktop[11]

I've been using Boot Camp on my Mac mini Core Solo, which worked like a charm, after having tried Parallels that just ate up the memory and choked.

I have to say that even OS X Tiger with 512 MB was not running as I expected it, with widgets turned off, only one or two programs active at once before hitting the virtual memory, so I always advise 1 GB for Macs if you need to run more than the build-in applications.

I've got a Windows laptop as Picasa is the only picture editing program that works properly with my 30,000+ photos.

—*aurin*

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[6] http://www.atpm.com/13.05/digital-photography.shtml

[7] http://www.atpm.com/Back/atpo.shtml

[8] http://www.atpm.com/13.04/web-accessibility.shtml

[9] http://www.squarefree.com/bookmarklets/validation.html

[10] http://www.squarefree.com/bookmarklets/zap.html

[11] http://www.atpm.com/12.10/parallels.shtml

A half-gig of memory is just not enough any-more, at least not for serious work. As you learned, more memory is better. That was my experience with Windows as well as OS X. As a result, I started installing the maximum RAM in my computers (well, with the exception of the dual-G5 desktop—only 4 GB. My MacBook Pro has 3 GB, and that works very well, even when using Adobe Lightroom with lots of images and several other programs open at the same time. —*David Thompson*

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MacMuser
by Mark Tennent, mtennent@atpm.com

Who Needs an iPod?

When the second-generation iPod arrived in 2002, my kids got me one for my birthday. By modern standards it is a bit of a brick, the shape of a thick pocket calculator and as heavy as a breeze block. It's even made of stainless steel with a plastic faceplate thicker than a modern iPod. At the time it seemed wonderful.

We managed to put the entire MP3 collection of four Macs into that iPod; its 20 GB hard disk seemed enormous. Our music library was already eclectic and large by 2002 standards. Plugged into a set of powered speakers, the iPod became our new hi-fi. Running in the car, via an illegal (in the UK) iTrip[1] transmitter, our entire music collection came with us.

Then there was "Napster Week" when the whole world was swapping music before "they" closed it down. Up until then we hadn't bothered with downloading tracks, but when the RIAA won their case and a time limit was put on the legality of the process, we got our 2 Mb ADSL working 24 hours a day. It was collecting the tracks we "owned" already but had locked onto vinyl and compact cassette tapes.

When the RIAA won their anti-piracy case against Napster, they probably did more damage than the P2P downloading caused in the first place. The RIAA haven't made a dent in peer-to-peer swapping, and by bringing the process to international attention, gave it the biggest free advertising campaign. Even now, with iTunes and others making music legally available, P2P networks flourish using strong cryptography and with decentralized servers making it almost impossible to stop.

Now, five years after the iPod arrived, our media libraries are huge, boosted by iTunes downloads, M4As, and other digital formats. The effects of DRM, despite what the legislators in many European countries say, are no barrier to playing protected tracks on non-compatible devices. iPods have grown larger in storage space and smaller in dimensions, with the latest Shuffles being tiny wafers of solid state RAM. My original iPod comes out for an occasional car journey but usually stays shut in a drawer.

Our music playing device has regressed. Instead of powered speakers or earphones, enormous storage and sleek interfaces, we use a mobile phone with barely enough space to take more than a couple of hour's worth of music. The built-in speaker is worse than a 1960s Dansette, and getting 100 MB or so of tracks onto it via Bluetooth is hardly a rapid process. But given the choice at an impromptu barbecue, I'd rather be listening to a phone-based MP3 player and still be able to chat with my partner.

The batteries last a lot longer too.

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/9.11/itrip.shtml

MacMuser
by Mark Tennent, mtennent@atpm.com

One of Leopard's Hot Spots

Back in the last century, when we got started as designers and our clients paid their bills (unlike today—*You* know who you are), we used to work with companies' directorates.

Usually the personnel manager would call us in to discuss the new magazine/sales leaflets/whatever. They would pass us over to the senior manager or director it was destined for, most likely the head of sales. We worked directly with them. They took the decisions, accepted to proofs, and things went wonderfully smoothly. If they also took the opportunity to get few more hairs added to their heads, maybe a tummy tuck and wrinkles removed, so what. We were pleased to oblige with early pre-Photoshop image editors.

The Good Old Days

If only things were like that nowadays. It must be a feature of our educational system, teaching children to work collaboratively. Will no one make a decision on their own nowadays? We start the job with who we assume is the "client," they send us "final text," accept the visuals, and we produce the finished artwork. We are told they are "just going to show their colleagues," before returning with a whole new ball game.

The final text apparently wasn't and "can we just slip in these four extra pages of A4" (into a DL leaflet usually). The images they sent aren't correct, and one of their friends doesn't like the pink corporate color we were told we had to use. Worst still, they send something they've knocked-up in Office, which they want us to recreate; complete with centered Times bold titles, "friendly" Comic Sans body text, and clip-art bullet points.

Creating everything digitally should have been a time-saver, but because people use word processors, they assume that it is just as easy to make changes to a piece of design. No matter if you just spent four hours shoe-horning text into place to get all the baselines aligning across the spread. Or, the PDF you sent as a low-resolution visual gets forwarded to the printer who happily runs out a million, full-color copies with 72dpi images pixelated to destruction.

Apple to the Rescue

Far be it for an Apple fanboy to blab on about the maker of his computers...but it looks like they may have a solution to proofing problems. The next version of iChat[1], Apple's instant messaging client, will have iChat Theater. With it we will be able to work collaboratively, holding a conversation with our client while editing their document. They will be able to watch us in realtime without leaving their desk.

To a certain extent this can be done by turning a free-standing Web cam towards the computer screen, but Apple's move to build cameras into the monitor has taken this away. Plus, many of our clients go into a flappy-handed tizzy at the thought of setting up something new. They want the IT department to do it for them. iChat is so simple that we can talk them through completing three one-line address boxes.

Once iChat Theater is incorporated into applications, audio and video can be presented during an iChat conference. Editing changes will be easy-peasy. Our client will see that their addition of a "word or two" throws off the whole document's layout, and that they'll have to cut out words elsewhere in the document to make the everything fit. Their damage will be right in front of them, as will the solutions we try before finding a workaround.

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[1] http://www.apple.com/macosx/leopard/ichat.html

What Do You Do With a Full Inbox?

In my [last column](#)[1] on [Getting Things Done](#)[2], I addressed the Collection stage—that phase where you are gathering all of the tasks and potential tasks, as well as any other pieces of information, into one place: the Inbox. So, if you followed along to that point, but didn't go any further, this column will tell you what to do with that full inbox. (And shame on you for not reading more about Getting Things Done than I've included here!)

The default next step in Getting Things Done is the Processing stage. This stage has a number of parts, and it can often be a back-and-forth vacillation: GTD pioneer David Allen says that coaching clients on this "invariably becomes a dance back and forth between the simple decision-making stage of processing the open loops and the trickier task of figuring out the best way to enter these decisions in a client's particular organization system" ([Getting Things Done](#)[3], p. 121). In actuality, both of these steps are part of the Processing stage, though it might seem like just the first part is.

In my approach, then, I want to distinguish between these two: what is the difference between closing open loops and answering system questions? I also want to distinguish between principles and practice. This means that I will cover the Processing stage in more than one article.

Underlying Principles

How do you Process? Allen describes it clearly in his book: you empty your physical inbox, dealing with each individual item as appropriate (more on that at a later point). He discusses some principles that are fundamental to this: top item first, one item at a time, process, don't simply scan. These must be accounted for in Processing, of course.

But when it comes to the overlap of an analog lifestyle with a digital one, even basic Processing can get confused. One of the benefits of Getting Things Done is that there are hard edges to the system: it is clear when you are in Collection mode, when you are Processing, and when you move on to think-plan-do. But put a computer into that workflow and the hard edges get soft again.

What do I mean by that? Well, it may seem like the biggest obstacle in Processing is getting items out of a physical inbox and into the computer. But care must be taken here—it could be that you have merely shifted something from one inbox to another. Instead, true Processing means that something that comes out of an inbox and is dealt with accordingly.

Multiple Inboxes

To understand this fully, you must view the various receptacles where you Collect as multiple inboxes. You may have several: a physical inbox, an inbox in your e-mail client, a virtual inbox for files on your computer's desktop, and one in your task management program (if you have one).

Thus, when you Process (either the first time or during a daily, weekly, or monthly review) you must deal with the contents of all of these. Processing isn't done when you've emptied your physical inbox into your computer; you still must finish the Processing of those items you've added into your computer.

The key to keeping your GTD system working, therefore, is keeping the number of inboxes to a minimum, while having enough to serve your needs. I touched on this in the last article, on Collection.
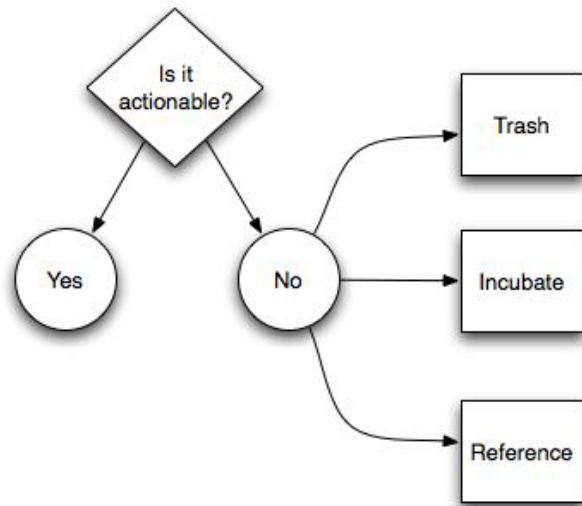
The Practice of Processing

Allen clearly articulates how to think about each item in your inbox—I have reproduced a portion of his workflow diagram here:

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/13.04/next-actions.shtml
[2] http://www.davidco.com/what_is_gtd.php
[3] http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0142000280/
aboutthisparticu

Of course, if you're processing your physical inbox and determine that an item is bound for the trash, your Mac doesn't have to factor into that part of the Processing! But how about the stuff in the inboxes and/or buckets on your Mac? As hard as the discipline may be, you must develop the habit of throwing away unnecessary stuff across the board—whether it is junk mail in your physical inbox (pretty easy to throw away), a document on your desktop from a co-worker you met with two weeks ago (harder to trash), or a personal message from your cousin in your e-mail client inbox (difficult to delete).

There is no need to re-invent the wheel here: David Allen has discussed the importance of throwing out physical stuff adequately in the book. Meanwhile, Merlin Mann has covered emptying your e-mail inbox very well in his Inbox Zero series[4]. More recently, Ethan Schoonover has done a great job with the difficulty of documents and files on your virtual desktop in his article Five Steps to a Kinkless Desktop[5]. Both Merlin and Ethan echo David's advice about ruthless deleting of stuff you no longer need. Among the three, the part of Processing that involves emptying your inbox is almost done, and some of that stuff should be in the trash after nearly every review. Frankly, it is the extraordinary person indeed whose life is either so refined or so mundane that any given review might not produce a trash-worthy item.

The last remaining bucket is, of course, the system you use for task list management. Don't forget that this is a bucket as well; if your application of

choice is at all GTD-oriented, it will have some sort of collection mode. And don't be fooled into thinking that these items have been processed simply because they are "in the system."

The important thing is to keep as much trash out of your task management system as possible. This isn't to say that some of these items won't be trashed—inevitably you'll have something that started off as an actionable item—or even a project— that will be dropped or rendered unnecessary, and you should promptly delete this in your review.

Incubation

Non-actionable items that aren't trash may be fodder for what Allen calls incubation. In other words, they aren't yet ready for action. This may be a task that is contingent on other information or completion of other tasks, or it may be something requiring other decisions that you aren't ready to make yet.

I find that incubation is a good place to place projects (i.e. tasks with more than one step or required action) that are in very early-stage development. I try to keep my daily reviews to about five minutes, and heavy-lifting-like project planning for weekly reviews and/or a scheduled time for it. This is not how Allen describes project planning; he advocates project planning as part of the "do" stage, or at least the part of Processing that determines what is a task-list action. He acknowledges the need to set apart distinct time for planning them, however:

> Whether you draw up your 'Projects' list while you're initially processing your in-basket or after you've set up your action lists doesn't really matter. It just needs to be done at some point... (*GTD*, p. 137).

