

# ATPM

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

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# Welcome

by Robert Paul Leitao, [rleitao@atpm.com](mailto:rleitao@atpm.com)

Welcome to the April issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* We've just completed our 10th full year of publication and start our second decade of interesting views, insightful reviews, and general Macintosh-related mayhem and madness by bringing you yet another edition of ATPM in our easy-to-read monthly format.

## Secret, Secret on the Wall

When does a news story become a revelation of a trade secret? That's an issue to be determined by the courts thanks to Apple's recent efforts to squelch product rumors and reduce news leaks. In the land of legalities, Apple has indeed tasted victory and courts have provided the Mac-maker with a new beachhead to battle online journalists and their undisclosed sources.

With vehement cries of First Amendment rights, online journalists who focus on Apple Computer and the company's product development efforts are scampering to protect themselves after a California Superior Court ruled in Apple's favor and the company's efforts to obtain the identities of those who leaked new product information from the journalists and their publications. Sources who violate non-disclosure agreements to provide information to rumor and news sites will have to contend with the ramifications of their actions while the boundaries for publication of trade secrets obtained through other channels may be tested in this current round of court battles.

## What's a SchemaSoft?

We admit that question will most likely not be the correct response to a Final Jeopardy statement, but Mac users might be intrigued by the answer. SchemaSoft is a software developer that makes products to glean or extract data from a variety of digital formats. It's also a company that recently sold its principal assets to Apple Computer. What Apple will do with SchemaSoft's assets has not been disclosed. That information might now be considered a trade secret.

## Buy a Pepsi, Get a Tune

Maybe. Consumers do have a 1-in-3 chance of winning a free iTunes tune on specially marked Pepsi bottles. While the promotion expires on April 11, 2005, winners have until May 23, 2005 to redeem their winning bottle caps for a free song.

This year's Pepsi song giveaway appears to be more successful than the much-maligned campaign of one year ago. Still, Pepsi bottle-tipping might be observed in some locations as eager music fans tilt the bottles to the side to see if they have a winning cap in hand before entering the checkout line.

## It's Time for Tiger

The latest version of Apple's popular Mac OS X will hit store shelves soon. Pre-orders are being taken at many major outlets, and Mac enthusiasts are watching the clock for an official release date. Officially scheduled to be released in the first half of 2005, many of the new features will save avid Mac users time on tasks while enhancing the operating system's overall functionality. We will have an in-depth look at Tiger soon after shipping copies arrive.

## Daylight Savings Time

The first Sunday of April marks the beginning of Daylight Savings Time in most locals in the US. Residents of Hawaii, Arizona, and certain areas of Indiana will remain an hour behind. But no matter what the clock may say, each issue of ATPM is designed as a time saver. Every digital page from cover to cover is chock full of useful information to the delight of our readers. Our concise presentation of Macintosh-related news and views makes the most of your time leaving plenty of daylight for other worthwhile activities. We welcome you to our April issue.

This issue includes:

## The Candy Apple: Some Secrets Are There For Good Reason

Ellyn reveals one way to tell if you are doing the right thing.

## **Bloggable: Apple v. Public Opinion**

What happens when you leak secret information? Steve Jobs comes down hard on you, is what. Wes Meltzer explores the first decision in Apple v. Does and its ramifications...and 17 other items of possible interest to you, from an R.I.P. to Jef Raskin to more on Motorola's efforts on an iTunes phone.

## **About This Particular Web Site**

This month's *ATPW* gives you a double dose of baby names, the histories of your finances and Canada's flag, and a tip on reducing the number of banner ads you see while browsing. If clicking all those links make you hungry for more, you can also read about three dozen kinds of fried dough.

## **Pod People**

Let your iPod improve your workouts—pump up the jam!

## **About This Particular Outliner: Outline Exchange and XML, Part 1: History**

This month's *ATPO* column starts a look at XML and how it can help you exchange outline data among outliners and other applications in a workflow.

## **Segments: Paint it White**

They say white is for virgins, so given it was David Blumenstein's very first Macworld Expo, the color scheme fit perfectly.

## **Customizing The Mac OS X User Interface: Part II, Desktop Pictures**

The images we choose to place on our desktop environments are very often a direct reflection of our individual personalities; it's easy to spot the nature lover, dedicated parent, Apple zealot and more as we pass by their workstations.

## **How To: Tips for Your Next Multimedia Project**

"Powerful, easy to use technology meets powerful, easy to use multimedia applications, and in true Mac tradition the end result is up to the user."

## **Cartoon: Cortland**

Cortland and his friends schmooze at a luncheon, and trouble may be brewing for Todd.

## **Cartoon: iTrolls**

The iTrolls ask, "What's In a Name?"

## **Desktop Pictures: Arizona**

This month's desktop pictures come from Eric Blair's January 2004 escape to sunny Arizona.

## **Frisky Freeware**

Frisky the Freeware Guinea Pig checks out Thunderbird.

## **Review: Axio Backpacks**

The Swift is another entry in the niche hard-shell backpack market with another set of tradeoffs to consider. Axio's Swift is good, but not great. The Hybrid is a super-sized backpack for super-sized laptops and super-sized people, with some medium-sized flaws. The Fuse is a good, basic hard-shell backpack with some quirks that would puzzle even Saab owners.

## **Review: iLite**

The iBook user's answer to backlit PowerBook keyboards.

## **Review: iPod shuffle**

The iPod shuffle is everything it claims to be: light, inexpensive, and fun.

## **Review: Tetris Elements**

Tetris-mania! Since the late 1980s, the video game world has been hooked on falling blocks. The latest entry into the Tetris family, Tetris Elements, has graced the Macintosh platform. Find out if this one lives up to the tradition.



# E-Mail

## Mac OS X Hints and Tips

Command-Tab is certainly handy (especially since I came from the Windows world where Alt-Tab does the same thing—for switching applications only).

However, there's an added tip: if you use Command-~ (or technically Command-`, since you don't press the Shift key), you can cycle between open windows in the current application. For example, say you have Word open with a couple different document windows. Using Command-~, you can cycle through the various open windows in Word without having to use the Window menu bar item or manually selecting them with your mouse. Very handy, indeed.

—*Jim Collison*



I thought that no tip or trick could still surprise me after years of using my Mac, yet the inspector in the Finder and being able to quit or hide applications while using Command-Tab were completely new to me. Thanks for these helpful shortcuts!

—*Ben Clark*

## Cortland

God, I'm hooked! Keep putting out this great comic strip!

—*Grover Watson*

## PolyRingtone Converter Review

As the developer of [a MIDI Player](#) I hope to eventually provide the facility to produce ringtones in the manner that you describe. However, I have to disagree with your assertion that MP3 ringtones will make MIDI ringtones obsolete. Sure, MP3 ringtones will probably take a large part of the market but MIDI can do lots of things that MP3 can't. Say you

really like a riff but the singer's voice is dominant. There is no easy way to remove the singer's voice in an MP3. Finding the best way to cut out a section of music could also be a problem, requiring fade in, etc. which doesn't strike me as a very effective ringtone. Also, with MIDI, you can change the instruments to suit your liking. You can be creative and generate a unique ringtone of your own. Sometimes a musical "idea" expressed in a different way can be more effective than the original music.

—Peter Zegelin

### **WireTap Pro Review**

Does this application require [Application Enhancer](#) (APE)? I can't imagine installing a hack that is always running and then toys with my system when I need to occasionally run an audio application. Are there any other audio recording applications that are similar, don't use APE and work well?

—Orytek

No, WireTap Pro doesn't use an APE. It is a combination of a front-end application and a kernel extension. —Eric Blair

### **Outlining Task Managers, Part 3**

Excellent as usual, Ted. Thanks for including requested applications that aren't primarily outliners but use some outlining features nonetheless. Perhaps your and your readers' attention to their outlining features will prompt some of the developers to beef up their outlining feature sets.

I've tried each of these applications over the last few months, and while each of them are promising and cover certain niches, I really like DayLite and Merlin the most; they're the most robust of the lot in my opinion. I bought DayLite and am considering buying Merlin. DayLite has adopted a plug-in approach and is encouraging developers to create plug-ins to it, which bodes well for its rapid growth as a platform. They have a handful of plug-ins available already, including one that integrates with Apple's Mail and a third party plug-in that integrates DayLite with Parliant's PhoneValet telephony application.

Like many of your readers, I also use DEVONthink (and am waiting for their upcoming Professional version), OmniOutliner, and am looking into the promising Flow and ActionItems applications. So I'm looking forward to your upcoming column on workflow integration to help tie them together.

A request is that you cover how well various applications conform to the XML and OPML open standards formats for data longevity and portability. To state the obvious, this seems to be the essential glue to creating a viable workflow system. In fact, a larger systems approach is the main criteria for how I'm evaluating individual applications for functional fit, for they don't just stand on their own as separate isolated feature-set islands, but form integral parts of a larger information management system.

—*Jeff Nailen*



It shouldn't matter to you which one because your world will differ.

You can't just say that! Your attention to detail makes me value your opinion highly, so which one was it?

And of course thanks again for a great article.

— *Richard Chamberlain*

Sorry. I promised myself early in the game that I wouldn't promote my own usage patterns to readers. If you don't have respect for your readers, you shouldn't be writing.

One of the tenets of *ATPO* is that outlining is a technique, not a product. Another is that *ATPO* readers are clever individuals worthy of finding environments that fit their unique minds. What I use is pretty irrelevant, and I hope *ATPO* helps readers find good fits for how their imagination is shaped.

I want to write about XML transfer, workflows, and scripting. Beyond that, reader interest may wane. In a final column, perhaps I'll get personal about my own environment. —*Ted Goranson*



Thank you very much for the superb articles and comments. I'm waiting to see DEVONthink Pro and for another sale (or academic pricing) from Tinderbox.

Currently I mainly use DayLite, Near-Time Flow (1.5 EA), and OmniGraffle Pro, but have tried many of the programs mentioned here. Each program has its strengths. I really like Tinderbox's approach and graphical displays of the information, and DEVONthink's management/preview of a variety of files has been quite useful since I have hundreds of PDF files for part of one project. Unfortunately there's not one program to cover all my needs. For now Flow seems to offer a good balance between my need to store different files in an organized manner, a simple text editor with options to make specific information easily accessible (e.g., using markers, colors, styles), and more.

By the way, Near-Time now also has Current, which seems to be like Flow but [without the collaboration features](#).

Years ago I used [Idea Keeper](#) from Plum Island Software, but unfortunately development seems to have stopped years ago. It was pretty good.

—Eddie



I hope that as you continue this very useful series, you will find time to look at the latest beta of Hog Bay Notebook. It has evolved and improved noticeably even since you first mentioned it, is easy and satisfying to use, is inexpensive (important for some of us!), has rapid and excellent support, is scriptable, and has a growing wiki site. Because it is so easy to import into, to export from, and to clip into, and offers itself to so many different uses, I have given up using its direct competitors. With DEVONthink and Richard Schreyer's wonderful Notes, I have a great deal of flexibility for outlining, compiling, data-linking, note-jotting, journaling, to-do-ing, and trying to keep track of what I am doing on the computer and why. I appreciate applications like HBN that make my computer time easier rather than more complicated.

—Joanne Morrill

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# The Candy Apple

by Elyn Ritterskamp, [eritterskamp@atpm.com](mailto:eritterskamp@atpm.com)

## Some Secrets Are There For Good Reason

I have read only a little bit about the court action Apple has taken against a rumors site. I read just enough to think I already know what is the right thing in the case. Not because I am an expert on law. Not because I am an Apple stockholder and I have an interest in the company making money. (I sold my shares a while back. At \$37.50. I hear they are in the low 40s now, after a stock split when prices were in the 80s, but I won't look.)

I think I have a line on what is right because there are some things that transcend business and law. I'll explain it and you can see if you agree. It's fine if you don't. I am not out to convert anybody; this is just how it looks from here.

The trouble began when Think Secret published news of Apple products before they were introduced. The site gave pretty specific descriptions of the products; it seemed to Apple that someone inside the company had leaked the information rather than that the site's operator was just very intuitive and a good guesser. Apple wanted to find out who was leaking the information, and said that California law backed them up. A company employee leaking secrets was violating a contract. The company says it has a right to protect trade secrets, because its business could be adversely affected if such secrets get out too early.

The particular item that got everybody riled up was that Think Secret published a description of the Mac mini two weeks before it was unveiled at the Expo. So, for two weeks, Mac buyers did not purchase other units because they were waiting for the Mini. I'll go out on a limb here and suggest that knowledgeable Mac consumers do not buy anything right before the San Francisco Expo, because they know new stuff gets revealed then. I can't think that Think Secret's revelation stopped any new Mac buyers from getting on board right then.

But.

I will argue that Think Secret is wrong to publish these kinds of stories. I have been a peripheral journalist since high school; I took a couple of classes in journalism ethics. I am all for freedom of the press, because it is necessary for journalists to be able to expose wrongs. But investigative journalism is to protect consumers from rogue companies, not to expose their legitimate trade secrets.

Here's the argument: if there was nothing wrong with what Think Secret was doing, the guy who runs the site would just tell Apple who his source is. That's it. That's the argument. He is acting like he has something to hide because he does have something to hide, and so does his informant.

We instinctively know right and wrong, and when we do wrong, we try to cover it up. That is human nature. I don't even need to explore the stuff about California trade secrets laws, or US Supreme Court rulings, because the behavior makes it obvious: legal or not, this is wrong.

Some stuff is supposed to be secret. If you don't want to be in on a secret and not be able to tell it, don't sign the contract. If you change your mind, tell your boss you want out. Be honest.

Mark Twain said if you always tell the truth, you never have to worry about keeping your stories straight. He didn't mean to tell everything you know. Sometimes, when someone asks you if these pants make them look fat, it is OK to lie. Or you can say, "No, those pants don't make you look fat. Your huge butt makes you look fat."

See why being totally honest is a little dicey sometimes?

I'm kidding. Mostly I prefer total honesty, too. It is better than guessing. But this Apple employee who is leaking this stuff, that's not about being honest. That's about being sneaky, and feeling like they are putting something over on their bosses. That's not good motivation. That's not something to be proud of.

They could just choose to stop. There is still time to end this mess before it gets really ugly. Of course, it may be that Apple likes having its name in the press even as an aggrieved party. It is still publicity.

I'd rather have the good kind of publicity, the kind where they tell us they are selling gobs of iPods, and soon there will be a \$500 laptop. Yeah. That's a rumor I wouldn't mind seeing.

Onward.

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## Apple v. Public Opinion

Can our favorite computer manufacturer force bloggers to release evidence about their sources for leaks—and will it benefit them?

As background to this column, you might want to read my [discussion of Apple v. Does](#) from February. I originally promised that *this* column would come in March, but very little happened 'til early March and I wanted to write about the Super Bowl commercials.

At any rate, the first part of my question has already been decided: Judge James Kleinberg, of Santa Clara County (CA) Superior Court, ruled March 15 that [Apple can subpoena Power Page's e-mail](#) in the first round of their lawsuit against sources who gave information to [Apple Insider](#) and [O'Grady's Power Page](#), and in a preview to their separate suit against [Think Secret](#).

The media and a number of big-name bloggers have gotten quite tangled up in the oft-cited defense that blogs are like newspapers and, as journalists, the bloggers' sources' identities are protected under California's shield law.

Kleinberg's [decision](#) (185K PDF), of course, sidesteps the entire issue, ruling that the state's trade secrets law [trumps any potential shield-law protections](#). Moreover, he explains,

Easily overstated in its power, “[t]he description ‘shield law’ conjures up visions of broad protection and sweeping privilege. The California shield law, however, is unique in that it affords only limited protection. It does not create a privilege for newsmen, rather it provides an immunity from being adjudged in contempt.

Based on the language and the facts presented, it is far from clear that [Jason] O'Grady [of O'Grady's Power Page] qualifies for relief from the subpoena on the grounds advanced. Whether he fits the definition of a journalist, reporter, blogger, or anything else need not be decided at this juncture for this fundamental reason: there is no license conferred on anyone to violate criminal laws.

In other words, the question of whether bloggers are journalists, at least under California law, is irrelevant. (And the shield law doesn't protect journalists from violating laws anyway; it merely protects them from being held [in contempt of court](#).)