For me, this can't happen cleanly in a Process that is part of a daily review.

Incubation items need to be regularly reviewed, however, and the idea behind them is that they may percolate into a real-live actionable task. This seems like the perfect place to put projects until I have time to plan them out. Note: I'm planning to do several articles on project planning when the time comes— probably next after Processing is finished.

Other things may live in incubation; what goes in there is up to your practices. The important point is that you need a place for them, and that place should be somewhere that you will regularly review, just like your "Waiting" and "Someday/Maybe" items (articles yet to come on these, too; thanks for your patience!). I've built an Incubation folder into my task

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[4]http://www.43folders.com/izero/
[5]http://kinkless.com/article/kinkless_desktop

management system, and set up Incubation items just as I would a regular task, and with as much description as I can provide—I simply mark them as "Inactive" and leave start and due dates blank. A tip: if you find that reviewing these, and other tasks that are in some way inactive (e.g. items in Waiting), is difficult to remember, try setting a start date for them, but no due date. In many systems, this will make the item appear in the main list of tasks.

Reference

If it isn't actionable, you don't think you should throw it away, and it isn't a task or project in seed-form (Incubation), it must be a Reference item. Maybe it is research for a current or future project, or an article you found interesting. Maybe it's records from your kid's pediatrician, and you know you should store it somehow. In one way or another, most of us accumulate an enormous amount of Reference material that ends up claiming space (and eventually attention) in our homes, offices, and other places.

Reference material is not only bulky, but it is usually important—and it deserves to be addressed in full and in detail. My next piece will have a comprehensive guide to setting up a Reference filing system that will serve your analog/digital world.

New Finds

Web/Browser-Based

Nexty[6] is designed to be a GTD task manager and is built in a PHP environment. It has a "tab" interface and includes a calendar and reminders, in addition to projects and contexts. As list managers go, it is fairly basic and straightforward: nested/hierarchical lists are supported, and the contexts element qualifies Nexty as GTD-oriented (barely), but there is little to make Nexty stand apart from other similar browser-based list managers. If you work exclusively from your computer, Nexty may suffice. It is free, and currently at version 1.0a.

ToDoist[7] is another online application that offers a robust feature-set for task and project management, including tasks and sub-tasks, context-like categories, and a searchable interface. While not specifically designed for GTD, the nested and hierarchical structure of ToDoist makes it very GTD-friendly. Gmail and iGoogle integration will be very welcome for many,

while mobile access will keep you informed on the go. I especially appreciate the Quicksilver plug-in and the Dashboard widget that make ToDoist very Mac-friendly. Also, there are a number of screencasts that walk you through using ToDoist in a step-wise fashion. ToDoist is free.

Stand-Alone Applications

Check Off[8] is a menu bar addition that provides a basic to-do list. While very basic, it does support groups of tasks (which could give way to projects or contexts), and exports to notes-enabled iPods. Also, tasks can have notes attached to them, for additional information, and a QuickPick is provided to support Apple's Backup software—something I wish more developers would take the time to offer. Check Off is free under the GNU public license and is currently at version 3.6.

iGTD[9] has probably gotten more attention than any other currently available GTD application over the past couple of months. The developer has been hard at work offering very frequent updates, with 11 in under two months. iGTD seems to be loaded with all the right features—and very little superfluous stuff. It has an Inbox view for collection/processing (and a distinct Process/Review mode), and also Context and Project views, as well as easy ways to see completed and uncompleted actions and archived tasks and projects. Hierarchical organization of tasks makes building projects and sub-projects easy. Including both start and finish dates is helpful, and notes, tagging, and URL attachments makes tasks more robust. iGTD is also highly integrated with iCal, Address Book, and iSync, so it works across the system; even Mail (and MailTags 2.0) and Web browser support are included. New tasks can be created through Quicksilver, or through a "quick type-in" feature. There are still more features that I won't mention—but they are worth checking out. iGTD is currently at version 1.4.1.1 (as of this writing—but don't be surprised if it has been updated in the mean time), and is free/donationware.

One more worth mentioning: those in the know are anticipating The Omni Group's forthcoming OmniFocus[10], which promises to be an immediate challenger in this growing market. Be sure to check out Omni's page for OmniFocus, which now includes a very lengthy (and satisfying) introduction by Ethan Schoonover, the developer of kGTD and a

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[6]http://nexty.sourceforge.net/
[7]http://www.todoist.com/

[8]http://www.carpeaqua.com/software/checkoff/
[9]http://bargiel.home.pl/iGTD/
[10]http://www.omnigroup.com/applications/omnifocus/

chief consultant for OmniFocus. You can also find a second video on Ethan's blog, Kinkless[11], with a promise of still more to come.

Also: a number of you have mentioned good finds in the comments of past articles, and I appreciate that. Obviously there is no way for me to know about *every* option out there without a lot of help from you. Please keep them coming! That said, when it comes to offerings like GTD on Rails[12], Scrybe[13], Propel'r[14], and GravityGTD[15]—in other words, those options that are still in development or early beta and the public can't access them—I'm going to hold off on profiling until development is further along. To be fair, if they provide insight into their applications in the way that Omni has with OmniFocus, I will be happy to point you to that. For example, Scrybe has a beta testing program that has given a number of people a good look at what they have to offer; recent posts in their forums suggest that it is difficult to get an invitation to become a beta tester at this point, however.

Due to my personal time constraints (I do write this column on a volunteer basis, after all), I'm planning to profile the following in a future column: ActionItems[16], Docket[17], HiTask[18], Joe's Goals[19], myLifeOrganized[20], Next Action[21], Pimki[22], Toodledo[23], and Tweeto[24]. In other words, I already know about these and you don't need to remind me of them.

The List

Web/Browser-Based Solutions—GTD Specific

30Boxes[25] is lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction. Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface too. 30Boxes is in beta and is currently free.

GTDGmail[26] is aFirefox extension for GTD integration with Gmail. Pre-packaged labels, a Review process, specialized searches within Gmail, quick-entry for tasks, and printable. Current version, 1.31, is open-source; requires Firefox[27]. *News:* Demonstrating the (sometimes) frailty of the free/open-source world, the GTDGmail site has crashed—and there's a notice that it won't be fixed for a while.

gtd-php[28] is a PHP solution designed to be locally installed. A simple tabbed interface, capture and process stages, weekly review. Currently version 0.7 (last updated September 2006) and free. *News:* Further demonstrating the frailty of the open-source world, this Web site had been hacked and was full of porn when I checked it. Be careful about browsing here. . .

iCommit[29] cannot be locally installed. Like a wiki without the hassle of setting up. Currently at version 1.9.0, free but first-come, first-served.

MyTicklerFile[30] is a broader implementation of GTD. Explicit syncing with iCal; e-mail of upcoming weekly tasks. Costs $9/month for 15 projects, 150 reminders, and an unlimited number of Ticklers; $19/month. doubles that. (1 project is free.) *News:* Current version is 2.1, last updated in February 2007.

Neptune[31] includes a collection "inbox" and context or project task viewing panes, as well as inactive projects and tasks. Daily e-mail reminders of tasks, new tasks can be added by e-mail, and data export. Neptune costs $10 per year, with a 15-day free trial available.

Nozbe[32] has markers for which action will be *next* and a time estimation for tasks. Contexts are visible and identifiable, and it is easy to collect and process quickly. Nozbe is free.

SimpleGTD[33] tabs for next actions, contexts, projects, and done actions; drag-and-drop organization and easy "un-doing" of tasks. Launched in mid-January 2007, free.

Tracks[34] a Web server that runs locally, or hosted through tracks.tra.in[35]. Fast, lean, and pretty, it offers calendaring and a multi-user component. Tracks

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[11] http://www.kinkless.com
[12] http://gtdonrails.com/
[13] http://iscrybe.com/main/index.php
[14] http://www.propelr.com/gtd/collect
[15] http://www.gravity-gtd.ca/index.php
[16] http://www.sailalong.com/Default.aspx
[17] http://www.surprisesoftware.com/docket/
[18] http://hitask.com/
[19] http://www.joesgoals.com/
[20] http://www.mylifeorganized.net/
[21] http://trimpath.com/demos/nextaction_static1/nextaction.htm
[22] http://pimki.rubyforge.org/
[23] http://www.toodledo.com/
[24] http://www.tweeto.com/
[25] http://www.30boxes.com/

[26] http://gtdgmail.com/
[27] http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/
[28] http://www.gtd-php.com/Main/HomePage
[29] http://die-bernhardts.macbay.de/GTDV2/
[30] http://myticklerfile.com/
[31] http://www.neptunehq.com/
[32] http://www.nozbe.com/page/index
[33] http://www.simplegtd.com/
[34] http://www.rousette.org.uk/projects/
[35] http://tracks.tra.in/login

is open-source and currently at version 1.043 (last updated August 2006).

Vitalist[36] is a wide-scale GTD system: collection, project management, recurring actions, and tickler files. Includes a mobile edition, iCal and RSS feeds, and e-mail and SMS reminders. A "premium" (paid) version also includes security encryption, collaboration, file attachments, and (soon) calendaring. Premium accounts cost $5 monthly. Vitalist was released in January 2007.

Tiddly-Wikis

This category is for single-file wikis that you store locally or run from a server.

d3[37] is currently at version 1.1.0, and open-source (free).

GTD TiddlyWiki[38] is the original. Current version is 1.0.6 (updated Sept. 2005); open-source.

MonkeyGTD[39] uses the newer revision of Tiddly-Wiki, version 2.1.3, released in November 2006. Currently v.1.0.10, updated January 2007.

Park[40] localizes the TiddlyWiki, adding note-taking features and Spotlight support. Park is free and currently beta at version 0.9.

Web/Browser-Based Solutions—not GTD-Specific

37signals' Basecamp[41] and Backpack[42] are both capable project managers with iCal integration and some localization. You might also check out Ta-Da List http://www.tadalist.com/[43], a basic task list manager. All three have free versions. *News:* Backpack Mobile[44] is now available as a free feature for Web-enabled mobile phones, allowing you to view pages, add list items and notes, make new pages, and view and add reminders.

HiveMinder[45] has a "brain dump" one-click task creator, RSS feeds, iCalendar feeds, printing features. Task Review, and can e-mail tasks to you. It is searchable and sharable. HiveMinder is free, but ad-supported; they plan to offer a paid-for version in the future.

Mojonote[46] has multiple lists, reminders by e-mail and SMS, and lists can be shared with others. A free account gets 5 lists, 5 notes, and 10 reminders; $5 per month upgrades that to 100 of each.

Remember the Milk[47] offers many input and output options: online, e-mail, SMS, RSS feed, Web-enabled PDA or smartphone, and instant messenger. Can create tasks through e-mail. Remember the Milk is free and beta.

Sproutliner[48] is a task list with some hierarchy and context management. It is open-source, and they say it is "beta" (last updated May 2005).

TaskFreak[49] is a PHP solution that includes categories/contexts, priorities, due dates, and a progress scale. User-contributed plug-ins that expand the function and capability substantially. Single-user (for both MySQL and SQLite) and multi-user (for MySQL) versions are available, and are free. *News:* Update to version 0.6.1 is available, which fixes several bugs and adds a few minor features, like date format options and hidden future tasks.

King Design's Tasks[50] works with iCal, sends e-mail reminders of tasks, and has tags, RSS feeds, and customization. Version 2.7 (recently updated) costs $30, while version 1.7 of Tasks Pro ranges from $125 to $500. Tasks Jr. (version 1.9.1) is free.

Tasktoy[51] can categorize by context or project, attach notes to tasks, has mobile device compatibility, and low-resistance task building with easy repeatable tasks. GTD friendly. Free as a beta version.

Zenlists[52] allows categories or contexts for task lists. Currently free.

Stand-Alone Applications—GTD-Specific

Action Tracker[53] a FileMaker Pro GTD environment. As an interface for project management, it also organizes notes, contacts, and other files related to projects, and can create iCal events. Action Tracker 1.3.1 is free, and if you don't have a FileMaker Pro license, a runtime version is available.

Actiontastic[54] offers views of the inbox, projects, or contexts; a "Process Inbox" engine will help you through the processing phase. A Quicksilver plug-

[36] http://www.vitalist.com/
[37] http://www.dcubed.ca/
[38] http://shared.snapgrid.com/index.html
[39] http://monkeygtd.tiddlyspot.com/
[40] http://www.coalmarch.com/products/park.php
[41] http://www.basecamphq.com/
[42] http://www.backpackit.com/
[43] http://www.tadalist.com/
[44] http://www.backpackit.com/weblog/archives/new_feat ures_updates/backpack_mobile_is_here_just_add_mob_ to_the_end_of_your_backpack_url.php
[45] http://hiveminder.com/splash/

[46] http://mojonote.com/
[47] http://www.rememberthemilk.com/
[48] http://sproutliner.com/
[49] http://www.taskfreak.com/
[50] http://www.kingdesign.net/tasks/
[51] http://www.tasktoy.com/
[52] http://zenlists.com/
[53] http://macproductive.com/actiontracker.html
[54] http://www.kaboomerang.com/blog/category/actiontas tic/

in, iCal and iPod syncing, and Mail and MailTags compatibility round it out. It is currently at version 0.9.3., and is free/open-source.

EasyTask Manager[55] manages only tasks, which can be sorted by project or category, and assigned due dates, priorities, and notes. It syncs with iCal, offers print features, and drag-and-drop makes for easy processing. Also, an online mirror of tasks is free at easytaskmanager.net[56]. Costs $20. *News:* Version 1.8.4 is now available, which fixes some syncing and formating problems, and adds viewing tasks for sub-projects in the parent-project view.

Frictionless[57] has very good overall integration of GTD principles; also Quicksilver integration and AppleScripted task creation from Mail. The current (free) version is 0.8.4. *News:* Frictionless is in a major state of overhaul and rebuilding, with a version 2.0 in beta that looks and acts totally different. Still very buggy and in need of maturity, but promising.

Ghost Action[58] sports a simple, single-window interface with tabs for Contexts, Projects, and Actions, syncs with iCal and .Mac, and will also sync with a PDA or phone through iSync. Version 1.1 costs $19.

iKog[59] (an acronym for "it keeps on growing") runs through Python, can be run off of a flash drive, and has basic management of lists, though the all-text, low-GUI interface will throw some people off. iKog is free. *News:* Version 1.87 is available; updates have added interface options, some automation, archiving, and bug fixes.

KinklessGTD[60] is an elaborate template and AppleScript set for OmniOutliner Pro. View by Project, Context, or Next Actions; syncs with iCal, and receive input through Quicksilver. Free under the GNU public license, though it requires purchase of OmniOutliner Pro[61], which costs $70.

The mGTD plug-in[62] for Hog Bay Software's Mori[63] is a "digital notebook" that brings a thorough GTD system into Mori. The mGTD plug-in (current version: 1.2 "pre-final") is free, but Mori (current version: 1.4) will cost you $40.

Midnight Inbox[64] gathers events and tasks from iCal, messages from Mail, and other documents, bookmarks, notes, and other files to process, then review-plan-do. Monitor progress, archive completed projects, and organize work patterns. Version 1.1.5 costs $35.

PyGTD[65] includes start dates, contingencies, effort required, subtasks, and project notes. PyGTD seeks to combine the strengths of Steven Covey's prioritization principles (taking both urgency and importance into consideration) with the essence of GTD. The interface is clean and simple. PyGTD is free.

Ready-Set-Do![66] functions like a virtual version of the paper GTD method: an extensive set of AppleScripts, it transforms your Mac's desktop into a GTD processing station. Integrates with iCal, allows a "whole system" approach that isn't possible with any of the other apps. Currently at version 1.1 and costs $20 for a single-user license.

Thinking Rock[67] has a distinct operation for each of the three main steps; it is easy to enter lots of new tasks at once. As a Java application, it is portable. Version 1.2.3 (last updated December 2006) is free. *News:* A new version is deep in development, and while it is not fully a release version, it is available. Also, the developers have disclosed their need to begin charging a minor ($15) donation for some future versions, while promising that there will always be a free version available.

Vortex[68] has a two-panel view for all options, with one column for contexts, projects, someday/maybe tasks, and review. New tasks, projects, or waiting for items can be created with a single button. Includes contingencies and dependent actions, and indices for time and energy requirements in addition to priority assessment. Vortex is currently version 1.0.10 and costs €25 ($49).

What To Do[69] offers three views: context, project, and priority. Drag and drop also. Costs $29. *News:* Version 1.1 is now available; unfortunately, I can't tell you what has changed! I can't tell, and there are no release notes available. Sorry.

[55] http://www.orionbelt.com/
[56] http://www.easytaskmanager.net/
[57] http://www.twinforces.com/Frictionless/Frictionless.html
[58] http://ghostparksoftware.com/
[59] http://www.henspace.co.uk/ikog/index.html
[60] http://www.kinkless.com/
[61] http://www.omnigroup.com/applications/omnioutliner/pro/
[62] http://www.hogbaysoftware.com/node/1385
[63] http://www.hogbaysoftware.com/product/mori

[64] http://www.midnightbeep.com/
[65] http://96db.com/pyGTD/
[66] http://homepage.mac.com/toddvasquez/Ready-Set-Do!/Personal93.html
[67] http://www.thinkingrock.com.au/
[68] http://airbladesoftware.com/
[69] http://www.objectivesatisfaction.com/what_todo/

Local Applications—Not GTD-Specific

DoIt[70] (formerly "ToDo") has a Quicksilver plug-in, limited integration with Address Book and iCal, .Mac support, and AppleScriptability. Also supports file attachments and categories for lists. Donationware. *News:* Version 2.5 is now available, which includes international localizations, some scripting improvements, and auto-updating.

High Priority[71], a system preference pane, creates a menu in the menu bar that lets you create and update your iCal tasks. Version 1.11 costs $6 for a personal license (family and business licenses are available).

iClock[72] offers a menu bar–based method of managing task lists. iClock is at version 3.0.5 and costs $20.

Life Balance[73] gives "meta-feedback" about tasks: how much time are you spending in different areas of your life (i.e. work, family, hobbies, etc.), and are you keeping it balanced? Life Balance for the Mac costs $65, or $80 if bundled with the Palm OS version. Currently at version 3.2.9.

Stapler[74] is a combination notepad and to-do list manager, with creation date, notes, and a check-box for completed items. Tasks can be color-coded based on a low-level preference setup. €7.50 (about $10) gets you version 1.1.

To-Do X[75] will import tasks from iCal, but has no further interaction with it. It offers categories, priorities, and attached notes. Version 2.1 costs $15.

ZooDo[76] is a basic task-creator for iCal, serving as a "collection bucket." Version 1.0 is free.

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[70] http://www.jimmcgowan.net/Site/DoIt.html
[71] http://www.kudurshian.net/highpriority/
[72] http://www.scriptsoftware.com/iclock/iclockmac.php
[73] http://www.llamagraphics.com/LB/LifeBalanceTop.html
[74] http://www.blue-tec.com/stapler/
[75] http://www.nomicro.com/Products/ToDo/
[76] http://interfacethis.com/zoodo/

Conjuring Speech/Thought Bubbles

I didn't plan very well. This month's topic was supposed to have been about digital photo resolution. Somehow, it just happened that it fell on the June issue, which means I was to have worked on it in May. But May is, by leaps and bounds, my busiest and most hectic month of the year, and digital photo resolution is a topic that needs more concentration than I could give this month.

Consequently, for this month's issue, I'm offering a tutorial that was requested by a reader back when I first began this series—one that is simpler for me to write. That reader wanted to know how to create speech bubbles and thought bubbles. I remember years ago buying those sheets of stickers that looked like speech/thought bubbles—some pre-printed with silly phrases and others left blank to write your own whim.

Well, no need to buy those stickers anymore. Now, you can just make your own in exactly the shape you want them and with exactly the words you desire, and have them already be on the photos if you have digital prints made.

So, let's start with a silly photo that is just screaming for speech/thought bubbles:

Time to put words into their mouths and heads.

Um, yeah. Just a goofy shot I snapped of some friends. So let's start with the guy. He's clearly hol-

lering "OW!!" so let's make a speech bubble to that effect.

By now, you should already know what step one is. Say it with me: make a copy of the photo and work on it instead of the original.

Now click and hold the Shape tool (right side of the Tool palette, just below the Text tool) and choose the Custom Shape tool. In the Options bar at the top of your screen, click the Shape pop-up menu, then click the small circle with an inner triangle located at the upper right corner of the window. Choose TalkBubbles near the bottom of the menu, then click Append in the resulting dialog box.
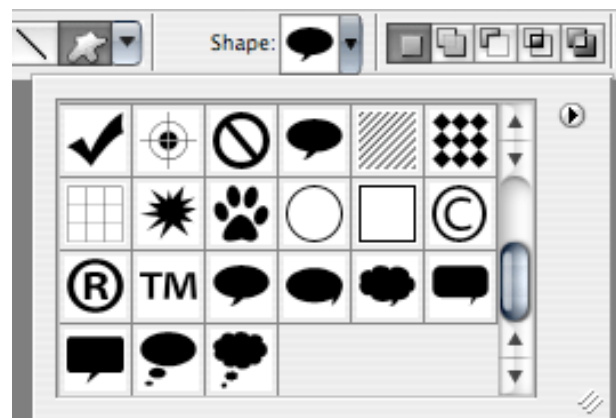
A handful of bubbles is already waiting for you in Photoshop.

It's important for me to say that these bubbles are in Photoshop CS2. I do not know if they exist in prior versions, but it is possible to make your own bubbles, which I'll cover in a moment.

Once you've chosen which bubble you want, click a spot in your image where you want one corner to be and drag to the opposite corner. Your selected bubble shape will stretch to match the area in which you dragged. Don't worry if you don't get the size or position quite right. It can easily be moved and stretched.
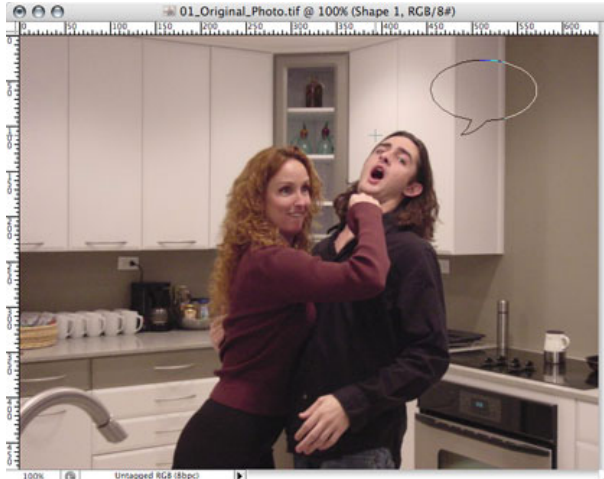
Dragging the bubble shape to the desired size and position.

A speech bubble, ready to hold words.

After you've created the shape, you'll note that its color will be whatever you have defined as the current foreground color. You'll also note a new layer in your Layers palette. (Select Layers from the Window menu if your Layers palette isn't visible.) This new layer is a Shape layer and you'll see that it has two icons in it. The icon on the left lets you change the shape's color. Double-click it and you'll see a Color Picker window in which you can choose white or any color you desire.

If you want to move the bubble, just click the Move tool (top right icon in the Tool palette) then drag it to the desired location. Maybe you want to change its size or to point the directional tail in the opposite direction. No problem. First click the Path Selection tool (the black pointer to the left of the Type tool). If the pointer is the white Direct Selection tool instead of black, click and hold it to select the Path Selection tool instead. Click on the bubble, then press Command-T. You'll see a transformation box appear around the bubble. In addition to being able to drag the corners to change the size and shape of the bubble, you can either right-click or hold the Control key and click this transformation box, then select Flip Horizontal to point the tail in the other direction.

But suppose you don't like any of the preset shapes. Hey, this is Photoshop. We can make our own!

Click and hold the Shape tool again and choose either the Rounded Rectangle (my preference for a speech bubble) or Ellipse. If you choose the Rounded Rectangle, you'll see a Radius selector up in the Options bar at the top of your screen. This value defines how rounded the corners will be.