That did not stop the endless discussion, of course. Dan Gillmor, who as an ex-journalist should know better, gets confused on the ruling and insists [Kleinberg's ruling threatens online journalism](#). Jacob Weisberg at *Slate* is confounded, in passing, by *The New York Times* and suggests that California law protects journalists and [the case is about bloggers being excluded from it](#). The *Blog Herald* gets twisted around and thinks bloggers will [be emboldened by the decision](#) and will seek out more trade secrets, which makes no sense to me. Donna Wenworth, at *Corante's Copyfight*, insists that the case is [about a reporter's right to the First Amendment](#), which is a nice sentiment, even if the case does not appear to have any outstanding Bill of Rights implications. As a nice balance, Rob McNair-Huff at *Mac Net Journal* manages to [get confused about the shield laws](#) and still see the big point.

What's that big point? To my eye, Apple is losing the war for public opinion, even as they're winning the battle over their sources.

You will not see me excuse people who break laws. There's no excuse for violating trade secret laws, even if you think the things that the company claims are trade secrets really are not, unless there is some greater purpose than *merely* a desire for information. What Nick Ciarelli, Jason O'Grady, et al. did is in violation of the law, and our protections for lawbreakers who provide information tend toward a test of whether the public is better off with the information than without it. In this case, I have yet to hear a compelling argument that the public benefits one way or the other, and in that event the injured party, Apple, has the trump card.

John Gruber at [Daring Fireball](#), ATPM staffer Chris Turner who writes [Retrophisch](#), and Timothy Hadley at [Math Class for Poets](#) all get this. Gruber, who I quote so often he might be writing my columns for me, [says of the decision](#):

So, yes, there's a First Amendment argument that these sites have the right to publish this information, and to keep their sources confidential—but these rights are outweighed by California's trade secret statutes and established case law.

Rights are not absolute. Recall Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins.” What the court is saying here, more or less, is that the right to publish information about Apple ends where their trade secrets begin.

This is the aspect of these cases that has the potential to truly matter. There is definitely a case to be made that trade secret statutes should not outweigh First Amendment rights. Getting trade secret laws ruled unconstitutional would make for, needless to say, a landmark case.

Hadley is less clear, and sides with the defendants, but he reminds us that Apple is suing [because they have perceived damage](#). He writes:

My first impression is that Apple likes word-of-mouth and media hype for its products, but it really wants to be able to control that hype itself.... In some circumstances, Apple might want to conceal new product plans because it wants the maximum lead time in the market before competitors could develop a competing product.

Lastly, Chris reminds us that because this hurts Apple, the company [has every right to seek damages](#)—and that “something punitive enough to ensure they will discontinue this nonsense” should be ample to prove the point.

I admit that I’ve found the case disconcerting. Apple Computer, Inc. has a reputation of being at the center of a gigantic cult-like universe. We Mac users are fanatics, and ATPM is Exhibit No. 1, a magazine built solely on our readers’ twin needs: information and worshipful devotion.

To my eye, these webbloggers/journalists, people like O’Grady and Ciarelli, are the newest generation of the vanguards at the frontier of Mac worship. They’re the fuel for the endless speculation and hype. Obviously, Icarus-like, they got too close to the sun, but without the information they (illegally) provide I don’t think you’d see a wealth of, well, Mac blogosphere. Would I be able to write what I do without the constant speculation about new product releases? It would be the John Gruber Show.

My worry seems to be fairly common. McNair-Huff and Gillmor put it best, but I've seen this all over. Can Apple maintain good will with its customers without its slavering vanguard of fanatical fans getting the information in advance?

I'm not sure. They're forcing me to do real reporting, rather than just scratch at the surface of their rumors, that's for sure.

## And Now, For Something Completely Different

- Speaking of Apple rumors, we now know the iPhone is going to be [just a Motorola phone with iTunes onboard](#). No surprises there. But wait! First it was going to be released at some point in the future, then [this month at CeBIT](#), then it [went missing from CeBIT](#), then it was [back again](#)—but for M3 in Miami, not at CeBIT. *The Street* says it was all about [skittish carriers and revenue streams](#), but *Reuters* says Motorola held off because Steve Jobs wanted to have the phone [ready for sale](#) when they announced it. Well, if this thing works out, I might consider switching back to Motorola phones. (Hint to Sony Ericsson: if your joysticks lasted more than six months, I wouldn't be buying a new phone just yet.)
- On the topic of *yet more* Apple rumors, there's a rumor floating around that [Apple is looking into a subscription music service of its own](#). I've panned the idea before, and frankly, I don't have the money (or the music-buying prowess) to commit to another monthly bill, but I doubt Apple is consulting with me. [Engadget](#) and [AppleInsider](#) would sure be happy, though.
- Jef Raskin was a pioneer for Apple. Without him, we would have no Macintosh—and I might very well not be sitting in my living room typing this on my lap, if not for his visionary sense of an easy-to-use all-in-one portable computer. Thank you, Jef. He passed away February 26, and was remembered fondly by [The New York Times](#), [DigiBarn](#), and, fascinatingly, [Alex Soojung-Kim Pang](#). Goodbye, Jef. You changed the world.
- As best I can tell, this supposed hubbub was mostly on Mac mailing lists and bulletin boards, but Kirk McElhearn jumped in head-first, writing a [requiem for FireWire](#). John Gruber refuted the idea and the vehement reactions, twice, first saying that it makes perfect sense for Apple since most iPod buyers [are PC users without FireWire](#), and later saying that the other reason for the hullabaloo is that [Mac users are always](#)

[afraid they're going to get jilted](#) in favor of the iPod. I'm not sure I buy that, though—FireWire is still better, and when my dad bought an iPod (and then one for my mom, and then one for my sister), I encouraged him to get a FireWire card rather than a USB 2 card. Poor FireWire. It was such a great technology.

- Do things ever really change? Not at Apple, apparently. Just because Classic Mac OS is dead doesn't mean the legacy operating systems are gone: *DrunkenBlog* shows us fun screenshots of Interface Builder past and present. Yup, [like fraternal twins](#).
- In the world of real-world computer analogies, there are an almost infinite number of comparisons. Evan DiBiase at *MacAndBack(AndBack)* comes up with [a new one](#):

[I]f Windows were a butler, he'd...do the things that you asked of him only according to some internal black-box logic that only occasionally worked. OS X would be your classic Jeeves, however: not without fault, but well-trained in its field, with a strong pedigree and even stronger performance.

(And [Evan noticed me!](#) I'm flattered—all I did was write about him.) He also provides us with a nice discussion of the Google Desktop Search, now out of beta, and how he could choose Windows and have that; or he could choose OS X, and [get 30% more integration](#) (roughly).

- Are the Apple mini-stores worth all their space and vaunted hype? *ifo Apple Store doesn't think so*; they aren't bringing Apple to new markets, and you don't want to think about how much they cost. If they open one in Chicago I'll offer my opinion...
- Walt Mossberg, the *Wall Street Journal's* tech mack-daddy likes, well, the Mac mini. He calls it "[one of Apple's smartest business moves](#)" and, as someone who would love one, I agree.
- The Sudden Motion Sensor in the new PowerBooks, which works like the IBM models to stop the heads of a disk drive if the Sudden Motion Sensor detects, yes, "sudden motion," can do lots of interesting things. It sounds like an accelerometer and an orientation sensor combined. So, one can find, at *Kernelthread*, a marvelous discussion of how to [use the SMS to do software manipulation](#). Now, that would be some mouse: just push the computer around on the table.

- What—or who, like the old joke—do I have to do to get this kind of coverage? [Jason Kottke](#), probably the most famous Mac user online, managed to wrangle a [profile in Newsweek](#) after he went pro. Never mind the bad headline; he’s nothing like Matt Lauer. Jason is now making his entire living off of micro-patronage, so, best of luck to him!
- Is Apple colluding with Gracenote to [steal your privacy](#)? *Engadget* says [no](#), and I agree. I wouldn’t have bothered covering this, but it was too much FUD to ignore. Unfortunately for MSNBC, who ran the original article, Gracenote doesn’t store IP addresses anyway.
- Because no good deed goes unpunished, Apple is now being sued for copyright infringement both for the [iPod](#) and for [iTunes](#). Something about a patent for DRM similar to iTunes’ and a patent for something that sounds a lot like an iPod. But the details just aren’t there yet. If there’s anything to this, expect a settlement shortly.
- I [reviewed Rancho Software’s MarsEdit](#) in February, and I’m angling to review [NetNewsWire](#) too. (I’ll play Bill O’Reilly: flood my editors with letters until they let me, and not that loser Eric, do it! ... Heh. Please don’t.) *DrunkenBlog* one-ups me, though, with an interview with the man (and woman) behind the software, Brent and Sheila Simmons. It’s a [great read](#).
- How did the iPod outdo the Walkman? Apple didn’t have two arms going separate ways, the *New York Times* [says](#).
- Have you heard about this new, great way to boot OS X on your PC? No, it’s not called, “Buy a Mac mini,” at least, not officially. A company called [Maui X-Stream](#), a Hawaiian outfit better known for their video streaming software, says users can get up to 80% of native performance on a PC using their product, CherryOS. Lots of people who worked on [PearPC](#) suspect a hoax, and *DrunkenBlog* compiles all the evidence and [concur](#)s. I’m going to withhold judgment until such time as CherryOS actually ships, but the evidence doesn’t look good.

- You may remember, from my [addendum to Bloggable 11.02](#), that Graphing Calculator has a fascinating story involving trespassing, free labor, and other lawbreaking activities. That story made it into an episode of [This American Life on March 11](#). Give it a listen...and support your local NPR station (or mine, [KOPB](#)) if you don't already.
- Could Microsoft and Apple be any more different? Apple will fix strange noises that certain models make under rare circumstances and publish them in their release notes for OS updates. MS [tells us](#), of the Office 2004:Mac 11.1.1 Update: *"This update addresses several issues with Microsoft Office 2004."* Wow. Thanks, guys.

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# About This Particular Web Site

by Paul Fatula, [pfatula@atpm.com](mailto:pfatula@atpm.com)

## NameVoyager

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Pink was one of the top 1000 most popular names for newborn baby boys, and while girls were most likely to be named John in the 1920s, the name remained popular straight through the 1980s. Whether or not it's entirely accurate, it's fun to play with this site, which lets you see how popular many boys' and girls' names have been during the last ten decades, and how their popularity has changed with the times.

## AnnualCreditReport

Whenever I get a credit card bill, it's accompanied by an invitation to spend \$30 to \$40 a year to get a copy of my credit report. The federal government had a better idea: each of three major credit reporting agencies is now required to provide you with a free copy of your credit report once a year. It's being rolled out gradually, so it's not yet available nationwide: check the Web site to find out when free credit reports will become available in your region, or to learn how to request a free copy of your credit report. (Note that, for privacy reasons, it is [recommended](#)<sup>1</sup> that you call or write for your credit report rather than request it via the online form.)

## Canadian Flag Proposals

Though the Canadians never came up with anything quite as wordy as the American "Don't Tread On Me" flag, Canada did see a large number of flag proposals before adopting its current flag in 1965. This Web site shows many of the proposed designs, a few of which look like they were drawn in crayon or marker by schoolchildren. The site also offers a little information about some of the proposed flag designs, and some history of the Canadian flag.

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1. [http://www.worldprivacyforum.org/wpf\\_calldontclickstudyfull.html](http://www.worldprivacyforum.org/wpf_calldontclickstudyfull.html)

## [Mike's Ad Blocking Hosts File](#)

Since ATPM is a computing publication, I try to include at least one computing-related item in each ATPW. This is it. Many of you are still using backwards antiquated Web browsers that display banner ads on Web pages. Maybe even on *this* Web page. A customized hosts file is one way to block ads (and all other communication) with known ad servers. While it's not nearly as powerful or versatile a solution as [Firefox](#), [OmniWeb](#), [iCab](#), or [PithHelmet](#) can offer, a hosts file like Mike's can help you cut down on the number of banner ads you see.

## [Think! Baby Names](#)

This site lacks the eye candy of NameVoyager, but makes up for it by giving the meanings and brief history of popular boys' and girls' names. The site is searchable by various keywords, and related names are shown in case you find a name which is close but not-quite-right. If you don't want boring American names, you can browse lists of popular names in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Sweden as well.

## [A Guide to Ethnic Fried Doughs Around the World](#)

From Andagi to Zeppole, this Web site offers the histories of many different sorts of fried dough. Here you can explore the origin of the word Doughnut, learn what a Fritole is called in Piemonte, or find out how to say Vetkoeks. On the surface, this Web site looks pretty good, and offers some interesting bites of information. But when you dig in, it falls apart: source links are often provided, but many of the links go to non-existent pages or servers. Clicking on a picture from a particular fried dough's page may yield a recipe, a larger picture, or (rather frequently) a broken link. A lesson to webmasters everywhere: it's not enough to create a great Web site; you also must maintain it.

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## It's Just Good Vibrations

There are lots of way to use your iPod, but nearly everything I have ever done with mine has centered around exercise. Having music adds a big dimension to a workout.

I bought a first-generation iPod in November of whatever year they were introduced. It seems forever ago. I'd had a Sony Discman for playing CDs, but it never seemed as perfect as I wanted. I had to carry a backpack or wear an ugly and constrictive waist belt, and if I wanted to jog at all it would skip. The iPod solved all that. It was small enough to fit in a pocket, and light, and I never did get it to skip.

I used it happily for a few years. Then one day when I plugged it into the Mac, it didn't register on the desktop. The Mac couldn't see it. I was stuck with the songs that are on it, which is not a bad array, but I could no longer add anything new. I was still able to charge it with a wall adapter, so I kept going with it for a while. But then came the iPod mini, and I could not resist for too long. Not being able to change the playlist on my original model was the catalyst for buying the Mini—I am not someone who has to buy something new just because it is there.

I bought a silver iPod mini and fell in love. It still had plenty of room for the music I wanted for workouts, and it was much lighter and smaller. I saw folks at the gym with armbands and toyed with the idea of buying one, but the mini was so light it did not distort my shorts or pants pockets like the original, so I never bothered. Good thing, because then along came the iPod shuffle.

I did not even pretend to resist the Shuffle for very long. I knew it was the perfect machine for what I wanted: very light, unskippable, and with enough room for a playlist that would not be too repetitious over a period of days. I had a little trouble loading a couple of songs onto the Shuffle (I had the same problem with the Mini, so it is probably something in my software), but I just removed them from the list, and it went fine after that. I didn't need a 12-minute version of the Pet Shop Boys' "Go West" on there anyway.

I will try to explain why it is that music is so important in a workout. It's different if you're playing a sport with other people or doing something sociable like walking in a group, of course. Then, wearing headphones is rude. But if you are on your own, sometimes your energy drags a little. Nothing jolts it quite like having the next song start, and it's Van Halen's "Right Now," and you know you have to seize the moment. Or maybe it is Asia's "Days Like These," and you remember that what does not kill you makes you strong. I see a distinct change in my gait if I am on a treadmill or walking on a sidewalk and on comes something peppy—disco was much maligned, but some of it is perfect for this. I have constructed my workout playlists so that most of the songs are high energy. If a slower one shows up on the Shuffle, and I need something snappier, I just hit the Forward button. It holds a little over 90 songs, depending on which ones I select. That's plenty. I have two 90-song lists, but I have not yet gotten bored with the first one enough to switch them out.

I read some complaints about the shuffle where people were wishing for a display so they could see what song was playing. I could not figure that out. You put the songs in there yourself—how would you not recognize the tune? I will address that complaint and others in a [review](#) of the Shuffle (also in this issue), but for now I will say that the Shuffle is just about the best workout accessory since the sweatband. Even the lanyard included with it is cool.

Since I got the shuffle and started using it for workouts, I've bought several songs from the iTunes Music Store. I don't quite understand the print ads that try to show it will cost you \$10,000 to fill an iPod if you use the iTMS, but Napster is \$15 a month or whatever. Most of the songs I put on my iPods come from CDs I already have, or that I buy, and then rip into the library. I have bought a dozen or so songs from the iTMS. I know the ads are trying to sell a product, but they look pretty misleading to me.

The iPod can be many things to many people. It has and will have games and other applications. It was conceived as a digital music player, though, and each evolution brings new and better ways to do just that: play music.

## Part of My Playlist

- "500 Miles"—The Proclaimers
- "Life is a Highway"—Tom Cochrane
- "Gonna Make You Sweat"—C+C Music Factory

- “The Impression That I Get”—Mighty Mighty Bosstones
- “YMCA”—Village People
- “You Sexy Thing”—Hot Chocolate
- “Don’t Stop Me Now”—Queen
- “Mexican Wine”—Fountains of Wayne
- “Come On Eileen”—Dexy’s Midnight Runners

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# About This Particular Outliner

by Ted Goranson, [tgoranson@atpm.com](mailto:tgoranson@atpm.com)

## Outline Exchange and XML, Part 1: History

This month we depart from our usual survey format and dive into something actually useful. Many *ATPO* readers simply cannot find the outliner tool that does all the things they wish, so they combine tools. Often, this is facilitated by a standard called [OPML](#), the Outline Processing Markup Language. OPML was created by [Dave Winer](#) of Frontier to exchange simple outlines, the kind Frontier creates.

Many outliners on our *ATPO* tracker list support OPML.

The following both import and export OPML: Circus Ponies [NoteBook](#), [Frontier](#), [Hog Bay Notebook](#), [hnb](#), [iTask](#), [NoteTaker](#), [NovaMind](#), [OmniOutliner](#) and [OmniOutliner Pro](#), [Process](#), [Pyramid](#), [SuperNotecard](#), [Tao](#), and [Tinderbox](#) (using [TinderToolBox](#)).

[JOE](#), [MyMind](#), and [iLiner](#) export OPML.

That's a lot of support, and it works well for outline headers. You can swap files back and forth between OmniOutliner and NovaMind via OPML for instance. OPML is one of those standards that has wide adoption because it is extremely simple, but OPML also has some serious limits for application integration.

It only exchanges the data associated with the most extreme reduction of what constitutes an outline, because that's all its creator cared about at the time. So parents, children, and notes (but notes in a less perfect way) are copied, basic outline stuff. Some other information is included that isn't of interest to any *ATPO* outliner except Frontier. But between the pair of OmniOutliner and NovaMind for instance, OmniOutliner's columns and styles wouldn't convey to NovaMind and coming back the other way, NovaMind's links are lost. That's a lot to lose, dear friends.

Another problem is that OPML was created by one fellow. He has refused to turn it over to any group, and for the past four years he has been doing other things and decided not to update it. Many in the business have trouble working with his personality and are frustrated by the absence of evolution.

There are a couple solutions to this problem. One is for the outliner community to take charge of our own standards and create something better than OPML, more capable and flexible, attuned to real needs of outliner integration rather than Frontier tricks—something open and with a real governing board. I'd be willing to help with this. It is outside the scope of ATPM, but I'm sure we can find a forum and a critical mass.

Another solution is what this column series could be about (if there is interest): use XML translations directly. OPML is a format that uses XML. In the past five years or so, the support for XML has ballooned. OS X uses it extensively; all those preference and property list files (.plist) are in XML. A great many of the applications you'd want to export to support XML, including publishing to the Web using the XML form of HTML, XHTML. Before long, every new writing and publishing application—print, Web, and screen—will be based on XML.

Some applications of interest that support XML are: [InDesign](#), [Publicicon](#) and its sister [Mathematica Notebook](#), [FrameMaker](#) (though it is abandoned on the Mac), [Word](#) (sorta), [FileMaker](#), and [iWork](#) (both Pages and Keynote). Naturally, [Dreamweaver](#) and [GoLive](#) can accept XML.

On the outliner side, Circus Ponies NoteBook, jEdit, NoteTaker, OmniOutliner, Slacker, Tinderbox, and VooDooPad all expose their own versions of XML which express all the good information and relationships they generate. I'm sure that in short order *all* the power outliners will, as soon as ATPO readers ask for and begin using it. Tinderbox and hnb actually use XML as their native file format.

So if you are interested in integrating your outliner into your workflow, you'll likely be using XML unless you convince the developers to create an XML shortcut that's invisible to you (like OmniOutliner's relationship with Keynote, Process with OmniOutliner, or Merlin with OmniOutliner and NovaMind).

Direct use of XML for exchange is what we'll be introducing in this series of columns. The problem of course is that XML is in the category of *messy black art*. *ATPO* hopes to alleviate that in some small measure.

## XML History

In the late 1960s, largely as a result of the [Multics](#) time-sharing research program, IBM had a research lab in Cambridge, Massachusetts, near MIT. That lab was engaged in lots of what became important work: some of the origins of modern operating systems, the database, and many languages have a historical thread that goes through MIT and this lab. In 1968, a problem assigned to the lab was how to mix "programming instructions" with document text to allow legal documents to automatically be indexed, and composed (typeset). IBM had lots of experience in this field; indeed, their "business machines" included compositors before they developed computers.

I visited this lab as a computer science student in 1967 and 1968, where they were developing something that the next year would be tagged "Generalized Markup Language." The original developers claim that the name was derived from the initials of their last names (which *are* G, M, and L, at least during a key period), but I seem to recall the name predating the formation of that group. The idea was to intersperse notes among the text as elements of computer instructions that would be "compiled" for layout and publishing.

You have to recall that this was in the center of the Lisp universe in its heady days. Lisp was arguably the most used for research and certainly the most advanced language of the time. (Many still claim so.) Lisp is built on the notion that data and programming instruction are comingled; no, that's not quite true: in Lisp they are actually the same.

GML appeared in the midst of similar ideas that were popping all over the place, most notably in the Graphic Communications Association (GCA) Composition Committee. But instead of using the strong notion from Lisp where the "tags" were similar in form to the text, they used a weaker notion where the text was one kind of thing and the "tags" were more computer-like,

IBM in those days was both savvy and agile, and in a very short time IBM expanded GML to a product line (“Document Composition Facility” also sometimes “Framework”) for many publishing purposes. At this point, another family tree thread diverged that led to GML-derived codes that formed the basis of Wang Laboratories and the development of so-called “word processors.” But that’s another story.

Independently, but with the backing of IBM, news syndicators (such as Reuters, Associated Press, and the like) invested heavily in a markup language using GML to transmit structured stories. They drove an international standard that resulted in the *Standard Generalized Markup Language* (SGML), ISO 8879 in 1979. SGML by that time (and since) was seen as a robust means for structuring documents in such a way that content and presentation could be managed separately. It was pretty much the only game in town for the heavy-duty document crowd.

Meanwhile, over the next decades, various much lighter weight proprietary tagging schemes popped up all over the place as the basis for numerous word processing and desktop publishing products. Over time, the complex and costly SGML became more and more marginalized for high end users.

Then two things happened that saved SGML.

The first was a project in the US Department of Defense (DoD) that was dealing with a financial disaster. They bought complex systems in huge amounts, more than any other enterprise in the world. All of these needed manufacturing, training, and repair documents that were typically included in the system procurement. However, as the systems evolved, the paperwork lagged, often by years. And we’re talking a lot of paper here: the typical submarine for example had associated paper that weighed more and cost more (overall) than the sub itself.

Many, many billions of dollars were being wasted by out of date paper, perhaps tens of billions a year, so the idea was to digitize the documents. The very ambitious project to do this was called Computer Aided Logistics Support (CALs). I was at the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) at the time advising CALs. I lobbied against adopting SGML as a CALs standard (holding out instead for something simpler and more consistent as I’ll explain later, but with process state), but in 1987 SGML became a defense requirement under CALs. Billions of dollars poured into SGML compliance (which continues today).

Naturally, this put new life into the tool base. The defense and intelligence world also sponsored lots of research—real research—to extend SGML to support complex structured documents, particularly hypertext.

I wish they had gone with my recommendation to create a new markup language that used the same syntax to specify the markup elements that it used in applying those elements. (This goes back to the strong Lisp-like idea.) As you'll see in a moment, SGML lacks this elegance and the specification of just what the markup *is* has turned into a nightmare of conflicting and increasingly complex notions that makes life hard for us *ATPO*ers. If CALS had not adopted SGML, then it would have died a natural death to be replaced by something better.

Our whole Web and document world is a result of this bad decision.

CALS spawned research into SGML-related hypertext schemes. Much of that hypertext research was conducted by the US intelligence community in projects that may never be detailed, I'm afraid. (I was involved in many of these.) Several hypertext conferences were held, starting in 1987 where some parts of some of these projects were reported. In the next couple years, several proposals were made for a hypertext language either extending or subsetting SGML. One of these took off, the simplest—HTML, Hypertext Markup Language—imagined by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 and implemented in 1991.

That version took off because it was incredibly simple, an implementation existed, there was a preformed (scientific document) user base, there was the Internet transport vehicle in place (for many years), and the language wasn't proprietary. Also, so the story goes, Berners-Lee credits an amazingly capable development system for the time in NeXT, the precursor of OS X. HTML looks and acts just like SGML but with a miniscule number of operators and no need for a separate "language" to specify it (because of its simplicity).

Needless to say, as with all cheap and easy solutions, the compromises catch up with you. So in more recent time, the now huge Web community forced a revisiting of SGML to invent another variant in complexity between SGML and HTML. The result was XML, the eXtensible Markup Language, what HTML (and in some respects SGML) should have been from the beginning.

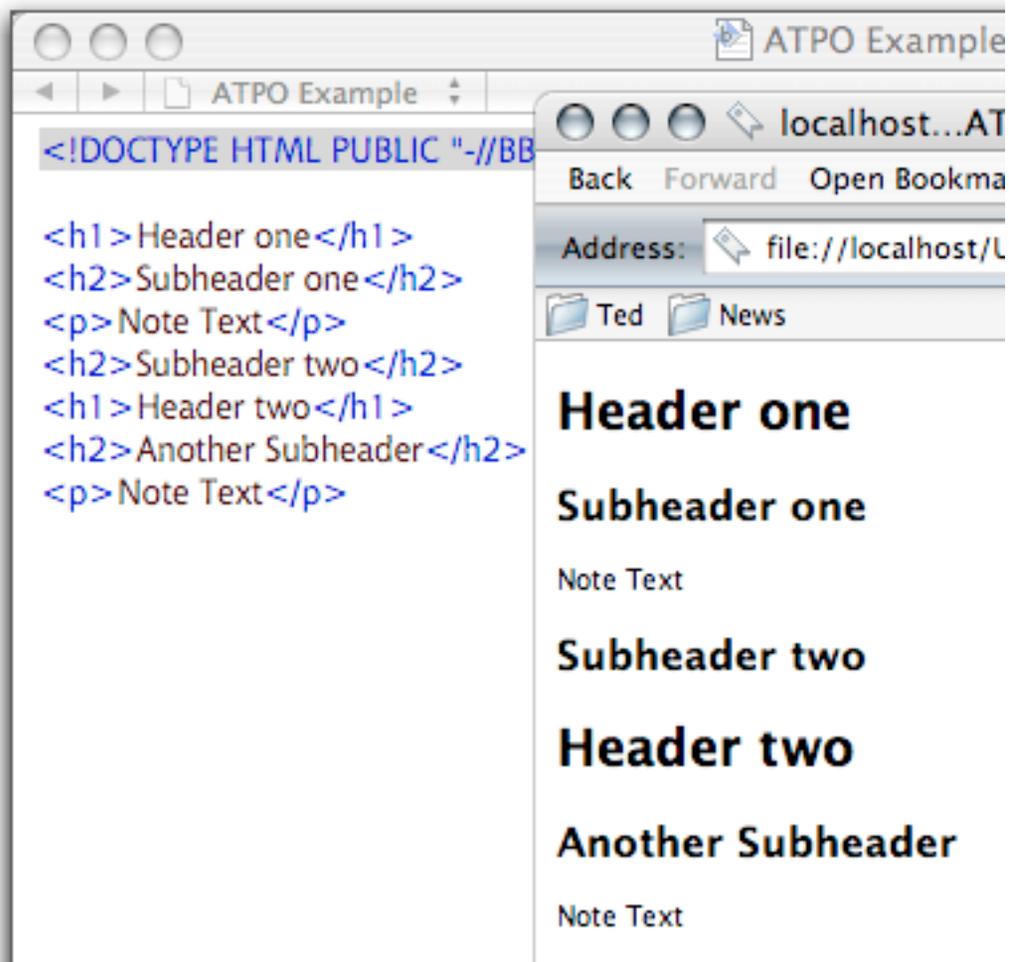
XML has been since 1998 a standard for documents (vastly eclipsing SGML in the user base), database exchange and the reinvented [XHMTL](#) (HTML as an XML application). Along with XML are a bewildering array of associated languages, formats, transforms, and such. Adding to the confusion are the hundreds of “standards” (like OPML, [RSS](#), [SOAP](#), and the several application-specific XML formats—Tinderbox, NoteTaker, NoteBook, OmniOutliner, OpenOffice, and now iWork—that employ XML) that we in the *ATPO* world encounter.

Just as a historical note, in the area of information science, the entire defense and intelligence research community collapsed about a decade ago, and basic research of this kind is now in the hands of others.

## About XML

If you are like me and the median *ATPO* reader, you need a gentle introduction to just what this beast has turned out to be, probably with some hand-holding.

XML “stuff” is found in as many as three places. One place is interspersed within your document as tags, saying for instance that “this bunch of text here is what we call a ‘title’.” If you look in an OPML file from one of our outliners, these are easy to see. It looks just like HTML tags, which many of us have encountered.



HTML Source

The screenshot shows a rudimentary Web page and the simple HTML that generates it. The tags are those things in angle brackets.

There might be XML-related code in a second area describing in a structured way just what you meant when you said “title” in the document. Often there are complicated rules that designers specify about the relationships among all the elements that are defined: for instance you may specify that a “subsection” must be part of a “section” and there must be at least two subsections in that section for it to exist.

This part is sometimes prepended to the beginning of a document, or more often in a separate file that is used over and over. This can be pretty hairy stuff, and can drive even experts crazy. The official name is DTD, Document Type Definition, by which they mean the definitions of the “types” (the entities in the tags) in the document.

Whether formally specified or not, Tinderbox will have its own version of these definitions, as will NoteTaker, and all the others on the list. The problem of course is translating from one to the other, and what to do when one has some elements the other does not. And that’s the case between any two interesting outliners on the *ATPO* list.

DTDs are so hairy in fact that many XML users don’t want to even tinker with them. So they’ll use a standard one depending on the domain of application. In the document world, [DocBook](#) is a common one that many tools support. Many disciplines have DTDs which you can explore on [XML.org](#).

Most applications that use XML (including OPML originally) don’t bother with a DTD in fact, assuming that the structure is obvious, or explaining it in plain English.

DTDs might be created (if they are done right) using another XML-related standard, the [XML Schema](#) language which provides a means for specifying the thing. There are lots of other competing standards in the DTD space which we won’t mention. Suffice it to say that it is complex, contentious, and confusing.

This is a legacy of basing XML on SGML, and using two completely different languages in the specification: one for the tagging and another to define the structure of the tags. You can blame your *ATPO* exchange frustrations on the Department of Defense if you want. I do.

The third area you might find XML-related stuff is in the actual presentation of the file. This won't matter so much to *ATPO* readers. Applications that natively use XML (iWork, OmniOutliner, OpenOffice, and Tinderbox) have their own proprietary means for producing what we see. The other outliners translate into XML for export. But they could have used XSL-FO (Formatting Objects) as a standard way of specifying appearance.

Our problem—the problem of getting your power outliner XML from a mindmapping tool, to an outliner, and on to a page layout program and back, or getting your outliner to dynamically import from your database—is in the DTD side. Fortunately, there is another part of the XML standard that can help us. XSL, the [Extensible Stylesheet Language](#) is yet another language (!) whose purpose is to translate XML from one format to another. XSL is a family of specifications using the same language. We already mentioned XSL-FO, but there is a sibling specification called XSLT, [XSL Transformations](#).

Whew, that's a lot of acronyms. There are lots more where those came from, and all of it is unfriendly.