Just as you did for the preset bubble shape, draw the new shape at whatever location and size you desire. Here's mine:
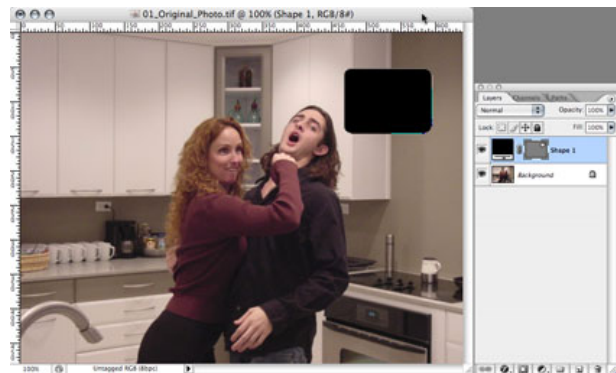
Creating the shape for a speech bubble. Remember to double-click the color icon in the Shape layer to set the bubble's desired color.

Next we'll add the little pointy tail to show that the speech is coming from the guy. Click and hold the Shape tool again, select the Polygon tool, then set the number of Sides in the Options bar to 3. When you click and drag, a triangle shape will appear, which will get larger the further you drag away

from where you clicked. You can also drag around the point where you clicked to change the rotation. It doesn't need to be perfect yet—just in the ballpark.

Creating a shape that will become the speech bubble's directional tail.

You'll see in the Layers palette that shape layers are added for each separate shape. Once the bubble looks the way you want, the pieces need to be combined into a single shape.

Click and hold the black Path Selection tool and instead choose the white Direct Selection tool. Click anywhere on the triangle's outer edge and you'll see small squares appear on all three points. Now you can drag each of these three points where you want them. Overlap two of the points just inside the bubble and drag the third to point to the desired location.
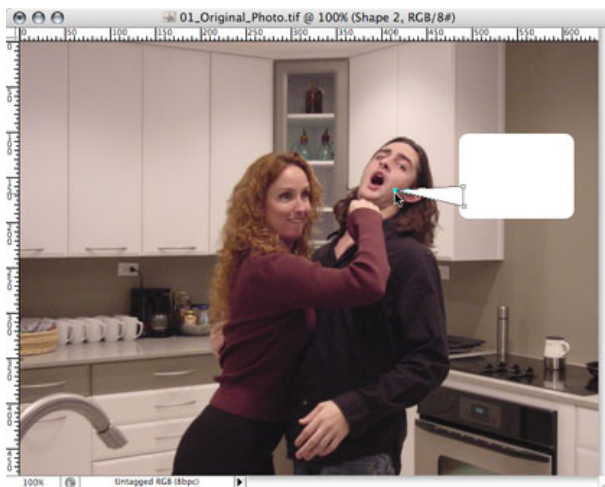
Feel free to make the directional tail any size you wish and coming from any point of the speech bubble you wish.

Once you have the shapes the way you want them, they must be combined to behave as a single shape. Go back to the Path Selection (black pointer) tool and click the second icon in one of the shape layers (the one to the right of where you clicked to change the color). This icon is called the Vector Mask Thumbnail, and you'll see a thin corner outline around it when it's active.
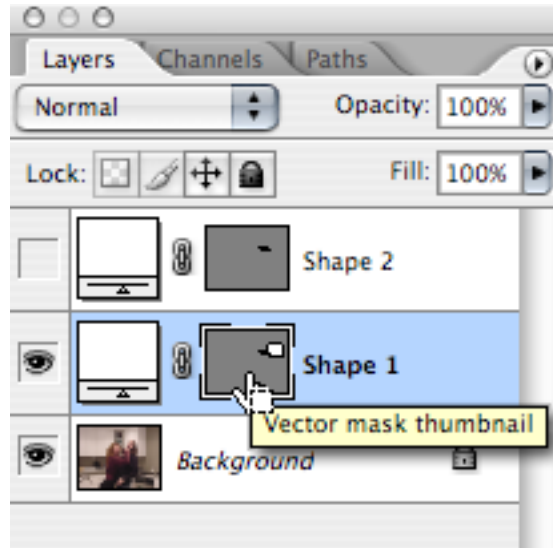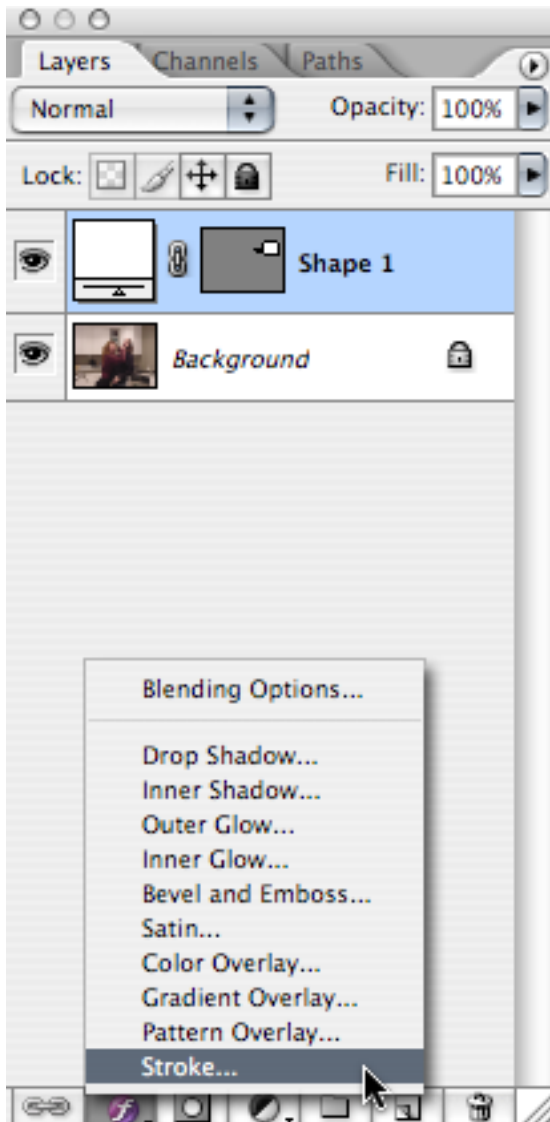

Combining two shapes into one Shape layer.

Copy this shape by holding the Command key and pressing C, then hide this Shape layer by clicking its little eye icon on the left side of the layer. Next, click the Vector Mask Thumbnail of the other Shape layer and paste the shape you copied—Command key then press V.

With this Shape layer still highlighted and the black pointer Path Selection tool still enabled, click the Combine button in the Options bar at the top of your screen. The bubble is now a single shape, just like the preset bubble we made earlier.

The next two steps are somewhat optional and involve using a function of Photoshop, which I originally planned to cover before this tutorial. So if you have questions about these Layer Styles, you might save them for next month since the July column may provide the answers.
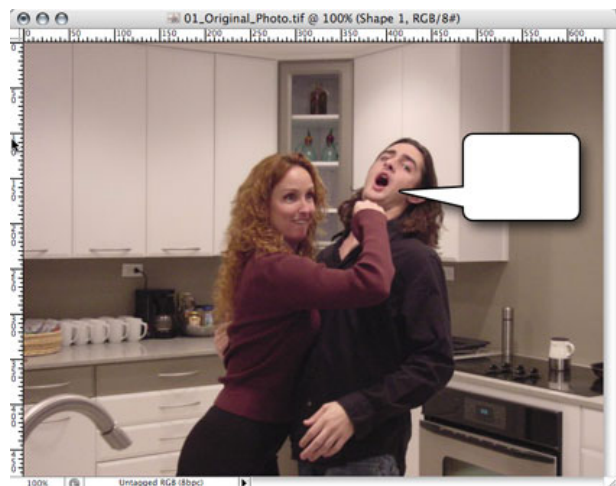
If desired, you can create an outline around the bubble. Make sure the bubble's Shape layer is highlighted, click the second button at the bottom of the Layers palette that looks like a lower case "f" inside a black circle, then select the Stroke. . . Layer Style.

The bubble has been outlined and shadowed.

The last thing to do is to add a Text layer with what we want our guy to be saying.

You can just hear his pain!

The various Layer Styles are applied non-destructively. You can modify them later.

In the resulting dialog window, you can change the stroke outline's size and change the color. Play with the other options if you like, but for now I'm using a value of 2 pixels for size, and black color.

The second of the two optional steps is adding a shadow behind the bubble. Go back to the Layer Styles button where you found the Stroke. . . option and choose Drop Shadow. . . instead. Once again, you can play with the settings to taste, but I set the Angle to 130 degrees, Distance to 10 pixels, and Size to 15 pixels.

In addition, if you don't want to use one of the preset thought bubbles found in the Custom Shapes, you can use the same combining steps to create your own thought bubble. It'll just require copying and pasting more shapes into one Shape Layer.

Many Ellipses were pasted into a single Shape layer to make this thought bubble.

Of course, if you're handy with vector drawing tools, you could simply draw the outline without having to overlap a bunch of ovals. We won't go that far, at least not now.

Once all the shapes are pasted into the same layer, follow the same steps as above—with the black Path Selection tool enabled—to combine them. Also as described above, change the bubble's color and add a stroke and/or shadow, if desired, and overlay a Text layer.
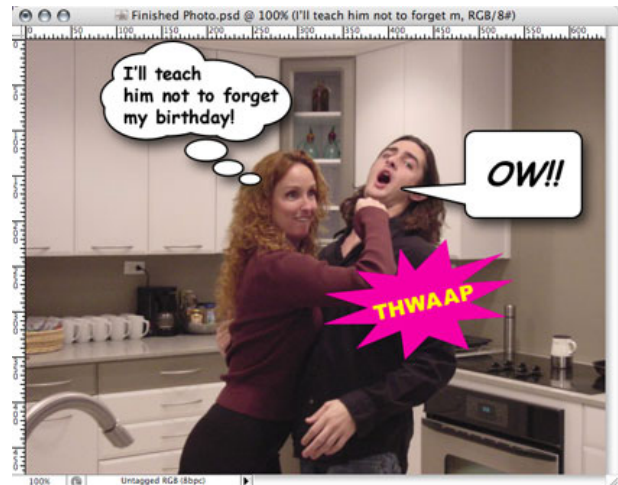

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Apparently, this one is only worth nine.

Homework Assignment

The preset Custom Shapes also has a zig-zag shape (or you can make your own). Have more fun creating

bursts of words depicting sounds, such as those seen on the campy *Batman* TV series.

BIFF . . . THWAAP . . . KER-CHUNK!!!!

Topics For Upcoming Months

- Effective Layer Effects
- What Does "Dots Per Inch" Really Mean? (A Tutorial on Resolution)
- Creating Seamless Tiles
- Mask-erades
- Fun With the Automate Menu
    - Photomerge
- Fun With Filters
- File Format Fever

If you have a topic suggestion, please share it[1]. I'm definitely interested in expanding this list with topics that are of interest to you.

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[1] http://www.atpm.com/13.06/photoshop.shtml#comment s

Desktop Pictures

We need new desktop pictures each month. [Write](1)[1] to us!

This Month's Desktop Pictures[2]

This month's photos are from ATPM reader James Craig:

> All images are of Easter Island (Rapa Nui). My wife Nan and I (we each took about half of these) are nearing the end of a year on Easter Island. I'm shooting B&W, and she is shooting to paint from. We have, of course, a MacBook Pro here with us.

> Here are a dozen of the thousands of images we have taken here. The project was designed essentially for me to shoot B&W negatives, but we find it just too tempting to keep shooting digital images while we are at it. Besides, many are with the Canon 5D, therefore high-resolution, and some are doable in B&W.

> We finally got Internet in the cabin, checked out the latest issue of ATPM, and thought it would be fun to send in a selection of desktop images.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

Pictures from previous months are listed in the desktop pictures [archives](3)[3].

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

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

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[1] mailto:editor@atpm.com
[2] http://www.atpm.com/13.06/easter-island/
[3] http://www.atpm.com/Back/desktop-pictures.shtml

OmniWeb Choose "Save Linked ▷ Images…" from the File menu.

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](4)[4].

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 and 10.4.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

Switch to the Finder. Choose "Preferences…" from the "Finder" menu. Click on the "Select Picture…" button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the

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[4] http://automator.us/examples-02.html

desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your `~/Library/Desktop Pictures` folder. Close the "Finder Preferences" window when you are done.
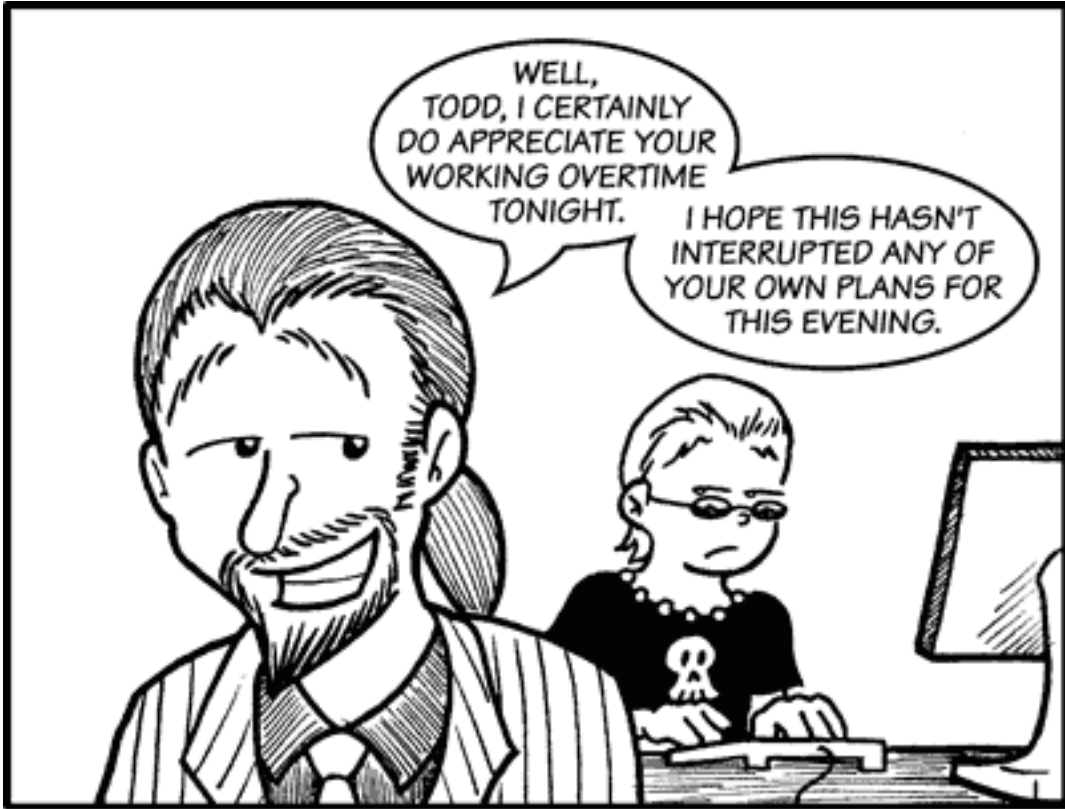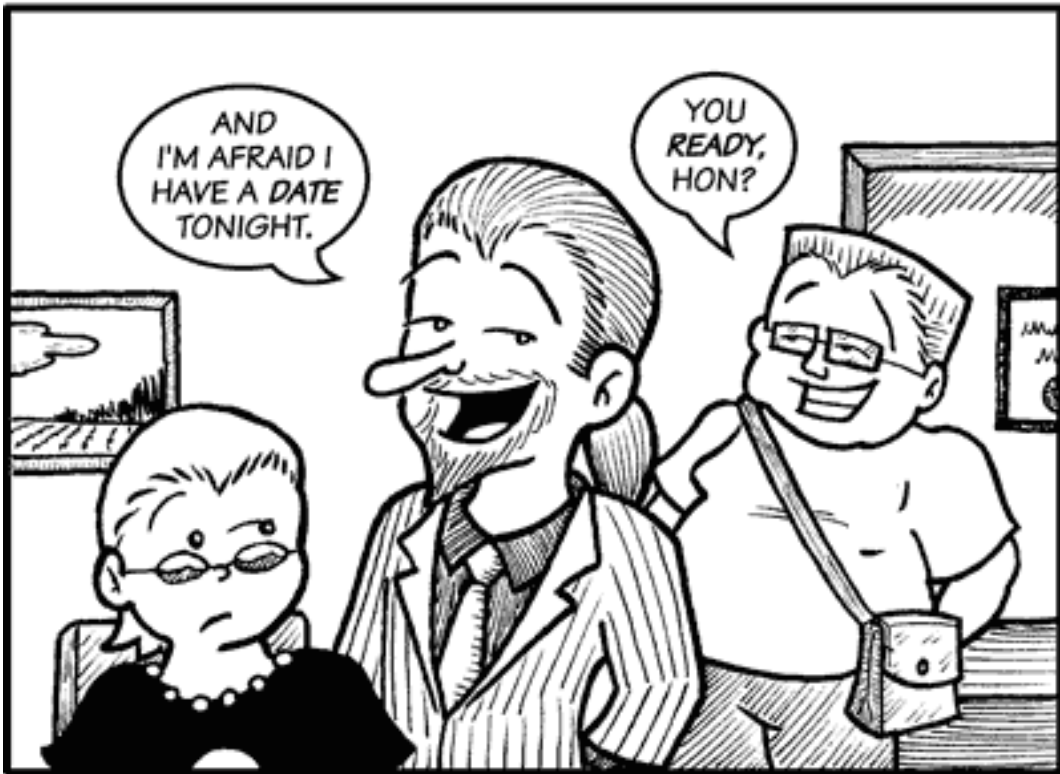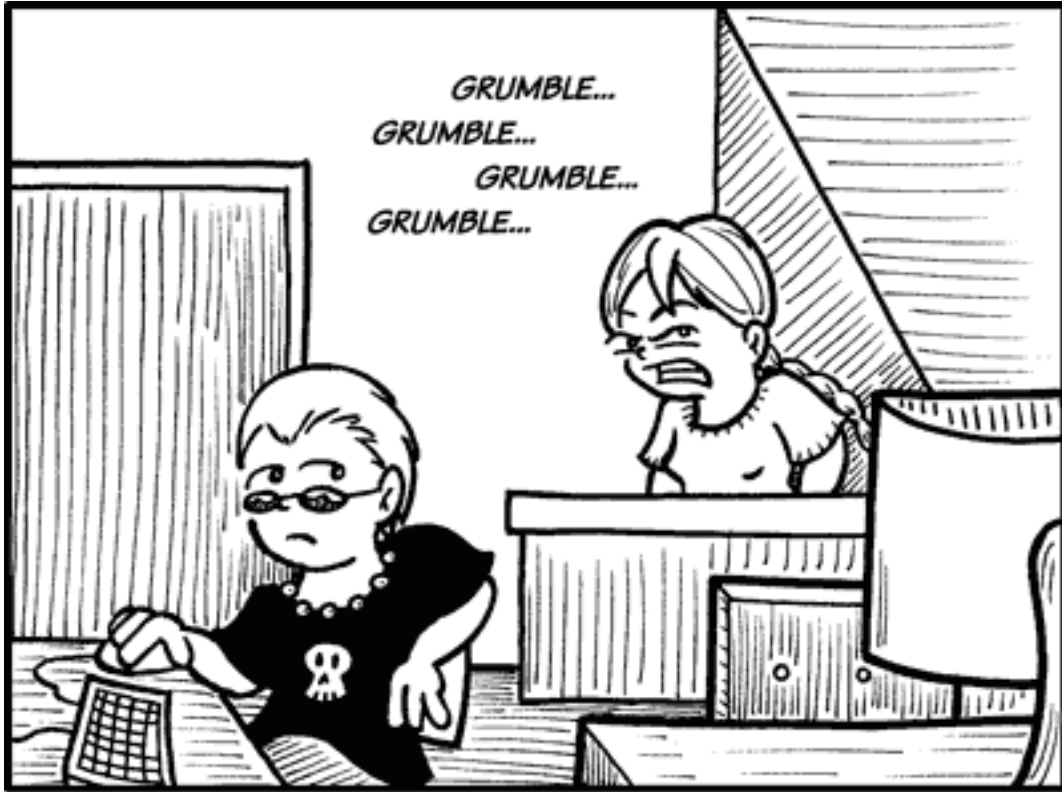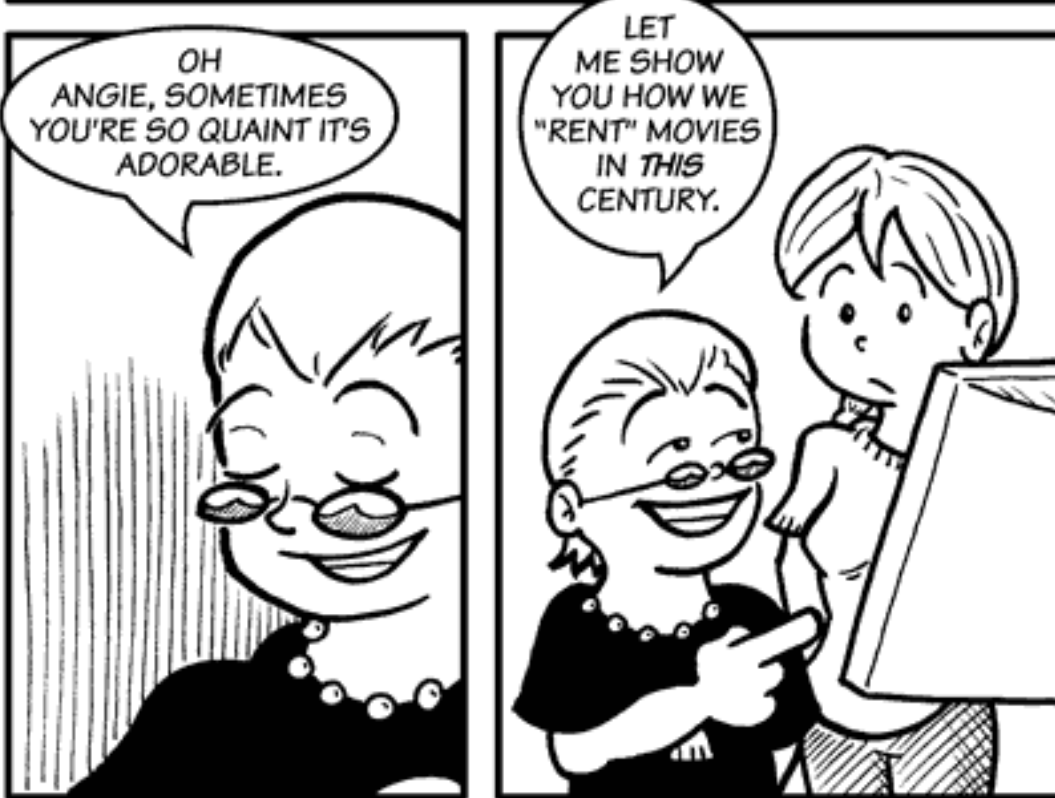
32