An *ATPO* user who wants to tie applications together has a few choices:

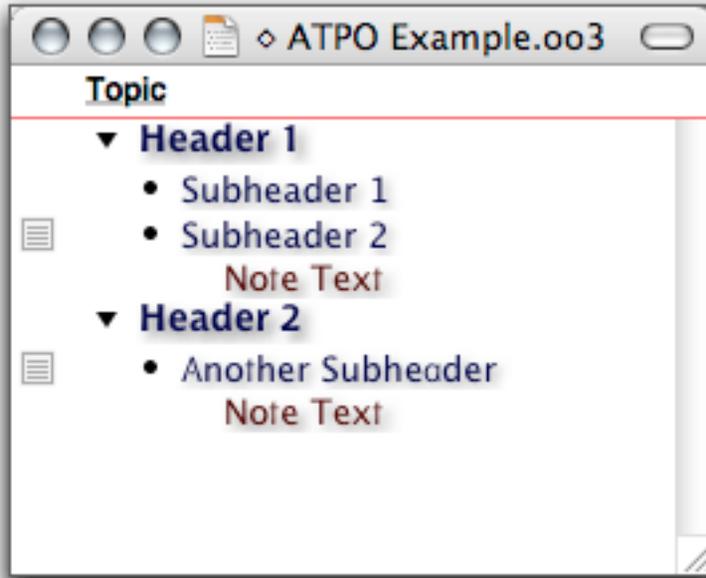
1. Just use OPML as is. It is a simple specification in XML that just about everybody supports. You don't have to know what's in it to use it as an intermediate format among applications of interest.
2. Use XML, taking the XML format of one application and translating it to another in an ad hoc manner. Maybe this would be useful if you plan, for example, on spending a year writing a book in OmniOutliner and you want it published in Publicon, so you know the originating and receiving applications.
3. Do number (2) but do it in a reusable, wholesale but more expensive way using the XSL Transformations language and perhaps some associated tools.
4. Do number (3) but have the work already done for you for each application in the *ATPO* Transformation specification, but you still might want to tinker with how features from one application translate to another.

Today, we'll just introduce OPML files.

## OPML Files

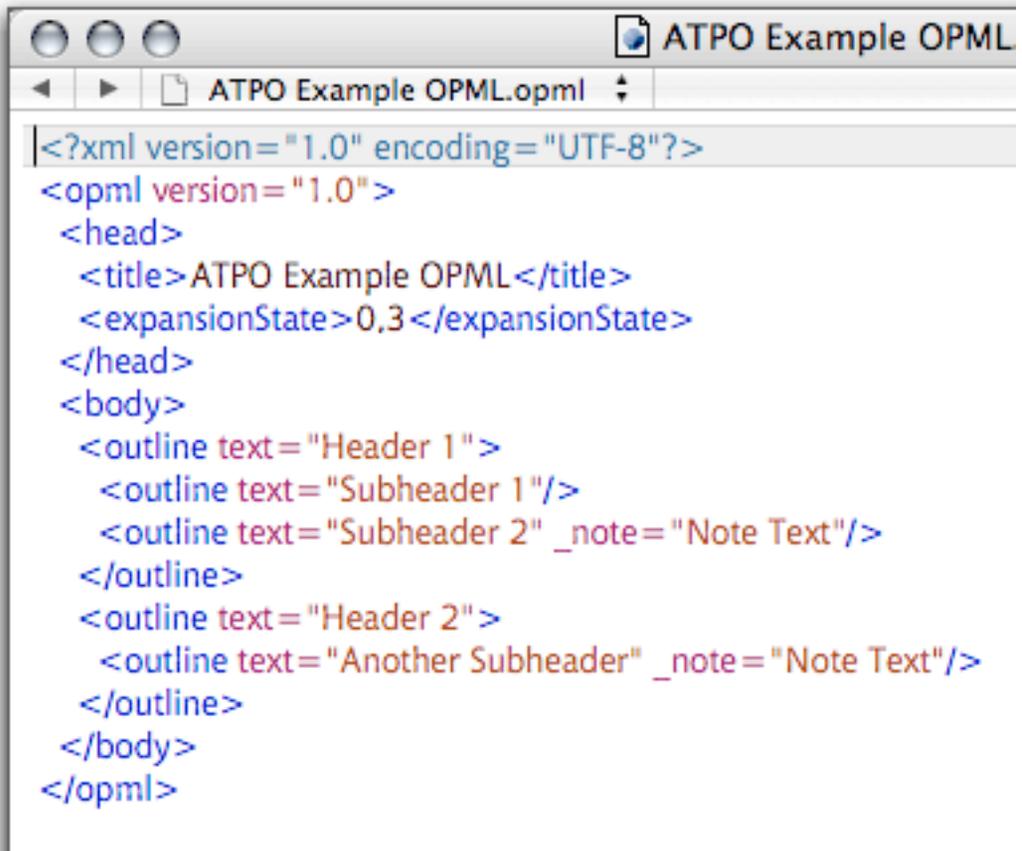
The good news is that OPML files are easy to look at and understand. The bad news is that they are useless for real outliner integration.

Here is a simple outline in OmniOutliner Pro:



OmniOutliner Example

and here's what it exports as in OPML format:

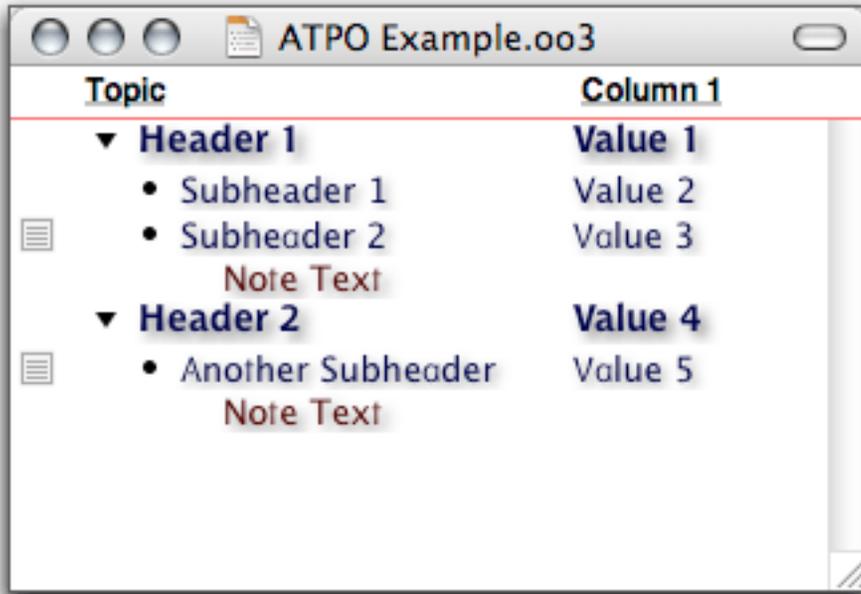
A screenshot of a text editor window titled "ATPO Example OPML". The window shows the following XML code:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<opml version="1.0">
  <head>
    <title>ATPO Example OPML</title>
    <expansionState>0,3</expansionState>
  </head>
  <body>
    <outline text="Header 1">
      <outline text="Subheader 1"/>
      <outline text="Subheader 2" _note="Note Text"/>
    </outline>
    <outline text="Header 2">
      <outline text="Another Subheader" _note="Note Text"/>
    </outline>
  </body>
</opml>
```

OmniOutliner OPML

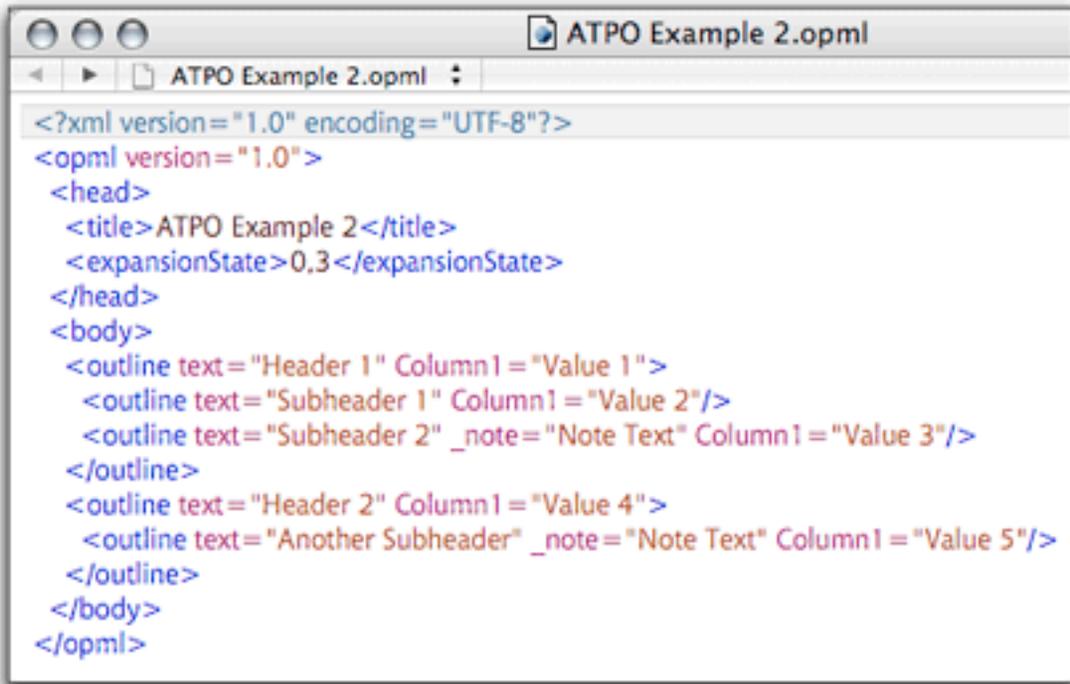
It is a bit more complicated than HTML, but most of it is pretty obvious, right? That bit at the top about "expansion state" records which headers were collapsed. In our case, none of the subheaders were collapsed and three were expanded. An OPML file from Frontier would have lots of other stuff in the header section, like owner and date.

But look at this OmniOutliner document, with a column:



Enhanced OmniOutliner Example

and its associated OPML file:



```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<opml version="1.0">
  <head>
    <title>ATPO Example 2</title>
    <expansionState>0,3</expansionState>
  </head>
  <body>
    <outline text="Header 1" Column1="Value 1">
      <outline text="Subheader 1" Column1="Value 2"/>
      <outline text="Subheader 2" _note="Note Text" Column1="Value 3"/>
    </outline>
    <outline text="Header 2" Column1="Value 4">
      <outline text="Another Subheader" _note="Note Text" Column1="Value 5"/>
    </outline>
  </body>
</opml>
```

OPML file with Columns

Before, you may have noticed that the outline's notes weren't an element (a separate tag). Instead each note was an annotation within an outline element. Here, OmniOutliner has done the same thing with the column. OPML, as it turns out has no definition for a note because Frontier doesn't do notes. Developers just know what a "note" is when annotated to an OPML outline element (and because OmniOutliner is a leader of sorts).

But "column 1" doesn't mean anything to a importing application. It wouldn't know what it is; in fact I could have named that column anything. OmniOutliner only puts it there so that if anyone saves an outline in OPML from OmniOutliner and opens it again in the same application, they can reconstruct the document. That's because OmniOutliner knows what a "note" is and assumes anything else is a column.

Bad news, right? When this second example is opened in NovaMind for example, it has to import the column values as if they were notes, together with the actual notes.

OPML is best for “flat” outlines where all the information is in headers and there is no separate “notes,” “comments,” or “paragraph” type. This is the case with NoteTaker and Circus Ponies’ NoteBook.

NoteTaker exports “category” and “priority” in the place where OmniOutliner puts column information. OmniOutliner sees those as columns, which of course they are, and displays them correctly when imported. I haven’t taken the time to explore all combinations of OPML-capable outliners, but my impression is that NoteTaker and OmniOutliner are the only ones that handle “column” data.

One approach to a new standard would be for us to specify a standard collection of attributes for the OPML element, essentially expanding the standard. We’d have to have internal links, specific column types with attributes (like priority, start date, owner, cost, and others with data types: numbers, string, graphic, etc.), outlines within notes (Hog Bay does something like this in its OPML), folded state, styles, and clones.

We could fix OPML. Or we could start fresh and do it right, like the CALS folks should have done. In our case, that would mean a new XML specification with accompanying DTD.

If there’s interest in this, we could continue in future columns to explore how to understand and tweak outlining-related XML.

## ATPO Tracker

### [LinkBack](#)

I still use OS 9 (not Classic) for certain things, and whenever I dive into it I’m reminded of things we still don’t have in OS X after all these years. Some of these I’ve mentioned as features of [legacy outliners](#). But another I wistfully yearn for is Publish and Subscribe; that’s where you could create something in one application, say a chart, graphic, or spreadsheet, and “publish” it to the system. Then any other application that supported the technology, say a word processor, could “subscribe” to the element and it would appear as if it were cut-and-pasted.

But this was a live implant. If the element were edited in the original application, the image in the subscribed document would change. Alternatively, double-clicking the element in the subscribed document would open the original application so it could be edited. This last feature was supported in a proprietary fashion in other applications as well, like FrameMaker.

But Publish and Subscribe suffered because of promotion of a much more ambitious technology called OpenDoc that would do this and much more. Although OpenDoc was cosponsored by IBM, it failed to capture mindshare because of Microsoft tactics and was discontinued. But not before some forward-looking small developers bet their companies on it. One of these was Nisus Writer, and when Apple dropped OpenDoc, these early adopters were killed or hobbled.

Now Nisus is bringing back Publish and Subscribe, or so it seems. They've announced an open-source project that presumably leverages their OpenDoc experience. One of the partners is OmniOutliner, which will support it in future releases.

This could be big. Right now, Windows has OLE, a comparable technology, and we have zip. It's really lame to have an outliner that can only make a hyperlink to a file or show what amounts to a "preview" of certain file types. Outliners like DEVONthink can display documents, but only whole documents in an outline of documents. We need LinkBack desperately, in all writing applications, not just outliners.

Especially since we already had it and it was taken away from us.

Presumably, most envisioned uses are in the page-layout and composition areas, for example a document that included spreadsheets, charts, and illustrations from three external applications. Naturally, this will be of importance to *ATPO* readers who use outliners to create such documents. But I think the influence will be felt most deeply elsewhere in the outlining world.

Tinderbox, as an example, is terrific for organizing notes and their relationships, but its editor for creating notes—doing actual writing—is tepid. LinkBack could fix this.

Outlining is the strongest on-screen interface paradigm at the cheapest cost for working with structure, but that structure (parent-child) has severe limits. Clones are a way of stretching the paradigm. LinkBack could be seen as a way of extending the cloning technique among different outlines, even from different outliners.

A primary use of outliners is an ordered information store. Referencing or linking to content external to the outline is a must. Displaying and editing such content in an outline has been called “[transclusion](#)” by innovators and researchers as the ultimate in this regard. LinkBack could give us real transclusion, maybe even with the accompanying notion of “[purple numbers](#).”

Let’s hope it catches on.

### **FullWrite Pro**

Speaking of legacy outliners, that column on legacy outliners seems to have put new life into the communities surrounding a few of them that run well under Classic. Dave Trautman is the FullWrite Pro guru, and he reports that things are going well in that department. He has put up a [new information page](#).

### **Curio**

A growing trend in software is the splitting up of applications into Basic and Pro versions. OmniOutliner, VooDooPad, and DEVONthink are *ATPO* examples. Now, Curio joins the club. Their new version 2.2 comes in four versions. There are the Pro and Basic versions of course. In between is the Home version.

The Basic edition sells for \$39, and has all the features we’ve chosen to mention in prior *ATPO* columns, minus the Internet search feature they call Sleuth. The Home version at \$79 adds Sleuth, some basic tablet support, and export/publishing options. The \$129 Pro version adds some Sleuth tailoring, project sharing features, and templates.

The professional edition is available at an educational price of \$65, but few people will buy it because at the same price and collection of features you can get the K–12 version. The only difference is in a different collection of Sleuth sites and the templates are educationally oriented. They may be trying to move into the market that has been sustaining [Inspiration](#): secondary education.

I'm glad to see this refocus in target groups. Originally, Curio was targeting the creative professional workflow. This is not a consumer use, and some reviewers were puzzled about just how they'd use this novel thing. (As a point of reference, [Creator](#) was one of the coolest Mac-only packages for a dozen years or so before going cross-platform. It was the most scriptable application on the Mac, and supported [QuickDraw GX](#) before anyone. GX did things that still amaze me, but like OpenDoc it was discontinued. I used it extensively for consumer-type stuff, but few Mac users could figure out any use for it because it only cared about a narrow professional market: newspaper ads.)

I do not know whether Curio's move indicates a new focus on the "home" user, but I hope so. And I hope we see more outlining features in their ordered lists.

### [Current](#)

In keeping with the pro-nonpro idea, Near-Time Flow has broken out a personal version as well. They call this one Current. Flow is targeted at group collaboration, a pretty hairy professional use. That collaboration capability adds quite a few user interface challenges.

Current, on the other hand, eschews the collaboration baggage while keeping the blogging and RSS-collection capabilities. Neither Current nor Flow is an outliner yet, but I'm betting they will be.

Current is free at present, but it looks like the price will be \$50.

### [Tinderbox](#)

Tinderbox is not for everyone, and even among Tinderboxers it is not best for all outlining tasks, but every *ATPO* reader should check it out. It is serious software made more serious with the update to 2.4.

(Updates in the Tinderbox world are free if you paid in the last year, and \$70 if not. That \$70 buys you another year.)

This update is significant. Tinderbox has a core attraction of four elements: rich hypertext, Web integration, multiple views including a handy zooming "map" view, and agents. The update enhances the latter three.

Many elements of Tinderbox are hard to get, but exporting to the Web seems the most difficult and least automatic to me. Eastgate works on this by including templates and “assistants.” They’ve improved this.

Where OmniOutliner, for example, explores new ways of exploiting outlining in Aqua, Tinderbox is inventing its own user interface. It’s added some very nice touches in the map view, allowing you to “group” note boxes in an “adornment.” The note’s color, previously associated with the box in the map view, now also pertains to the “header” in the outline view. I really appreciate this.

Also appreciated is the long-awaited appearance of pop-up entries for some attributes. It was absolutely archaic to have a dozen prototypes, but to select one you had to remember its name and type it exactly.

But surely the big addition is “rules.” Tinderbox has fairly smart “agents,” which gather clones of notes with various characteristics and can change just about any attribute. Tinderbox calls the scripts that agents use “actions.” Often to perform an action on a note (like turn the title red if it is a draft that is more than one week old) you’d have to make an agent elsewhere in the outline that did this by collecting clones and changing them. Messy.

Now you can have actions (using the same operators) that apply to notes without doing the clone routine.

## Mellel

We now have version 1.9 of Mellel, which adds style sheets to this outlining word processor. I haven’t yet written my column on why styles are important. The short version is: outlining is first about visual structure of information; styles are about visual characteristics of information (in both cases, “information” in text). The two work well together. Mellel’s implementation is refreshingly capable. Unfortunately, it is targeted at what we might call the layout view and does not affect the outline directly. But still, an advance.

## StickyBrain

A column on snippet managers is another column to come. StickyBrain will be one of the applications featured; it is coming on strong with its aggressive development. Like many of the task managers we mentioned last month, StickyBrain integrates with AddressBook. Now it has integration with the iPhoto database (something like NovaMind): you can browse your photos in StickyBrain's interface, which is shared by a scrapbook database. Chronos incidentally [sells content for that scrapbook](#).

## NewNOTEPAD Pro

Speaking of text editing, NewNOTEPAD Pro has a minor update. This is a \$23, simple Carbon two-pane outliner. Its features are unremarkable, but this update adds the ability to use [Emacs](#) keyboard commands. [BBEdit](#) and [Mailsmith](#), both from Bare Bones Software, also have this feature. Any discussion having to do with Emacs quickly becomes a religious argument, but a case can be made for it as the most capable text editor. Emacs keyboard commands are decidedly unMac-like, but allowing the choice shows that someone is thinking about power writers.

An ATPM [review of an older version of NewNOTEPAD Pro](#) can be found in the July 2001 ATPM.

## Circus Ponies NoteBook

NoteBook has been updated to 2.0 with a slew of new features. But you'll have to wait a month for my report, as it was released too late for an evaluation.

*Copyright © 2005 Ted Goranson, [tgoranson@atpm.com](mailto:tgoranson@atpm.com). Ted Goranson has been thirty years in the visualization and model abstraction field. He is slowly beginning a [new user interface project](#).*



# Segments: Slices from the Macintosh Life

by David Blumenstein, [apple@david.com](mailto:apple@david.com)

## Paint It White: My First Macworld

Apple Computer maintains such a firm grip on its technology and architecture that at Macworld Expo San Francisco it was the accessory vendors who were elbowing each other for space on the show floor. In all my years attending personal computer trade shows, I cannot recall ever experiencing such a territorial separation. Interestingly, I have learned just recently that Apple is planning to launch a Made for iPod brand mark, which, by my estimation, will be yet another licensing abyss into which accessory vendors will dutifully and blindly dive headfirst.

“Paint it White” and placing the lowercase letter i before anything should be the golden rules of Macintosh-based product development and marketing. I remain convinced that almost anything painted white could have been sold on the show floor as some sort of enhancement to the computer and audio experience. Those companies that did not take the hint prior to the show were copiously taking notes and running out to local hardware stores to remedy the situation.

The proliferation of i-branded products, and the launch of the Mac mini, will spur vendors to deluge the market with an onslaught of targeted accessories. Some have all ready hit the market: [mini Tower](#), [mini Grandstand](#), and my favorite, the [mini Skirt](#)—a glow-in-the-dark pedestal. My suggestion is that you march on down to your home supplies store, pick up a piece of glass-block, and rest your Mac mini on that.

If you were to discount all of the vendors marketing and selling iPod, audio, and PowerBook and iBook accessories on the show floor, add another five percent for those defying logical categorization, and then throw in another ten percent for vendors who simply kicked back Web site content at their booths, there was really about two hours of time to be spent on the floor. It had me wondering why attendees put up with it. And then it came to me. This is the only game in town. I found it odd when Steve Jobs kept likening time spent at Apple Stores as miniature, not mini, Macworld Expo experiences, with all of the hardware and software on display and the knowledgeable people at the ready to answer questions.

Most of my time was spent in the specialty software section comprised of one-square-meter booths, where companies that could not afford the hefty real estate prices passionately displayed and discussed their wares. It was a pleasure to spend time in this area. Not all of the products were ready for prime time, but that didn't matter as much to me as the collective level of enthusiasm.