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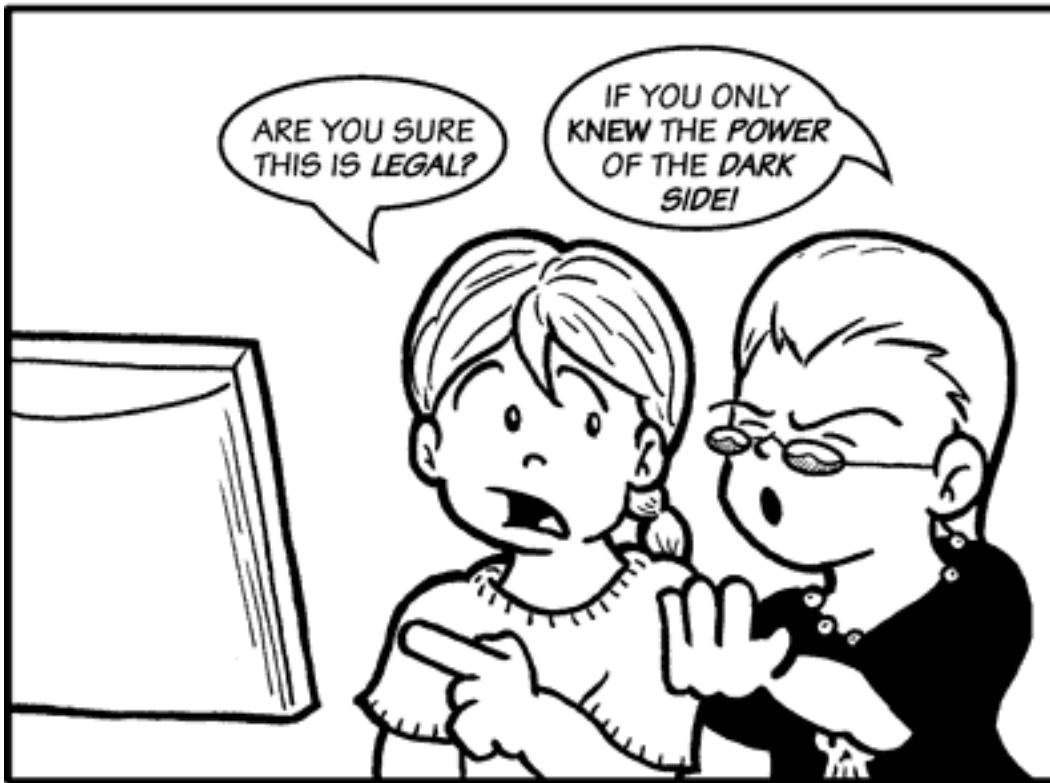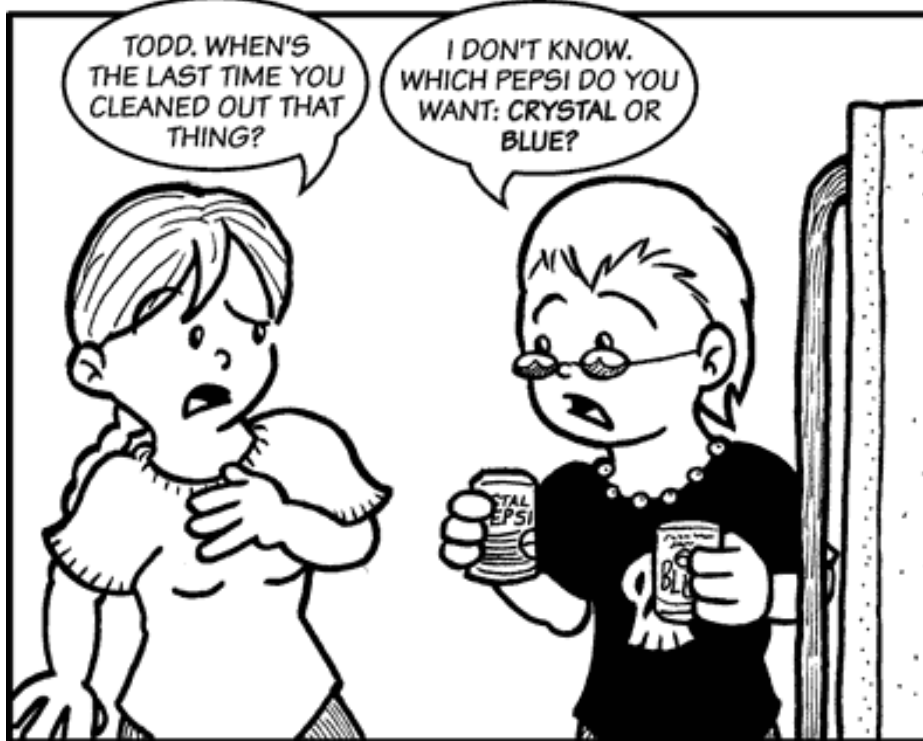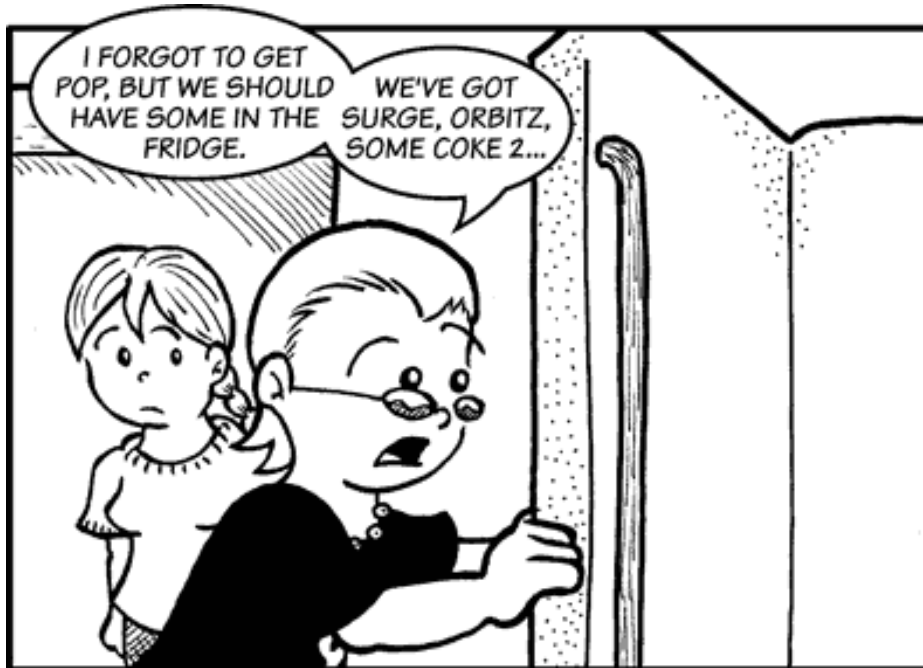
Aluminum Desktop Stand

Developer: LapWorks[1]
Price: $60
Trial: None

Laptop sales have risen dramatically over the past five years, making laptop stands an ever more popular accessory. The market has been flooded with a wide variety of designs, ranging from the mind-numbingly simple and inexpensive iRac[2] to the intricate and pricey NoteRiser[3]. One thing is certain: this increasingly competitive market has certainly evolved since the Road Tools CoolPad[4] hit the shelves nearly a decade ago.

that same basic idea and improved upon it dramatically with their Aluminum Desktop Stand.

Highest Incline

Highest Incline, Side View

Contour's NoteRiser, reviewed here some three years ago, was a fine stand for some purposes but overpriced and fatally flawed for virtually all Mac laptops in production at the time. LapWorks has taken

The Aluminum Desktop Stand is about the same surface area as a 15″ PowerBook or MacBook Pro but is about one-third as thick. It folds open through a fairly simple mechanism into any of six elevated positions, raising your laptop's screen to a maximum height of nearly seven inches. It also borrows a popular feature of Road Tools' CoolPad line, a swiveling base that allows for 360-degree rotation of a laptop

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[1] http://laptopdesk.net/aluminumstand.html
[2] http://www.atpm.com/10.09/irac.shtml
[3] http://www.atpm.com/10.03/noteriser.shtml
[4] http://www.atpm.com/7.08/coolpad.shtml

on the stand. (While nice for use on a conference table or for showing off photos, swiveling is dubiously useful in a stand requiring the use of an external keyboard and mouse.)

LapWorks pushes the Aluminum Desktop Stand as a means of cooling your laptop. In fact, LapWorks is the only manufacturer I've seen that has [actual scientific data](#)[5] to support this claim, in the form of a study conducted by engineering faculty from Cal Poly at Pomona. With the test laptop, a Dell, surface temperatures on the bottom of the laptop were reduced by about 10 degrees compared to the same laptop sitting on a desk and by 20 degrees compared to the laptop sitting on a cloth surface.

At maximum elevation, the Aluminum Desktop Stand claims a 23 percent heat reduction with the test laptop, and intermediate elevations offer proportionately less cooling capacity. Obviously, the degree of cooling will also depend in part on the design of the laptop, but it's clear that the stand does offer an improvement over the feet built into the bottom of a 15″ Aluminum PowerBook G4.

Blocked Optical Drive

As with the NoteRiser, the Aluminum Desktop Stand has a fatal flaw in its higher elevations: the support "ears" almost completely block the use of the optical drive in all of Apple's pro-level laptops. The problem is not as pronounced as it is with the NoteRiser due to a better design, but it's still bad enough to keep me from using this stand—in spite of all its nice features—on an everyday basis. It's also the only reason this stand gets demoted to an "Okay" rating.

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[5]http://lapworks.net/alum-thermalstudy/index.html

Lowest Incline

The good news is that LapWorks has sensibly decided to charge $60 for the Aluminum Desktop Stand, less than half of the NoteRiser's $130 suggested retail price. If you have a pro-level Apple laptop and use your optical drive more than once or twice a week, you're going to find this stand more trouble than it's worth unless you keep it at its lowest two or three settings. This largely negates the cooling and ergonomic benefits of the stand which, in turn, are presumably why you bought it in the first place. If you have a MacBook or iBook, or you don't use your optical drive much, this is a pretty slick stand at a fairly good price.

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[6]http://chrislawson.net

Book Review

by Eric Blair, eblair@atpm.com

Hacking the Cable Modem

Author: DerEngel
Publisher: No Starch Press[1]
Price: $30
Trial: Chapter 17[2]

VERY NICE

Alright, let's get this out of the way right now—*Hacking the Cable Modem* is *not* a Hacks[3] book. If you pick this book up thinking you want to squeeze a little extra out of the cable modem the Comcast guy just installed, put the book down and walk away. *Hacking the Cable Modem* is aimed at people who are willing to get into the guts of their cable modem and override the restrictions put in place by the cable companies. The sample chapter should give you a decent idea of the book's target audience; it's entitled "Building a Console Cable."

If you're still here after my clarification and still interested in taking a whack at your cable modem, then you're in the right place. Before going too deep into what the book offers, though, I want to mention two caveats. First, I did not attempt any of these hacks. I didn't expect the book to be as in-depth as it turned out to be, and I wasn't comfortable with the concept of modifying my leased cable modem. Second, most of the techniques discussed in the book are examined from a Windows-centric viewpoint. With some research, you could probably replicate some of the techniques on OS X, but others might require temporarily switching over to Windows.

The book's 23 chapters basically fit into three different sections: background, basics of hacking, and hacking specific modems. The background section covers the evolution of the cable modem. This starts with the earliest days of cable Internet access, when pretty much every type of cable modem used a different technique for connecting the user to the Internet. As a result, users pretty much needed to use an ISP-provided cable to ensure a reliable connection to the Internet. The history continues through the development and evolution of the DOCSIS standard, which established the protocols for ISP and cable modem producers and opened up a variety of modem options for end-users.

The background section also covers the history of cable modem hacking. This includes the birth of these practices and the author's extensive experience with hacking cable modems. Personally, I found most of this material a bit dry, though I can understand why some people would want to have this information, particularly those people interested in modifying the guts of their cable modems.

Jumping ahead, the book ends with four chapters on hacking specific cable modems. Consider this the "cheat-sheet" section of the book. If you desired, you could use the book as a buying guide for your next cable modem purchase. You probably don't want to perform these hacks on a leased cable modem, so you may as well buy a modem for which you've got instructions.

One of the dangers of referencing particular products is that the material can rapidly become dated as companies update their product lines. *Hacking the Cable Modem's* middle section, related to the basics of hacking, helps to alleviate this concern. Over the course of 13 chapters, DerEngel delves into information and techniques necessary to understand

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[1] http://www.nostarch.com/cablemodem.htm
[2] http://www.nostarch.com/download/cablemodem_ch17.pdf
[3] http://www.oreilly.com/store/series/hacks.csp

cable modem hacking. Most of the information is presented within the context of hacking a Motorola SURFboard, but DerEngel provides enough information that a motivated hacker can adapt the information to another cable modem. The only concern I have about obsolescence is whether changes to the DOCSIS standards may invalidate some of the information in the book.

Although *Hacking the Cable Modem* was not the book I hoped, I still found it to be an interesting reference. If you own a cable modem and are interested in breaking out the soldering iron, I definitely recommend checking out the book. It's a little dense at times and you definitely need to understand what you are doing, but the book definitely feels like a comprehensive reference on getting the most out of your cable modem.

Live Interior 3D 1.0.3

Developer: BeLight Software[1]
Price: $80 (academic pricing available)
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9. Universal[2].
Trial: Feature-limited (cannot save)

Ever want to see what your bedroom will look like *before* you hang that paisley-print fuchsia wallpaper? Or perhaps you'd like to know whether the expensive hardwood flooring or ceramic tile you've just chosen for the kitchen will make the room too dark? Then look no further. Live Interior 3D (LI3D) will let you create a virtual replica of that room, or your entire house, with relative ease.

According to BeLight Software, the developers of Live Interior 3D, the 3D visualization of your home or office will encourage improvements and help you to imagine your redesigned living space. LI3D can also assist in choosing the dimensions and locations of new furniture within your virtual mock-up, all at the planning stage. While this remarkable software tool sounds like it could be dangerous in the hands of a gung-ho spouse with a weekend renovation project in mind, having her first create the virtual room in LI3D will buy you some time to escape to the local public house go fishing or to the spa for a few days.

BeLight Software has moved rapidly from announcing the beta of LI3D in January 2007, to the release of the first retail version on April 4, which was quickly followed by the 1.0.3 update on April 26. While this shows a very active and enthusiastic software company, it also means that the program is quite young and has a lot of room to grow. Who will ultimately gain the most from using LI3D: professional interior designers or just the average householders? That's a good question, and I will reserve passing judgement 'til the conclusion.

My Virtual Kitchen Experience

I received a registration key for LI3D via e-mail on April 9, and downloaded the program (which installed flawlessly) from the BeLight Web site.

Even though I ordered a boxed review copy on the same day, it just arrived on May 16. There are two versions of the download available on the Web site: one with accessory 3D content (the full version), and a light version without this content. I mistakenly downloaded the light version, and had to uninstall then reinstall the full version (without problems) to get the benefit of the entire package, since the content does not exist as a separate download.

If you have limited hard drive space, then the light version is for you, and you can simply download any necessary 3D items for your room(s) from Google 3D Warehouse[3]. LI3D provides a handy link to this site from which you can directly and easily import 3D objects into your project. But be prepared to wade through near-endless lists of items for even the most refined of searches, and be prepared that many items in the warehouse are created/donated by third-party individuals and are of less than stellar quality. If you use 3D modeling software, then LI3D can also import 3DS format files. In order for you to see what the stand-alone program was capable of, I tried to create a room just with the objects available within the program.

Since my wife and I are planning to renovate our kitchen soon, I thought that creating a virtual model of it would provide us with a way to compare and contrast various color and flooring scenarios with only a few mouse clicks—and all before spending a cent on materials. While this was a good choice from my pragmatic perspective, the kitchen is probably the most difficult room to create in LI3D (or any design program) given its tight tolerances, wide range of layouts, materials, and accessory objects. I found it most challenging (a polite way to say much cursing occurred) and wouldn't recommend that anyone learn this program by starting with a kitchen. You must be prepared to think laterally.

As I mentioned, I tried to create a room just with the objects available within the program, and since there are no dishwashers or kitchen sinks in the LI3D library, I had to improvise what you see from what was available. The dishwasher is a resized and

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[1]http://www.belightsoft.com/products/liveinterior/overview.php
[2]http://www.apple.com/universal/

[3]http://sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse/

textured refrigerator placed within a countertop cupboard. The kitchen sink is a resized bathroom sink barely poking through the countertop, with an auxiliary stainless steel–finished flat surface placed just above the countertop level to look like the inside of the sink. Since none of the countertops has an opening for a sink, and you cannot create an opening without editing the countertop in a separate 3D program (or importing an object from Google3D), this was the only way to achieve a relative illusion of basin depth. The only item I downloaded from Google3D Warehouse was the faucet, and for some bizarre reason it imported as two separate object halves that had to be positioned together to make a whole. It took me about a full day to get the project to a point where I was happy enough to show my wife, and then a few more hours tweaking this and that. Like any creative activity, you can really get caught up in the this's and that's and need to know when to quit.
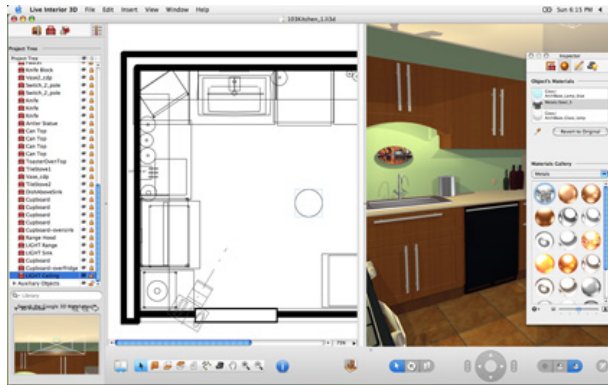
LI3D in action with the work area split into (from left to right) the Library, 2D and 3D Panes, and the Inspector Window. The overhead light is selected in each of these.
(click to enlarge[a])

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[a]http://www.atpm.com/13.06/images/live-interior-3d-1-large.jpg

The LI3D Interface

The LI3D program window consists of a sparse main menu bar across the top. In the workspace area are four main elements: the *Library Panel*, the *2D and 3D View Panels*, and finally the *Inspector Window*. The Library Panel, 2D, and 3D View Panels can all be open at the same time and adjusted for horizontal size via vertical "splitter bars." The locations of many secondary mode buttons and toolbar menus have nice contextual arrangement within the relevant panels, while the *Inspector Window* is a catch-all for most

other functions, such as individual *Object Properties*, including materials and texture choices, *2D* and *3D Properties*, and the *Lights List*. The Inspector Window is a floating panel that can be toggled open and closed, but has very limited sizing options. Most annoyingly, it does not disappear when the program is reduced to the dock and requires another click to remove it from the desktop. Several key functions are buried within the different modes of the Inspector Window, such as the *Make Screenshot* button (the only way to capture a 3D image from the program), which should really be in a more obvious location, perhaps on the main menu bar or the 3D view panel.

One of the alternative Library Panel modes is the *Project Tree*, which lists all elements within the room of the currently open LI3D file. Items are grouped by object type and receive a default name when added to the project, such as "Wall," but unfortunately do not receive a unique extension so all walls are just named "Wall." It is up to you to provide a meaningful nomenclature structure such as SouthWall, EastWall, LeftChair, RightLamp, etc., and it is best to keep up with making these changes before you have 65-plus objects, like in my LI3D kitchen file.

I have found many aspects of the program to be quite enjoyable to use, while others are redundant (just how many ways do you need to lock an object's variables?) or awkward, such as the ability to select and manipulate objects; a priority requirement for a program like this. If an object sits on top of another like an item on a shelf, or within it like my dishwasher, it is nearly impossible to select in either the 2D or 3D view using a mouse click. You will have to open the *Project Tree* to make the selection, but even then you may not be able to easily manipulate it the way you want, if at all. For instance, you are limited to rotating an object only on the Y axis. This was a problem for me when I tried to rotate the knife handles and knife-block you see on the countertop, which I created from resized and textured LI3D primitive objects. The knife handles had to stay horizontal rather than at an angle and is perhaps an inconsequential example, but is a significant limitation overall.

You also cannot move objects with any precision by selecting and dragging with the mouse. I found it best to use the arrow keys within the 2D plan to get exact placement on the X and Z axis; however, Y-axis elevation of the object must be entered with the keypad through a process of several rounds of high-low guessing in the 3D view. Selecting and drag-

ging in the 3D view can also move most items in a crude manner, but now the keyboard arrows will only move the position of the activated camera—not the selected item—which is most redundant since there are already camera arrow buttons on the 3D interface. Moving between the Project Tree and the 2D and 3D views, all just to get the exact placement of an object, is very frustrating and must be improved in the future for better workflow.

Using the LI3D cameras also takes a little getting used to. The program automatically provides five default cameras, but their positions are fixed, and if you have anything in front of them, such as walls or furniture (and what room doesn't have walls and furniture?), then that view is blocked. Thus, as far as I can tell, the default cameras are next to useless, but you can easily add and rename your own custom cameras and then move them around on the 2D view with the mouse. Any camera can also be used in continuous 3D "Walk Mode" by simply clicking the *walk* button in the 3D toolbar and then clicking on the semi-transparent arrows that appear on the 3D view and holding the left mouse button down. In order for these "walk-arounds" to work in anything approaching a seamless manner, you need to set the render quality to the minimum.

At this time there is no way to save predefined walk paths, such as you might use to show a client. But in my opinion, the biggest deficiencies with the cameras is that the field of view cannot be altered by changing the lens length (i.e. adjusting from wide angle to zoom). Also, you cannot use multiple 3D cameras at the same time within split views to get different 3D perspectives, which would greatly aid in the accurate placement of objects.

Making Images of Your Virtual Rooms

This now brings us to the topic of visual output and perhaps the biggest limitation of the program. While LI3D will nicely produce images of your 2D view, it has no 3D software render engine[4] and instead relies solely on the OpenGL hardware settings of your graphics card. Therefore, making portable 3D images of your LI3D-created room is functionally limited to taking screen shots by using either a per-vertex or per-pixel lighting model. (Use per-pixel if your video card can handle it.) The other available "render quality" settings involve only three levels: plain (no lights), with lights, and lights with shadows, which

[4]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rendering_%28computer_graphics%29

does not comprise much choice in my experience. I will let the unadulterated LI3D images speak for themselves; they were created on my Mac Pro with higher-end ATI X1900XT video card with 512 MB of RAM.

Our Virtual Kitchen

Our Virtual Kitchen

On the positive, I found that the ability to geographically align my room (according to both compass orientation and latitude) and then use the sun/moonlight settings (morning, daytime, evening, and night) was a wonderfully creative software feature, which added an element of realism I was not expecting. Adding other illumination to your room is as simple as going to the object library to choose a lamp or light fixture, dragging it to either project view panel, positioning it, and tweaking the light color and luminosity level. While this is quite simple, I found that the luminosity slider was poorly calibrated since the lowest setting should be zero, or no light. In the screenshots of my LI3D kitchen, with the three artificial light sources all set at the lowest setting, I found each light source to be too bright

compared to the real lights in our kitchen (sorry, my wife refuses to let me publish a pre-renovated picture of our modest townhouse kitchen…you'll have to wait).

Changing colors and/or materials on your walls, floors, or objects is a delight to do and requires only that the object be selected, the particular sub-material of the object be selected in the inspector window (if it has multiple materials/surfaces), and then the texture/color choice made from the pop-ups. My only complaints are that the outside environment (a quite virtual-looking sky and a green surface—not grass by any means) cannot be replaced by your own digital image and that the stock texture and color choices are rather limited. However, there is the ability to import your own object textures or copy and alter stock colors to create new ones, and you could always replace the outside environment from the windows/doors of the screen shots in an image-adjusting program.

Other features are also really quite handy. For example, if you have an existing blueprint or floor plan of your house or office, then it can be scanned and imported as a starting point to shape walls. Pre-prepared room templates, complete with furniture and lighting, are also available as starting points; however, they are limited to only a few bedrooms, living rooms, and offices.

Live Interior 3D and Your Macintosh

The minimum system requirements from the user's guide are rather understated, as my 1.8 GHz G5 iMac meets even the recommended hardware requirements (it exceeds all except the 128 MB of video RAM; it only has 64 MB), yet it runs painfully slow with the "spinning beach ball of death" appearing for such simple things as renaming objects in the Project Tree. Not surprising, LI3D blazes on my Mac Pro.

BeLight operates a support forum[5] in which a small but active community is forming, posting its LI3D questions, and making suggestions and requests for future releases. It is a good place to pick up tips that you won't find in the user's guide, such as how to "fake" a mirror, since LI3D does not have a 3D render engine to calculate reflected light paths, and apparently there is no plan to support this in the future. I posted a suggestion that a screen shot of the room could be taken from the mirror's perspective and then that image applied as a surface

texture to any item you want to have reflections (what would be called a reflection map in other 3D programs). It works with a bit of manipulation in an image-adjusting program.

Conclusion

I'm going to be honest: if I had paid full price for this program I would have been initially disappointed for all the reasons above. That said, and as I mentioned before, this is a very young program and improvements via free updates appear to be forthcoming at a good pace. For the average individual without 3D program experience and using this to generate room plans and images for personal use, LI3D hits the mark with a Good rating. If I were thinking about purchasing it for a small interior design company, then I'd seriously look at the other software options[6] and compare/contrast features and image output. Since LI3D does not export 3D files into other programs and has no software render capabilities, then I would say stay away from it for any serious or recreational 3D artwork.