I came across two firms that exemplify the range of applications and services. The first was Corriente Networks and its software-based WiFi RADIUS server entitled [Elektron](#). It's economical, intuitive, and presently a part of my home network infrastructure. The second one was Beezwx Data Ltd., a consulting firm specializing in helping businesses manage their data, and it is the maker of the Hive line of contact managers and organizers, all built upon FileMaker Pro. I was taken aback by just how much FileMaker Pro has progressed. The last time I worked with the application, it was a Claris product.

Toward the end of the show, I just had to find a place to sit down on the show floor, and as luck would have it, I sat right down with the IDG trade show manager for the show in an empty booth. We got to talking, and once I explained that this was my first Macworld Expo and that I had attended 20 years of personal computer trade shows, she started asking me all these questions about the show itself. I tried my best to answer all of them. I even sent mail to a whole slew of IDG executives about the show as a follow-up. At first they were cordial, but when I pushed the idea of specifics and having someone who could objectively and constructively criticize work with them, they dialed back their enthusiasm.

Macworld Expo, whether it be in San Francisco or somewhere on the East Coast, is going to have to change with the times and realize the shifts in the marketplace. Without Apple as its cornerstone, the folks at IDG masterminding Macworld Expo Boston are going to come to a rude awakening. I would ask them to give me ten reasons why to attend. At this point, I would settle for five highly specific ones, which do not include the panel discussions or conferences. There should be at least a handful of reasons for an exhibits-only attendee to show up at the front door of the exhibit hall.

I can think of a number of ways, one in particular, but before I start doling out free advice to IDG, I would like to hear what it has to say on the matter and what if any plans it has to make its East Coast show a success, insofar as attendees are going to want make it a yearly event on their calendars.

Were there things to write home about? Of course. The Mac mini, the iPod shuffle, Corriente Networks' Elektron, Griffin Technology's [RocketFM](#), and Delicious Monster's [Delicious Library](#), to name a few. Whatever you do when attending or displaying at Macworld Expo, do not lose the passion, otherwise it is Game Over! Hey, I need more quarters.

*Copyright © 2005 David Blumenstein, [apple@david.com](mailto:apple@david.com). When technology ceases to be a passion, David will hang up his keyboard, but not before. Until then it is enterprise and telecom engagements across the globe. The Segments section is open to anyone. If you have something interesting to say about life with your Mac, write us.*



## Part II: Desktop Pictures

The images we choose to place on our desktop environments are very often a direct reflection of our individual personalities; it's easy to spot the nature lover, the dedicated parent, the Apple zealot, and more as we pass by their workstations. I can still clearly see the desktop of a kid who was on his last leg with the printing company where I work. His desktop picture said it all—"The end is near..." spray-painted in bright blue over an image of a dirty brick wall.

Sources for images to use as desktop pictures are just as varied:

- The default desktop pictures that accompany every install of Mac OS X, and earlier incarnations of the Macintosh operating system, provide a nice mix of quality images.
- Hundreds of Web sites, with a wide range of computer-generated and photographic images, dedicate themselves to the cause of desktop pictures.
- Digital cameras have opened up a wonderful way for us to display our personal photography as desktop pictures.

The scope of this article isn't to try to define what makes the perfect desktop picture on a personal level; each of us must decide that for ourselves. However, if you've got the desire to share your creative works with others, via a personal Web site or other outlet, then you should consider a few things as you prepare your images.

### Image Size

Monitors have grown to monstrous proportions over the past few years. If the native resolution of your monitor is 1024 x 768 pixels or smaller you may not reach a very wide audience. Think big! Create your works oversized and scale them down for your personal use; 1600 x 1200 pixels is a good place to start, but that still won't cover the larger monitors, up to 2560 x 1600 pixels, that are currently in use.

## Picture Quality

Images that are pixelated, have visible JPEG compression, or are of poor photographic quality are big turn-offs.

- Pixelation is usually the result of enlarging a small image to a larger size.
- Don't be overly generous with JPEG compression. A nice, clean image that is free of artifacts gives end users a greater appreciation for your creations as they display them on their desktops.
- Raw photographs from your digital camera may need a little tweaking. Try iPhoto's "Enhance" button, or, in Photoshop (or Photoshop Elements) use the Image menu to Adjust Image > Auto Levels; using these methods can give a little more bounce and contrast to the colors and contrast, but they do produce some undesirable results from time to time. If your photo is a little on the blurry side try applying some Photoshop filter effects to help it out; Brush Strokes can be particularly effective in cleaning up blurred images while adding artistic flair at the same time—play with the sliders to achieve the best results.



The left image pictured above ([click to enlarge](#)) is photo I took in Sedona, Arizona. It's a long-range telephoto shot, so it looks somewhat grainy as a desktop. The painted effect on the right ([click to enlarge](#)) was created with Photoshop's Plastic Wrap filter and some creative layer blending.

## Text Elements

This is one of those things that is subjective in nature, thus it becomes difficult to give good advice for. Used sparingly, and as an overall part of your design, text elements can be very effective in a desktop picture. On the other hand, text can also do horrendous things to an otherwise excellent desktop creation. If you choose to add a copyright line or Web site address to your works keep them small and discreet—in the area under the menu bar or a lower corner is perfect. The middle of the screen is a big no-no.



That covers the basics! Beyond that, be creative and have fun with your desktop pictures. If others discover and enjoy your creations, that's icing on the cake.

Here's a small list of some of my favorite desktop pictures Web sites that I frequently visit and download from:

- [Blatte's Backgrounds](#)
- [Blue Sky Heart Graphics](#)
- [Caedes.net](#)
- [Mad Spaniard](#)
- [Pixelgirl Presents](#)
- [ResExcellence](#)

And shameless plugs for the [ATPM desktop pictures archive](#) and for my personal desktop pictures Web site, [Rampant Mac](#).

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## Tips for Your Next Multimedia Project

Apple has spent a good deal of time and energy over the last few years marketing Macs as the hub of a still-developing digital lifestyle. Everyone seems to be focused on new ways to make home networks, stereos, computers, and other devices all work together. Thinking back to how easy my first Mac was to use and connect to other devices, I'd suggest that Apple has been at the forefront of this idea from the beginning.

I like the idea of digital convergence, but for Mac users this is only the beginning. For me, the really interesting things started happening when Mac technology met iApps. Powerful, easy to use technology meets powerful, easy to use multimedia applications, and in true Mac tradition the end result is up to the user.

The iApps make multimedia development much easier than it was when I was part of a large project several years ago. In spite of that, there are a number of things that need to be considered. In this article, I'm not going to focus on tips for specific applications but rather on some tips that should help with planning and executing any project.

### Before You Start the Project

My normal mode of operation is to poke at a project until I get it working the way I want or I give up, whichever comes first. In the case of multimedia projects, though, I'm about to suggest something that I may never say again: do a little homework before you start the project. A little time and effort here can save you a lot of heartache later. Here are some things to think about before you shoot your first scene or build your first Web page.

Think about the final destination for your project. Photos that are the right size and format for a Web page might not work as well for a DVD. Even within the DVD format, some players are capable of playing back a wider variety of files than others. The final destination of a project could conceivably affect file sizes, types, and other parameters.

Consider the scope of your project. Whether it's your first project or your tenth, large-scale projects can be exponentially more difficult to manage than smaller ones. For a first project, try something small. If you are going to tackle a large project, consider involving several people in a development team. Just make sure that everyone understands what they need to do and any special considerations such as the file types needed for specific files.

What tools do you need to complete the project? The iApps are great for many projects. Before you buy additional software, take the time to get to know the hardware and software you already own. Not only might you discover a variety of useful tips, you will have a better understanding of what your setup can accomplish.

Knowing the limitations of your hardware and software may not only make your project easier, but it can also save you some money. I've been working on a project for the last few months. I now have several pieces of software that perform similar tasks. Some of the software has been freeware and none of it has been too expensive, but a better understanding of each piece of software's limitations might have meant using less software. This could potentially have saved me a few dollars and some hard drive space.

Make the final plans for your project. The format for your final plan is not as important as whether or not you can actually follow the plan.

As part of your project plan, be sure to include provisions for backing up and archiving important files. In my mind, there is an important distinction between backups and archives. Backups are performed frequently and involve copying files that are being modified regularly. An archive consists of files whose content is not being changed often but might be useful at a later date. Perhaps you shot some great video footage that you decide isn't right for your current project, but it's too good to throw away. This is the right time for an archived copy of the file rather than a backup.

## During the Project

As you start working on your project there are a number of things to consider. These hints aren't geared for specific applications but focus instead on topics that seem to be important for a variety of projects.

Work on the project in stages. As a general rule, you can't do everything in one marathon editing session. Even with the best equipment and software, these projects take time. The larger the scope of the project, the more time it will consume.

Save your work often. No matter how stable your system and chosen applications are, there will be problems now and then. You don't want to spend several hours editing a project only to have a power failure or other problem ruin all of your hard work. If your editing software has an auto-save setting, consider using it.

Speaking of saving files, I prefer saving files in uncompressed formats, such as AIFF for audio and TIFF for graphics, until I've finished final editing. I learned this the hard way several years ago. While using my poke-at-it-until-done method to correct the color of a scanned photo, I saved the photo several times as a JPEG. Over time, this produced digital artifacts that were not present in the initial photo. If there are unwanted elements in your files that were not there initially this might be the culprit.

If you must use compression, use as little as possible. Too much compression produces the same kind of digital artifacts I encountered with the photo I mentioned earlier. Before you compress the file, make one or more backup copies. You can use the copies to experiment with various settings to determine which settings give you the best compromise between sound or image quality and file size.

Test your project often to make sure everything is working properly. If possible, test on the same type of equipment that will be used to playback the project. I've worked on projects that played fine on our home computers but didn't play on the target systems due to minor configuration differences. You may waste a few CDs or DVDs, but it's probably worth it. I can't think of too many things more frustrating than putting significant amounts of time into a project only to discover that something you did the first day doesn't work properly.

If you encounter problems, don't be afraid to ask for help. Chances are that other users have experienced similar problems. Sometimes the answer is so simple it's easy to miss. I once worked on some video clips that refused to play back on the target PCs. After several false starts and consulting several books, I switched from an AVI file to QuickTime. The problem went away immediately.

## After the Project

Once your project is over, take time to enjoy the kudos from your audience. Don't be too upset if you think of several things you would like to have tried that didn't occur to you initially. One of the more frustrating things about many creative endeavors is that when the project is complete you can always think of something you would have done differently.

Now that the project is complete, it's a good time to make note of any interesting things you have learned while completing this project. Don't think of the notes as taking the fun out of a project; they may save you a lot of time in the future.

## Final Thoughts

These tips don't cover every problem that you might encounter, but hopefully they will stimulate some thought. Many of the things I learned initially about multimedia development have changed significantly, but these tips seem to remain important even today.



I don't know what's coming up next month, but I'll think of something. I'm sure there are lots of problems waiting to be resolved or projects that haven't been tackled.

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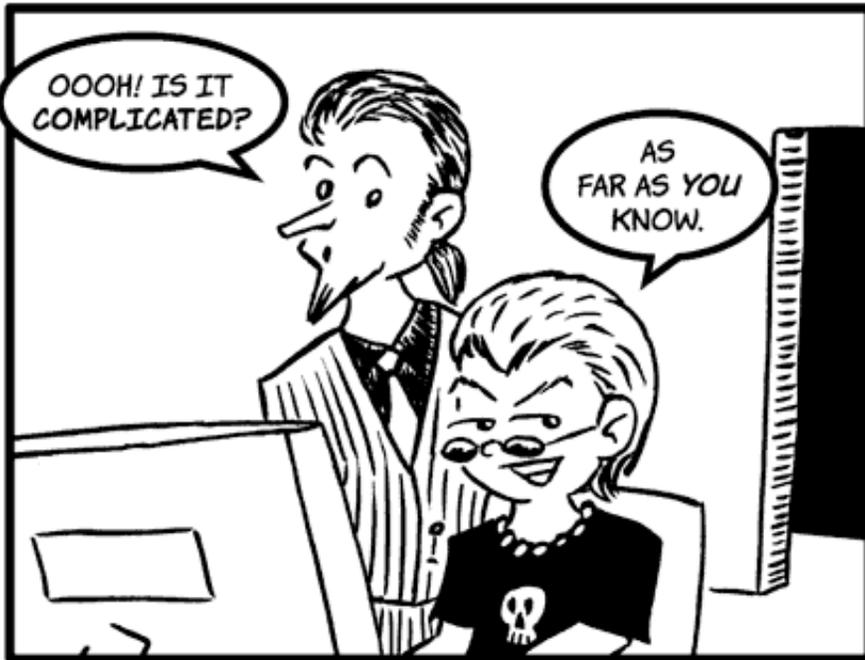
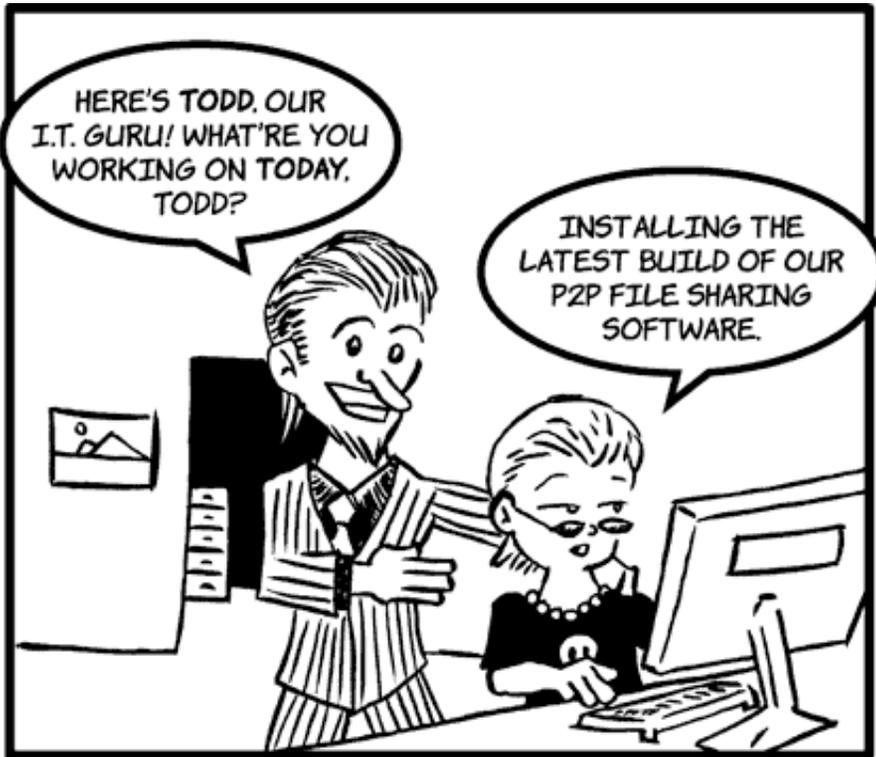


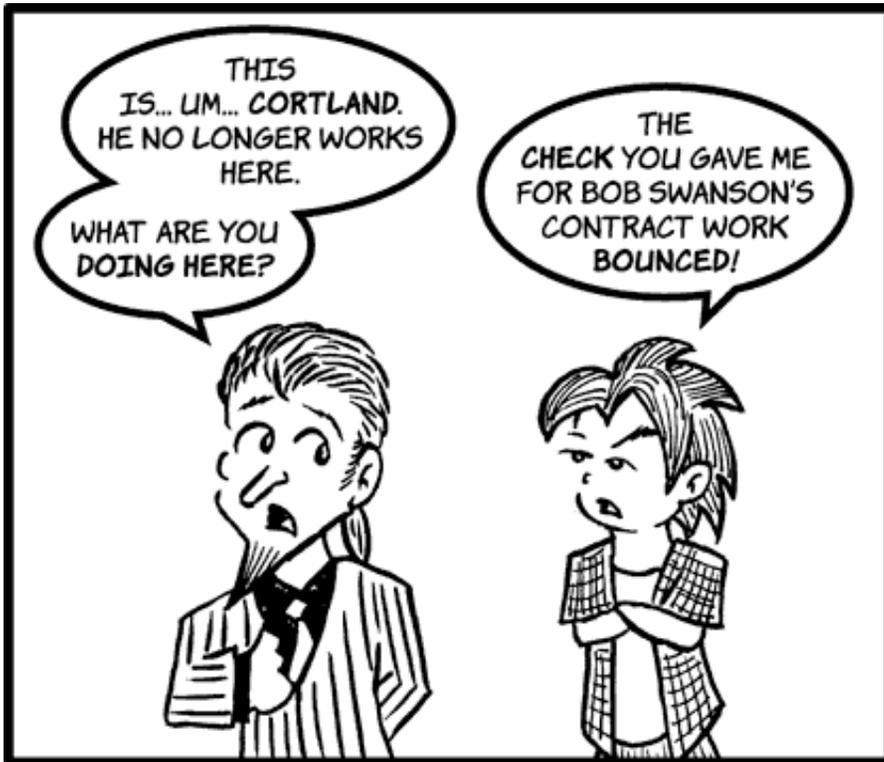
# Cartoon: Cortland

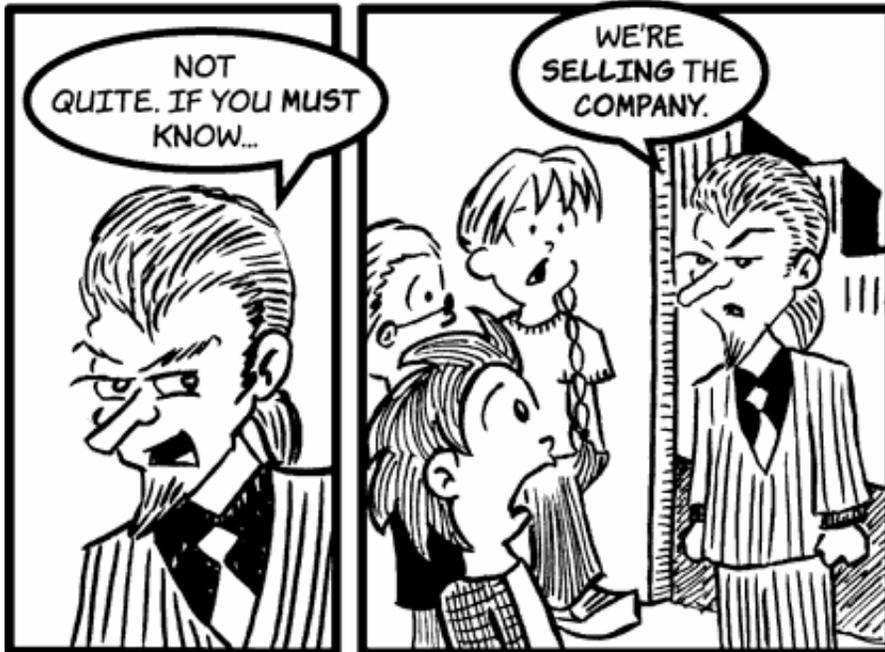
by Matt Johnson, [mjohnson@atpm.com](mailto:mjohnson@atpm.com)



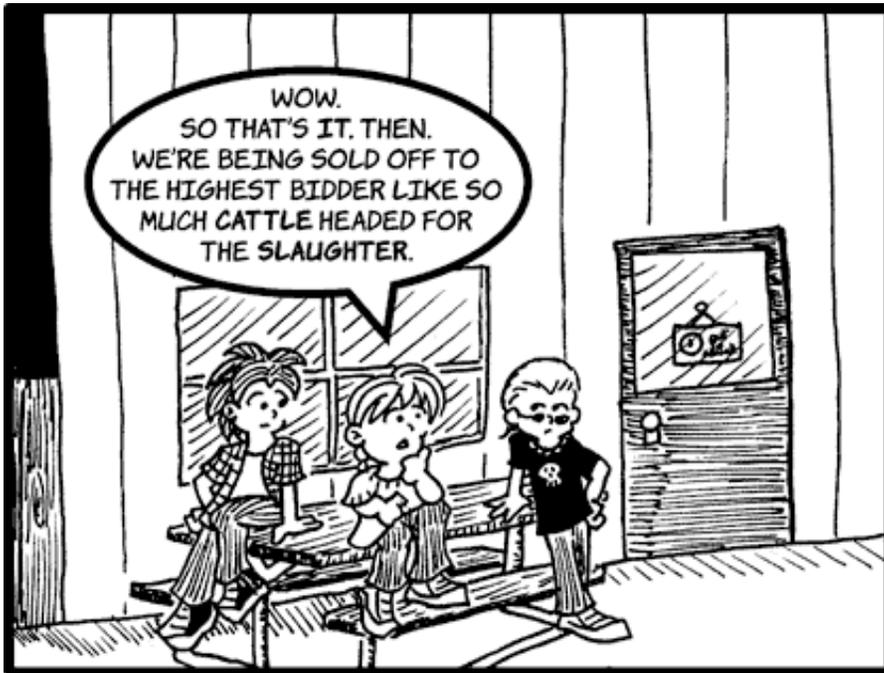




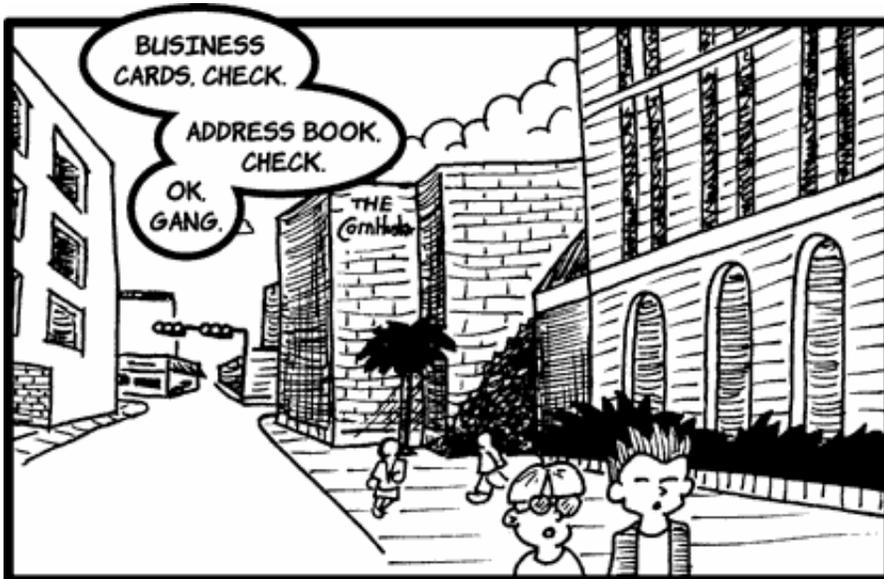






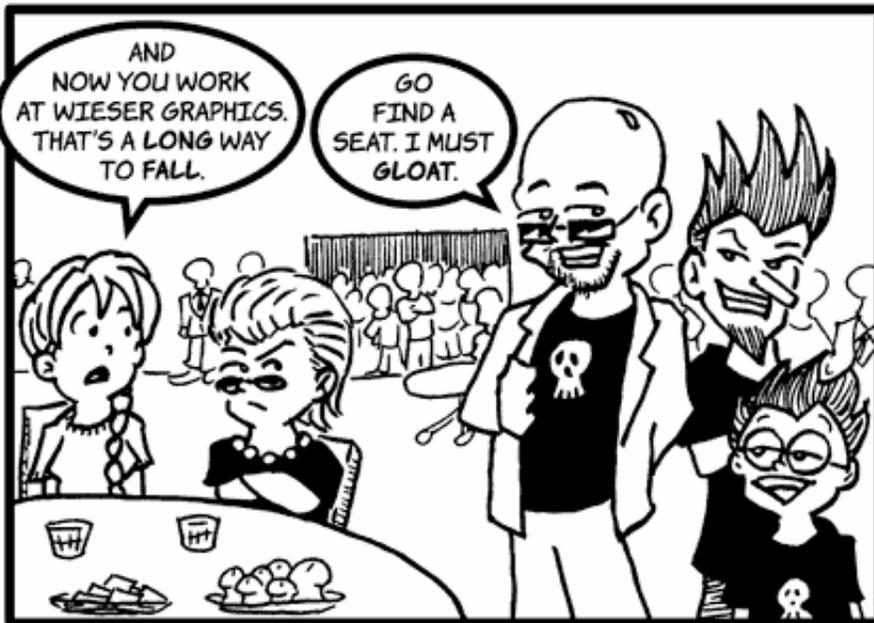






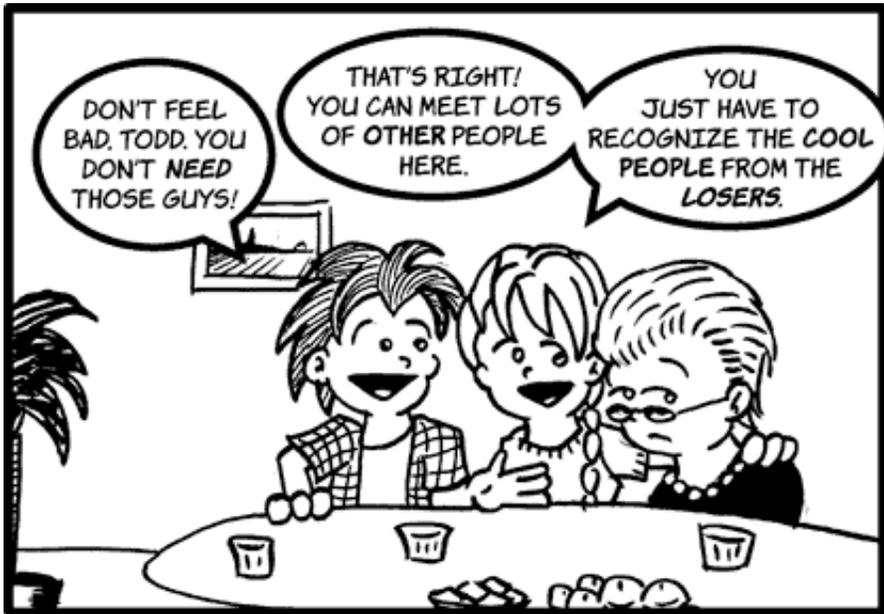






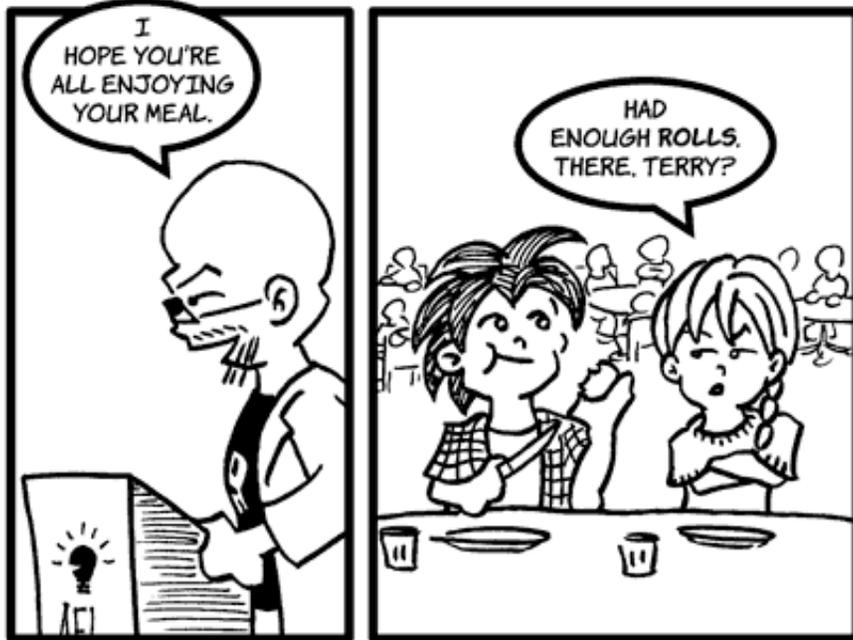


\*STRONZO: JERK  
\*\*SÌ COME NO: OH BROTHER







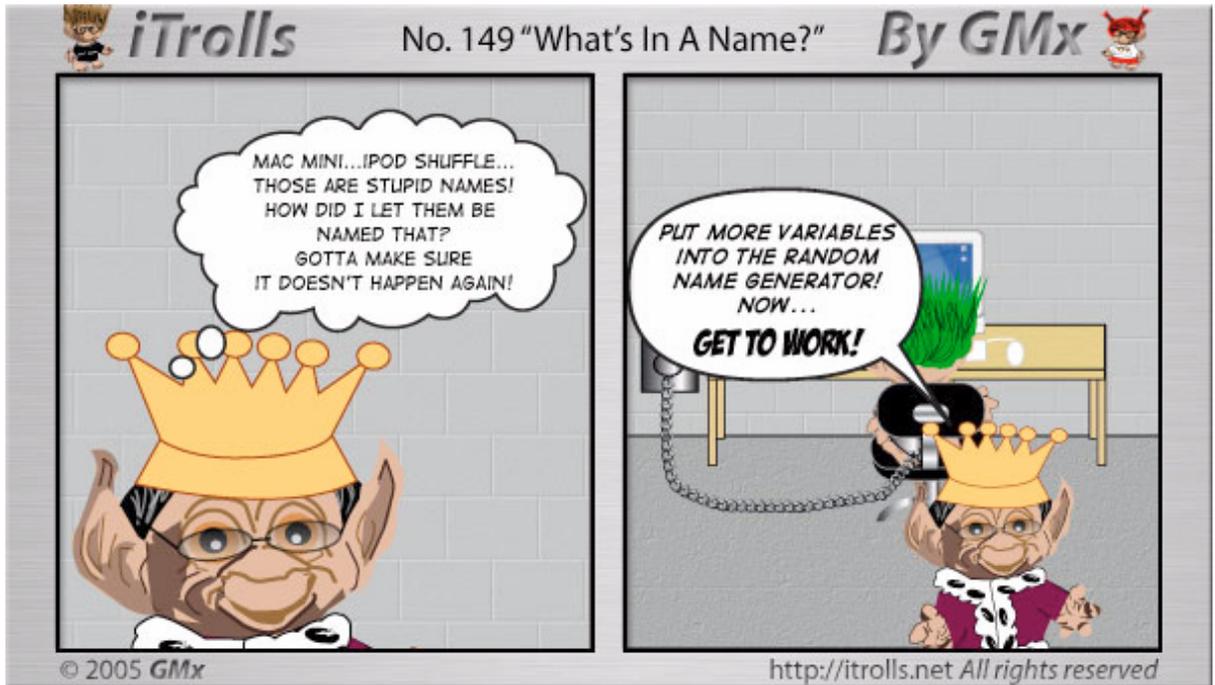


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# Cartoon: iTrolls