For this program to have gotten a Very Nice rating or higher, I would expect overall better quality images from the 3D views, a way of saving walk paths for presentation purposes, better options and workflow for manipulating objects, and the ability to change the default outdoor environment or import more realistic 2D images. This last issue is almost a necessity and would vastly improve the appeal of the flat-appearing screen shots.

While the access to Google3D Warehouse[7] functions adequately, I would also like to see more and better quality in-program objects, color choices, and textures rather than have the onus of doing this myself. In particular, I found the wood grain to be particularly disappointing once applied to the virtual cabinets of my created kitchen, and there was no way to hide/change the huge and rather ugly handles the cabinets came with. However, if you have a certain look in mind and are tenacious, you can import much better textures or items from a vast array of free online sources.

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[5]http://www.belightsoft.com/forum/viewforum.php?id=32

[6]http://home-design-software-review.toptenreviews.com/

[7]http://sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse/

Rip-Stop Backpack

Developer: Incase[1]
Price: $100
Trial: None

One thing I've learned from my obsession with computing backpacks is that it's very hard to find a one-size-fits-all pack. I don't mean that in the sense of physical size, but rather in the sense of task accomplishment. A pack that works for hauling around everything you need on a vacation or long-term business trip might not be ideally suited for your casual, everyday treks to the office, and vice versa.

For instance, I still love my Tom Bihn Brain Bag[2], mainly because when I do go on a week-long trip, I know I can stuff everything I'll possibly need in it, and *still* have room in the bag. The Brain Bag degrades nicely for smaller cargo use, but some folks may still find it too cumbersome. Enter the Incase Rip-Stop Backpack.

The Rip-Stop Backpack, so named due to its rip-stop nylon material, is an outstanding everyday pack. It can handle any size portable Mac you can throw at it, from the 12-inch iBook all the way through the big boy, the 17-inch MacBook Pro. The laptop compartment is fake fur-lined to protect the beautiful lines of your 'Book. The laptop space was quite accommodating of my 12-inch PowerBook in its SleeveCase[3].

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[1]http://goincase.com/products/detail/ripstop-backpack-cl55018
[2]http://www.atpm.com/8.04/bags.shtml
[3]http://www.sfbags.com/products/sleevecases/sleevecases.htm

Packed and ready to roll. Yes, I'm re-reading *Snow Crash*.

Incase, a maker of some very nice iPod cases, didn't forget the Mac's favorite accessory, either. There's a dedicated iPod compartment up top, with a slot to thread the headphone cable through, and this is also fur-lined. As you would expect, any size iPod will fit in the compartment. While I've always delighted in such spaces for storage, I've never used them as they are intended. For one, I hardly go any place where I'll be in transit long enough to listen to tunes from the iPod stored in my backpack. Two, my Type A, control-freak personality would want some means of controlling the iPod from within the pack, and very few bags allow that. Still, those users who don't fall into either of those categories can rest easy in knowing that Incase has sweat the iPod details for the Rip-Stop Backpack.

Top of the bag, showing the entry to the compartments, including the one for the iPod. The luggage tag is not included.

Inside the rest of the pack is plenty of storage space for books, magazines, and your assorted computing sundries. There's even a "secret," zippered pocket in the front compartment, ideal for storing documents or items you don't want easily visible when opening the pack. I found that if I packed my usual vacation load into the Rip-Stop, it took it all, but it was a strain. It was a little uncomfortable getting certain items out during the flight, but nothing in the form of a deal-breaker. I was definitely pushing the limits of the bag, and most users would not stuff the Backpack as much as I did. My normal, everyday load would not constitute nearly as many items, and the Rip-Stop excels in that area.

The two main compartments.

The straps of the Backpack are padded and comfortable on the shoulders. I made good use of the chest and waist straps while hauling through two airports. Not only did these help stabilize the Rip-Stop for better balance, but they also take more of the load off of one's shoulders. (That's just good ergonomics, and all backpack users should utilize chest and waist straps, if available.) All of the straps were easy to adjust, even while standing in the middle of the aisle of a 737. (Somehow the left shoulder strap had gotten *very* loose during the flight, and needed to be tightened as I put it on to deplane.) The carrying handle on the top is very comfortable, and doesn't feel like it's going to rip out on you at any time, as some pack handles do.

The bottom of the Backpack is semi-formed, so as to offer stability when one sets it down. I say semi-formed, because right out of the shipping box, it was slightly compressed, and it took filling the bag with gear for a few days to stretch the material out. However, for the base to keep your pack upright, the pack itself must be properly balanced. I noticed that when I took my PowerBook out of the rear laptop compartment, but still had all of my other gear in the front portions of the bag, the pack would tip over on to its front.

The Rip-Stop Backpack is currently available only in a green/tan/black color combination, with no word from Incase when the all-black version, like the one I have, will be available again. The Rip-Stop is one of those packs that just feels *solid*. It feels, looks, and *is* well-made, and it is not going to let you down.

SimpleMovieX 3.0

Developer: Aero Quartet[1]
Price: $30
Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9, Quick-
    Time 7. Universal[2].
**Trial:** Fully-featured (slower saving)

- You have a digital camera that can double as a camcorder so you use it frequently to record five-minute clips of your kid doing cute things. Eventually, you need to assemble them into a movie to show to the kid's technically-challenged grandparents.

- You have TiVo and have shelled out the money to be able to convert the recordings to MPEG-4. Now you need to quickly remove the commercials.

- You are a Stephen Colbert fan and want to take up his Video Challenge so you need something that can quickly move chunks of video clips around.

With SimpleMovieX from Aero Quartet, the needs in these scenarios can be fulfilled. Installation of SimpleMovieX, or SMX for short, is a simple matter of mounting the image file and copying the program to the Applications folder. When launched, SMX presents you with the message "Drop Movie to edit here."
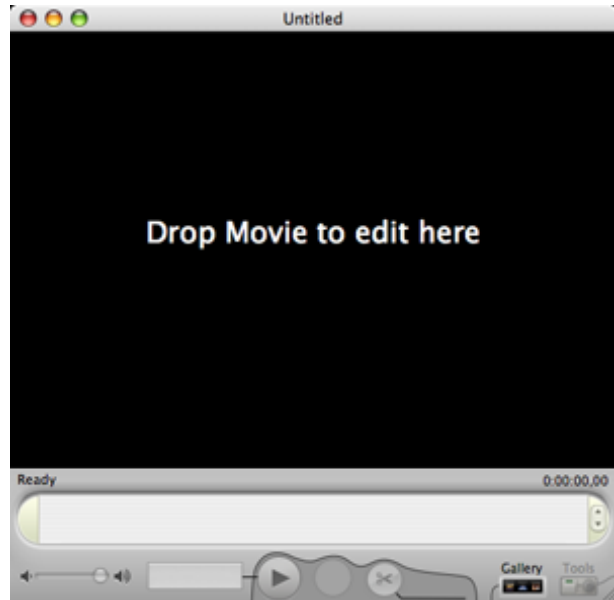
Below the main window is a holding area, called the Gallery. As a movie is loaded, it appears in the Gallery, and a few controls appear in the main window.

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[1]http://www.aeroquartet.com/SimpleMovieX/info.html
[2]http://www.apple.com/universal/

For simple editing, all the work can be done with the controls in the main screen. You have the big Play button to play back the clips. Using the copy-and-paste metaphor of a word processor, you select a segment of the movie by adjusting the white and the blue controls. Actually, the segment end that you adjust instantly turns blue as you select and drag it, so it seems like you don't really move the white knob. With the target segment selected, you can copy and paste them via keyboard commands Command-C and Command-V or from the menu bar at the top. Command-X or its corresponding menu command would cut the selected segment from the movie, but since cutting is a frequently-used action in film editing, SMX conveniently has a button, labeled with a picture of a scissor, right in the main window.

Editing a movie isn't as easy as moving chunks of text in a word processor. You don't really see the selected movie segment but merely a representation of it on the time line. To give you extra, finer control of the process, SMX provides zooming, audio waveform, and a search window.

Using the up and down arrows in the main window, you can zoom up to $900\times$ into a movie segment to select just the frame to serve as the beginning or end of a segment. You can also use the left and right arrow keys on the keyboard to move one frame at a time. To control by sound, enable the display of the waveform overlay. Now you can precisely capture those sound bites exactly based on where the wave goes flat. Lastly, by exposing the Tools pane, you can visualize the selected segment in terms of frames. Instead of fast forwarding to the place where you want the marker to be, you click on one of the still frame in the grid. The number of still frames to be scanned can be 16 or 64.

SMX has one advanced feature that can be attractive to TiVo owners. As long as you can somehow convert the TiVo downloads into MPEG-4, SMX will happily load them. Using SMX's new chapter feature, you can divide the movie into, well, chapters. On the time line, the chapters are labeled alternately as blue and white chapters so with a built-in script, you can easily remove all the commercials in one fell swoop.

I am not a TiVo owner but I do have a need that SMX helps greatly. My wife plays the Chinese zither in a local musical group. From time to time, they would perform at concerts and I record the shows. I do not care for the DVD format's menu system and prefer that my movie discs play immediately upon being inserted in a playback device. I store the concert movies in the Video CD (VCD) format. VCD files are in MPEG-1 format, and even though quality is at best VHS, VCD discs take less time to burn, lack DVD's menu system, and play immediately upon insertion.

To separate the music from the movie, up to now, I had to use Audacity and Griffin's iMic—somewhat of a low-tech solution, and I usually end up adjusting the volume a few times before I can get the music

right. Now, with SMX, I can cut out the concert segment with the tune I want, then extract the audio out to an AIFF file. I still use Audacity to export the tune to MP3 for import into iTunes, but the extraction process is much simpler and more reliable.

I don't do any movie editing at all and don't own QuickTime Pro, either. If I want to extract an audio track out of a movie I would try the task with iMovie. Alas, before any movie files can be used by iMovie they would have to be first imported into iMovie. The import process takes minutes to complete, but is long enough to derail the train of thought that carries my artistic vision. In the case of VCD files, iMovie cannot even import the .DAT files, a mere few hundred megabytes in size. iMovie complained that I didn't have enough space for the import process, even though I did have 4 GB of free space.

SMX has many more advanced features, but you are on your own when you get there as SMX's documentation has a gaping hole in advanced editing. With the common use of online documentation, I wasn't surprised that the SMX help file has links to the Web for advanced editing. Alas, when I went to the Aero Quartet Web site, there was nothing much on advanced editing, either. The page is under construction. To its credit, the SMX documentation does disseminate the difference between codecs, such as MPEG-1, and containers, e.g. QuickTime and includes links to Wikipedia.

SMX bills itself as "The happy QuickTime Pro replacement that does MPEG." Its list of reasons to switch from QuickTime Pro includes native support for MPEG-1, MPEG-2, and AVI. To the list, I would add free/discounted upgrades and more reliability. One major complaint QuickTime Pro owners have is that every new version of QuickTime Pro costs $30, regardless whether you bought it before or not. What's worse, when QuickTime Player 7 came out, installing it would disable QuickTime Pro 5 or 6's Pro features. With shareware like SMX, chances are you'll get free upgrades for a long time to come.

Overall, SMX works smoothly but I've found two somewhat annoying bugs. If, instead of dropping files into its window, you use Command-O, in the selection window you would not be able to double-click a file to select it. You would have to press the Enter key on the keyboard or click the Open button. The other bug is that if you go into full-screen mode, then use Command-Tab to switch to another application, when you Command-Tab again to return to SMX, the movie goes back to its normal size and continues playing, but with SMX's blank default screen. You would have to go into full-screen mode again or select a screen size from the menu bar.

Incomplete documentation and a few bugs aside, I still think SimpleMovieX is a solid product. As I do not own QuickTime Pro, I cannot say that it makes a good replacement, but for my light movie editing needs, its feature set is just right. I give it a Very Nice rating.

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[3]http://qaptainqwerty.blogspot.com

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[1] `mailto:reviews@atpm.com`
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[3]http://www.atpm.com/reviews/
[4]http://www.atpm.com/Back/

What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

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