by GMx, <http://homepage.mac.com/gregmx>



Copyright © 2005 GMx, <http://homepage.mac.com/gregmx>.



## Arizona

### Arizona

This month's [desktop pictures](#) come from ATPM Contributing Editor Eric Blair's January 2004 vacation in Arizona. The photographs are from the Phoenix and Tuscon areas and were captured with a Canon PowerShot S400 Digital ELPH.

### Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

### Downloading all the Pictures at Once

iCab and Interarchy (formerly Anarchie) can download an entire set of desktop pictures at once. Use the "Web > Download Entire Site" command in the File menu, giving it the URL to the pictures page above. In iCab, use the Download command to download "Get all files in same path."

### 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](mailto:editor@atpm.com) and we'll consider publishing it in next month's issue. Have a regular print but no scanner? Don't worry. E-mail us, and we tell you where to send it so we can scan it for you. Note that we cannot return the original print, so send us a copy.

### Placing Desktop Pictures

#### Mac OS X 10.3.x

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

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

### **Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x**

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

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

### **Mac OS X 10.0.x**

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

### **Mac OS 8.5–9.x**

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

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

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

## Mac OS 8.0 and 8.1

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

## Random Desktop Pictures

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

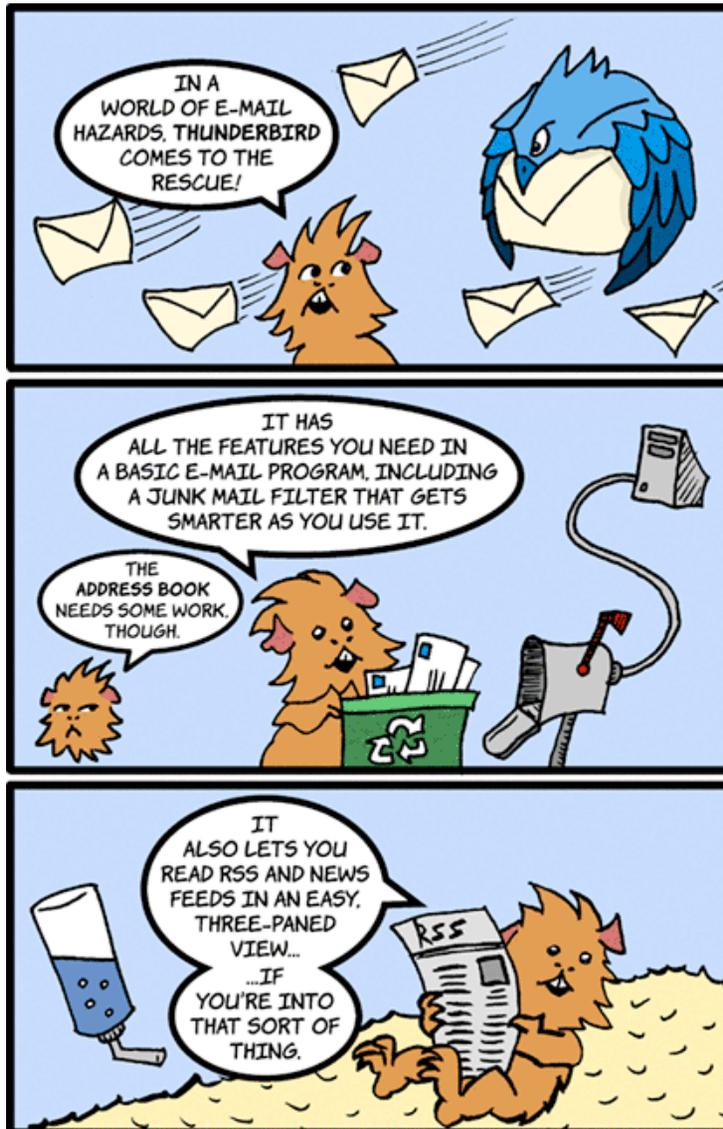
## DeskPicture

An alternative to Mac OS’s Appearance control panel is Pierce Software’s DeskPicture, [reviewed](#) in issue 5.10 and available for [download](#).



# Frisky Freeware

by Matt Johnson, [mjohnson@atpm.com](mailto:mjohnson@atpm.com)



[Thunderbird](#)

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# Review: Axio Backpacks

by Chris Lawson, [clawson@atpm.com](mailto:clawson@atpm.com)

## Axio Swift Backpack

Developer: [Axio](#)

Price: \$160

Trial: None



I know what you're thinking. "Isn't \$160 kinda expensive for a backpack?" Well, in the market niche occupied by Axio's line of hard-shell backpacks, the answer is no, and for good reason: making a hard-shell backpack that actually protects its contents is costly. Whether Axio's Swift does this any better than its few competitors remains to be seen.



“Few” is probably an exaggeration. As far as this motorcyclist/bicyclist/avid laptop user knows, there is precisely one other competitor in this market, namely [Boblbee](#). The top-of-the-line Megalopolis was [reviewed here at ATPM](#) just over two years ago and, until the introduction of HaroDesign’s Axio line a year ago, seemed to be the only realistic option for hard-shell wearable laptop protection. Saddlebags are a much better option on a motorcycle than on a bicycle, as anyone who has pedaled a bicycle up a hill with extra weight on board can attest, and you can’t take a saddlebag off the bike and into the office very easily.

Without making this too much of a shoot-out between the Swift and the Megalopolis, how does the Swift stack up? Well, the Swift encloses 1200 cubic inches, according to Axio, making it the second-largest hard-shell pack in the Axio line. Only the [Fuse](#) is bigger (see the review below); and, while not cavernous like the [Hybrid](#) (again, see the review below), it doesn’t feel terribly small, as the Megalopolis sometimes does.



It's clear that the designers put some serious thought into the bag's ergonomics. The Swift is a very comfortable pack, with contoured and very well-padded shoulder straps that fit the wearer's torso. It's fairly heavy for a backpack—about six pounds—but the limited size works in its favor here, as you can't stuff it so full that it becomes a real burden. A laptop, AC adapter and miscellaneous other accessories, and a couple notebooks or large textbook aren't going to be any more of a burden in this pack than they would be in the ubiquitous nylon Jansport packs you see on college campuses across the country. Conversely, if you're the type who carries four textbooks and two three-inch binders around for eight hours a day, you'll want something bigger. You probably don't want to cram your laptop into a backpack with all that other stuff anyway, not to mention that your chiropractor is going to love you when you get to be 35.



The Swift does well on most details. All Axio bags come with a detachable nylon cell-phone pouch that can clip onto either shoulder strap. If you leave the pack in a locker during the day, you can take the pouch with you and clip it on your belt. It's a nice touch, and it's no worse than most \$20 mall-kiosk cell-phone covers. The pouch can work with an iPod (sort of; you can't really control the iPod, but it'll hold it snugly and protect it) if

you don't have a cell phone, or if you carry your cell phone elsewhere. Also included is a protective cloth bag for storing your Swift, tossing it in an overhead luggage bin, etc. to prevent scratches.



We here at ATPM take reader satisfaction very seriously, and we're dedicated to fair, thorough reviews that give useful buying advice. My useful buying advice about that cloth bag is this: Axio should have given you a rain fly instead. I'm going to get all *Consumer Reports* on you for a minute and describe the Official ATPM Worry Wart's Wild and Wacky Western Washington Winter Weather Water Workout™.

It all started when Lee directed my attention to a little feature I very nearly missed. Axio's entire product line has a headphone cord pass-through port at the top of the backpack, near the carrying handle. This is ostensibly so riders can listen to a portable CD player (apparently enough people still use these for Axio to have designed an appropriately sized

pouch into each pack) or iPod (a product Axio has apparently never heard of, as iPod-sized pouches or pockets are conspicuously absent) while they're on the go. A fine idea in theory, if a bit dangerous. (Headphones in traffic? Just Say No™.)

Unfortunately, Axio forgot to put any sort of covering over this hole.

Any motorcyclist or bicyclist who's ever been caught out in the rain knows exactly what that means: a leak waiting to happen. After much hand-wringing over how to deal with this potential problem, I decided to put it to a test, and the OATPMWWWaWWWWWWW™ was born. This test basically consists of the following:

1. Turn on shower.
2. Put on backpack, zipped up, with zipper pulls paired at top center (worst-case scenario with the gap at the leading edge).
3. Get in shower.
4. Stand in artificial downpour for three minutes.
5. Point shower head away from you, or turn it off. Don't get out of the shower unless you have floor drains in your bathroom.
6. Note the amount of water (if any) that ends up in the pack, where it ends up, and where it seems to have come from.

Remember this, because you'll be quizzed on it later.

Admittedly, this is an absolute worst-case scenario test. The only way you'd see rain this heavy in the real world would probably be to ride your motorcycle into a hurricane, to ride your motorcycle behind a semi truck with no mud flaps driving through a hurricane, or to take an off-pavement detour into a lake on your [Scuba-Doo](#). Keeping that in mind, after three minutes under the shower, I poured at least half a cup of standing water out of the bottom of the Swift. Judging by the leakage patterns inside the bag, most of this water came in through the headphone pass-through, but some of it definitely came through the zipper. Most of the zipper leakage could be avoided by making sure the two zipper pulls

meet anywhere but the leading edge of the bag, but I recommend a piece of black duct tape—or a proper backpack rain fly—for riders who don't anticipate using the headphone pass-through.



That zipper, by the way, works very well. Its nearly circumferential design allows the pack to open very wide for easy loading and unloading of your laptop, books, gadgets, and other stuff. The interior presents a multitude of pockets for storing accessories, and the

layout of these pockets makes them useful even when the bag is stuffed to capacity. This is something that cannot be said for the Megalopolis, and I've gotten very good at untangling cords as a result.



Unfortunately, that interior design is also responsible for the second of the Swift's three major drawbacks. Due to the small panel that separates the laptop compartment from the rest of the interior, you really need to buy a laptop sleeve to protect the laptop from being scratched by the rest of the contents of the bag. Making this panel six inches taller (and, optionally, lining the compartment) would have entirely obviated the problem.

Tom Bihn's [Brain Cell](#) is an excellent sleeve, but don't expect to fit anything larger than a 15" Brain Cell in the Swift's laptop compartment. With something thinner like a wetsuit-style sleeve, you might cram a 17" PowerBook in there, but it'll be tight. Smaller PowerBooks and iBooks should fit easily. Keep the cost of a sleeve in mind when you're making a purchasing decision; expect to pay at least \$20 and possibly as much as \$50 to get a feature that most laptop bags in this price range include by default.

The last major drawback may simply be a matter of perception, but it deserves mention. The polycarbonate shell on the Swift is very thin, so thin that it flexes when you push in on it. Polycarbonate is the generic name of GE's famous Lexan plastic, and it's tough stuff—so

tough that it's claimed to be "shatterproof" in many applications. That's all well and good, but if you're sliding along on your back at 20 MPH or so, how long is the thin layer going to hold up to the abrasion of the road surface? I don't have any real-world testing on which to base this concern, but the thicker ABS shell on the Megalopolis gives me greater peace of mind.

One final (minor) word of warning: if you do get caught out in the rain and the bag really gets wet, or if you sweat heavily while wearing the pack, the red fabric on the back pad may bleed onto your shirt or jacket. I'd recommend washing the back panel in warm water when you first get the bag to bleed out as much excess color as possible.

All that being said, I prefer the Swift to the Megalopolis, as it's more space-efficient, looks less like a prop from a B-grade ripoff of [The Rocketeer](#), and holds more stuff in a more organized fashion. If I were riding my motorcycle more right now—and keep in mind the Swift was actually *designed* for motorcyclists, so this is pretty significant—I would have to pick the Megalopolis, which is totally waterproof and has a thicker shell.

So should you buy a Swift? If you've read this far, you're probably looking for the same thing I am—a roomy, highly protective hard-shell pack that looks good and works better. The Swift is *almost* it. If you can live with its disadvantages, or if you just can't stomach the design of the Megalopolis, it's a good choice. It's attractive, it's competitively priced, and it's very comfortable. Just keep your duct tape or rain fly handy.

## Axio Hybrid Backpack

**Developer:** [Axio](#)

**Price:** \$180

**Trial:** None



Axio's Hybrid is the Texas of laptop backpacks. It's bigger and badder than everything else, and by golly, it's not going to let you forget that. This works pretty well, and the Hybrid turns out to be a decent—and very roomy—pack.



The oversized Hybrid is one of the largest day packs out there, and a true leviathan in the laptop backpack market. At 2671 cubic inches, it's almost as voluminous as a kid-sized frame pack. Obviously, this pack was designed from the ground up for 17" PowerBook users, and the included sleeve confirms that idea. A 15" PowerBook will fit loosely in the

sleeve, shaking around a bit but safely padded from any bumps and scratches. Those of you with smaller 'Books might want to trade the sleeve for a smaller one from another manufacturer.



That sleeve deserves a mention. It's designed much like the \$20 [Brenthaven iBook sleeves](#) on the Apple Store for Education, or like a [Brain Cell](#) rotated 90 degrees. It isn't reinforced with plastic, so it's not as stiff or as protective as it could be, but it's well-padded and lined with soft fleece. Like the Hybrid itself, the sleeve is bulky. To be fair, the sleeve looks like it was designed to hold large, thick Wintel laptops, too, which accounts for the bulk. Despite its size, it integrates very well into the pack. It attaches to the bottom of the pack (with hook-and-loop fabric) and sides (with snaps), so even if the pack gets tossed around, the sleeve will stay in place. Axio could take a page from Booq's, ah, "book" here and offer sleeve options for its customers. The integration of the included sleeve is so nice that you hate to give it up, but closer-fitting sleeves give a feeling of greater security.



While not a true hard-shell, the Hybrid has a very stiff exterior that undoubtedly provides better protection than a limp nylon pack. There are two main compartments, both closed by nearly circumferential zippers, which make loading and unloading easy. The outer portions of the pack's clamshell hinge also come apart, which allows the bag to open a full 180 degrees (handy when you're trying to dry it out; see below). Lots of little pockets and zippered compartments make sorting your gadgets a breeze. It's easy to lose sight of the big picture here, though. Backpacks are primarily for carrying around a lot of stuff. The

Hybrid can swallow the largest laptops on the market, a binder or two, a bag lunch, and a couple of textbooks and still have room left over. This backpack surely carries the endorsement of the Future Chiropractors of America.



Medical jokes aside, the Hybrid is actually very comfortable even at full load. I threw two binders, three large textbooks, and a host of smaller paperbacks in it, and I nearly forgot I had 30 pounds on my back. A waist/hip belt and a chest strap combine with very well-padded and contoured shoulder straps to make the load seem much lighter than it really is. Those with shorter torsos may find the Hybrid too big, though; I'm 5' 10", and I have the shoulder straps tightened almost all the way down. Anyone under 5' 5" should definitely try the Hybrid on before making a decision.

Like Axio's other packs, the Hybrid comes standard with a cell-phone pouch that clips on either shoulder strap, and nearly any cell phone that's not a Zach Morris Special will fit. You can fit an iPod in there, too; just don't expect to control it through the thick padding. Most pocket-sized PDAs will fit, too, if that's your thing.



Also like Axio's other packs, the Hybrid has a headphone cord pass-through hole at the top of the pack, and this hole can't be sealed against the elements. The results from the Official ATPM Worry Wart's Wild and Wacky Western Washington Winter Weather Water Workout™ (full details in the Swift review above) aren't encouraging, either. The "waterproof" zippers still leaked fairly badly through the pulls. My advice is the same as for the Swift: don't zip it closed with the pulls at the leading edge of the pack, and most of this problem will go away. The headphone pass-through is another matter entirely. I poured fully *three cups* of water from the CD player pouch after the test. While the presence of this pouch did minimize the amount of water that got inside the main compartment of the pack, neither the pouch nor its seams are totally waterproof, so the

headphone pass-through is basically a slow leak. It's better than the setup on other Axio packs, whose headphone pass-throughs empty directly into the main compartment, but it's still leaky enough to render the CD player pouch useless in the wet. Again, get some black duct tape or a rain fly if you expect you might ever get caught out while riding, and most importantly, don't keep *anything* in that pouch that isn't 100% waterproof.



The biggest flaw aside from the utterly useless headphone pass-through is that the waterproof zippers are very stiff and will require some break-in before they slide smoothly. There's some individual variation here, and not all Hybrids have horribly stiff zippers. Pulling outward on the zipper pull as you're operating it seems to help alleviate the problem too.

The Hybrid is great for people who have to carry a lot of stuff, simply by virtue of being about the biggest laptop backpack out there. If you need a big pack or simply find true hard-shells too small, give the Hybrid a look. It's a good pack, but if your only vehicle has two wheels and no cab, buy a rain fly and save yourself a lot of headaches.

# Axio Fuse Backpack

Developer: [Axio](#)

Price: \$140

Trial: None



Axio has taken the shotgun approach to the hard-shell backpack market: make a bunch of slightly different bags and there's bound to be one for everybody. The Fuse is the largest of their true hard-shell line, and follows the Henry Ford Rule of Color: anything you like as long as it's black.



The Fuse has a fairly understated design, with black nylon fabric covering a polyethylene shell (Axio's other hard-shells use polycarbonate) and a splash of [Tennessee](#) orange-and-white on the back pad. The shell is more flexible than that of the Swift (reviewed above),

despite its extra thickness, due to the difference in shell material. The signature Axio hard-shell design elements—adjustable chest strap, ergonomic shoulder straps with reflective piping, a clip-on cell-phone/PDA/iPod holster, circumferential zippers for easy laptop ingress/egress—are all present and accounted for. The attendant benefits of these elements are also noticeable. As with other Axio packs, the Fuse is eminently comfortable to wear and fairly easy to use.

As backpacks go, hard-shells tend to be on the small side. The Fuse, at 1300 cubic inches, is pretty big for a hard-shell, though it's still under half the size of Axio's monster Hybrid (reviewed above). Though the Fuse claims a 100-cubic-inch advantage over its shiny cousin, the Swift, it feels somewhat smaller. This feeling is deceptive, because it's actually easier to pack more stuff in the Fuse.



This probably arises because the internal layout of the Fuse is, well, backwards. The pack is divided into two primary compartments. One is obviously intended for the computer, some pencils, and a CD/DVD or two. The other compartment, lined entirely with soft felt, houses a wonderful compartmentalization scheme that I've only seen in one other product: my Targus digital camera case. There are four dividers—one long, three short—that have the hook portion of hook-and-loop fabric on their lower face. You can place them anywhere you want, in virtually any arrangement you want, to customize the layout of the compartment to your precise needs.



The problem with this otherwise very useful arrangement is that it places a laptop immediately under the hard shell with almost no padding between the computer and an impact to the shell. If the custom compartment had been on the outside (just inside the shell), with the computer sleeve/compartment on the inside (sitting on the wearer's back), this design would be far better. As it is, the flexible shell and computer placement

*absolutely* dictate the use of a sleeve (\$20 to \$50 extra) if you're going to use the compartments as they're intended. If you're willing to give up most of the flexibility of the custom compartment, you can put your laptop in there and arrange the dividers to keep the laptop from sliding around. There's nothing really wrong with this arrangement, and I recommend it for maximum protection, but you do lose the organizational benefits of that wonderful custom compartment. Either way is a far cry better than the internal layout of a [Megalopolis](#), however, and for this flexibility, Axio is to be commended. Furthermore, the internal division of this pack into two main compartments makes it easy to toss a computer in one half and notebooks and such in the other half. This is why it's easier to cram more into the Fuse than the Swift, and the Swift could take a design lesson from the Fuse here.



Like the Swift, the Fuse struggles to swallow a 17" laptop in a sleeve, but will gobble up just about any laptop out there if you're willing to risk strapping it in "naked." Smaller laptops are no problem, sleeve or not, though a 15" [Brain Cell](#) is a tight fit in the designated laptop compartment. It fits easily in the other compartment with all dividers removed.



Those well-conceived signature Axio hard-shell design elements have a dark side: "signature" Axio design quirks. There's a nice cloth storage bag included with the Fuse but, like the Swift's storage bag, you would have been far better off with a rain fly. That incomprehensible headphone cord pass-through is present here too, and it let about half a cup of water through during the OATPMWWWWaWWWWWWWW™ test. The zipper is identical to that used on the Swift, so the same warning applies: don't leave the zipper pulls mated on the leading edge of the bag if you're riding. Since there's another zipper inside the Fuse enclosing one of the compartments, make sure the two zipper closures don't line up with each other. Making those two mistakes (intentionally) in the simulated

torrential downpour added an extra half-cup of water to the contents of the pack. Also like the Swift, the Axio's brightly colored back pad can bleed onto clothing when wet, so washing it with warm water would be a good idea.



The Fuse would be very nearly the perfect hard-shell if it had a bit more style, a stiffer shell, and innards that hadn't taken a trip through the Revers-o-Tron. Oh, and please, fix the headphone pass-through with a cover. Marware can do it on their [SportSuit Convertible](#), and duct tape is only so much fun.

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# Review: iLite

by Chris Lawson, [clawson@atpm.com](mailto:clawson@atpm.com)

**Developer:** [MCT](#)

**Price:** \$15 (list); \$12 (street)

**Requirements:** any laptop with side-mounted USB ports or a USB keyboard with a free port

**Trial:** None



From the guy who brought keyboard illumination to the PowerBook G4 with [icKeys](#) comes the similarly designed iLite, a USB-powered LED that serves to illuminate the keyboard on portable Macs without built-in keyboard illumination, or on desktop USB keyboards with an available USB port in an appropriate location.

The iLite was conceived out of a need to do something with the excess inventory of white LEDs in Mike's stock from poor icKeys sales. Apple had yet to add keyboard backlighting to any portable model, and the iLite was—and still is, for owners of portable Macs lacking a backlit keyboard, or for desktop users seeking keyboard illumination—a good solution to the problem. As the iBook was the first Mac to feature side-mounted ports, early iLite models were designed in matching white plastic. The current model is Dell-black, which is a stylistic step backwards made up for by other features. More on that in a minute.

The primary advantage of the iLite over the competition is its compact size, as the entire device is roughly the same size as the plug on a typical USB cable. This is both a blessing and a curse, however; the iLite is useless on any laptop with USB ports behind the screen. Illumination is nowhere near as good as the backlighting offered by the current PowerBook line, but it's not much worse than that of a [FlyLight](#) or similar gooseneck device. The illumination is enough to type by, and is in general superior to that offered by an icKeys installed in a TiBook. Its utility on an Apple Pro Keyboard is limited, though an

iLite is better than nothing and is considerably more attractive than a gooseneck light. Laptop users who have multiple USB ports should install the iLite in the port closest to the screen for best illumination.



An older white model was used for this review, and the current crop of black iLites offers some advantages over the older models. The LED is mounted so as to direct less glare into the eyes of the user, and the LED boom is slightly longer and flexible, allowing for superior positioning of the light and marginally improving its compatibility with external keyboards, a feature often requested by desktop users. Finally, the new iLites are more solidly constructed, which should offer increased durability in the long term.

Portable users will be glad to know that, like most such devices, the iLite drains the battery very little. LEDs are highly energy-efficient, and the iLite should have no noticeable impact on battery life. Of interest to the niche market of astronomers is the availability of the iLite with a red LED in place of the stock white LED. The red light preserves the eyes' adaptation

to the dark when stargazing. Coupled with Stephen Hutson's excellent [DarkAdapted](#) and a good astronomy software package, a red iLite makes a PowerBook or iBook a valuable companion for field astronomy.

Until Apple deigns to offer a backlit keyboard on the iBook line, the iLite remains a good option for iBook users. Power Mac and iMac users are faced with a series of mediocre choices: the iLite is too inflexible for the vertical USB ports in Apple's offerings; its gooseneck competitors are ugly and awkward; and third-party backlit keyboards have inferior actions, over-bright lighting, and poor styling. The market on the desktop is still wide open.

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# Review: iPod shuffle

by Ellyn Ritterskamp, [eritterskamp@atpm.com](mailto:eritterskamp@atpm.com)

**Developer:** [Apple](#)

**Price:** \$99 (512 MB); \$149 (1 GB)

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.1.5 or Windows 2000 or XP

**Trial:** None



The iPod shuffle is a gadget that does exactly what it is designed to do. It provides portable music-playing, it is inexpensive, and—like all Apple products—it just works.

The shuffle is the current evolution of the product line that has made Apple a success on Wall Street again. The iPod, in all its forms, and the iTunes Music Store, have revolutionized digital music. I think the iPod would still be a success without the Music Store, because plenty of consumers already use their existing music collection to compile their playlists. But the notion of buying one song at a time, instead of having to commit to an entire album, is one that has been long overdue. Of course, popular songs have always been available as singles, from the days of LPs. But over the past few years, consumers have wanted access to single digital files, and Apple has provided that.



Single songs would not matter as much if we did not have this music player. This is the music player that pulls it all together. Having said that, I will agree it has its limitations. If those limitations bother you, I suggest you stick with an iPod mini.

There is no display on the shuffle, which saves bunches of real estate, and I guess weight, because there is no gimcrackery to run the display. With no display, you cannot see a written thing to tell you what song or file you are hearing, or who the artist is. I fail to see what the big deal is about this. You choose which songs to put in the playlist, or at least which songs to put on your hard drive (if you let the Shuffle randomly pick songs), so what is the big mystery?

The Shuffle holds 512 MB (about 120 songs) or 1 GB in the high-end version. I was able to fit 93 on my first playlist. Your mileage will vary. The iPod mini holds about 1000 songs for \$199 on the low-end version, so if you need a large library on the go, again, stick with the Mini. You get more storage space for the dollar, but you give up the incredible light weight of the Shuffle. Not that the Mini is ponderous, at 3.6 ounces. But the Shuffle is just unbelievably light. You could make it a hair accessory.

As far as operating the unit, those are the only limitations I can see. There's one other thing that I would change if I could, which is that you have to plug the Shuffle into a computer (that's on) to charge it, or else purchase an adapter or dock. The other iPods come with wall chargers.

The Shuffle has a 12-hour rechargeable battery, which you need to plug in to charge before doing anything else. The instructions to load the software are simple. iTunes does most of the work for you. You can let the Shuffle select songs from the library, or create your own custom playlist. The Shuffle does not support AIFF files. You can have the songs play in sequence, or allow them to shuffle, which is sort of the point of the whole approach, for me. I like not knowing what the next song will be.

The Shuffle weighs less than one ounce. The USB connector is the butt end of the unit, which comes with a cap to cover it when it is not plugged in. The unit and the lanyard are white, but I bet it won't be long before there are other colors available. Maybe not. Maybe one way Apple keeps down cost is to make them all the same color. For a music player that does what this one does, for \$99, I say they could make it puke green and it would

still sell. Oh, and there is no shipping charge from the Apple Store. My order took about three weeks to arrive, as they predicted, but right now the Web site predicts shipping within 1–3 days.

It comes with those crummy earbuds they send with all the iPods, which give me headaches. But if you like them, great for you. You can plug in any standard headphones into the jack.

The unit runs on flash memory instead of a hard drive, so the songs will not skip. The iPod Mini has 25-minute skip protection, which is probably good enough for most of us. Have I mentioned that the Shuffle weighs next to nothing? Wearing it is like hanging a pack of gum around your neck. It might lose a fight with a paper clip.

If you understand that you will not see a display of your songs as they come up, and you do not care that the song selection is more limited than on the Mini or the grownup iPod, this is the toy for you. It is cheap, convenient, and ideally suited for exercising, which I assume is one of the most popular applications for portable music players. I have written [more on iPods and exercise](#). I have not seen any Shuffles at my gym yet, but I bet it won't take long. Already, I have been getting lots of envious looks and questions about mine.

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# Review: Tetris Elements

by Marcus J. Albers, [mjalbers@mchsi.com](mailto:mjalbers@mchsi.com)

**Developer:** THQ

**Price:** \$20

**Requirements:** 500 MHz processor, 128 MB RAM, Mac OS 9.1 or Mac OS X

**Trial:** None



Tetris: the grandfather of the modern puzzle game. Prior to its release in the late 1980s on the venerable Commodore 64, Apple II, and IBM PCs, the puzzle game genre consisted mainly of peg puzzle simulations, sliding picture puzzles, and maze-solving games. Once Alexey Pazhitnov's juggernaut was released to the world, the puzzle-game genre was forever changed.

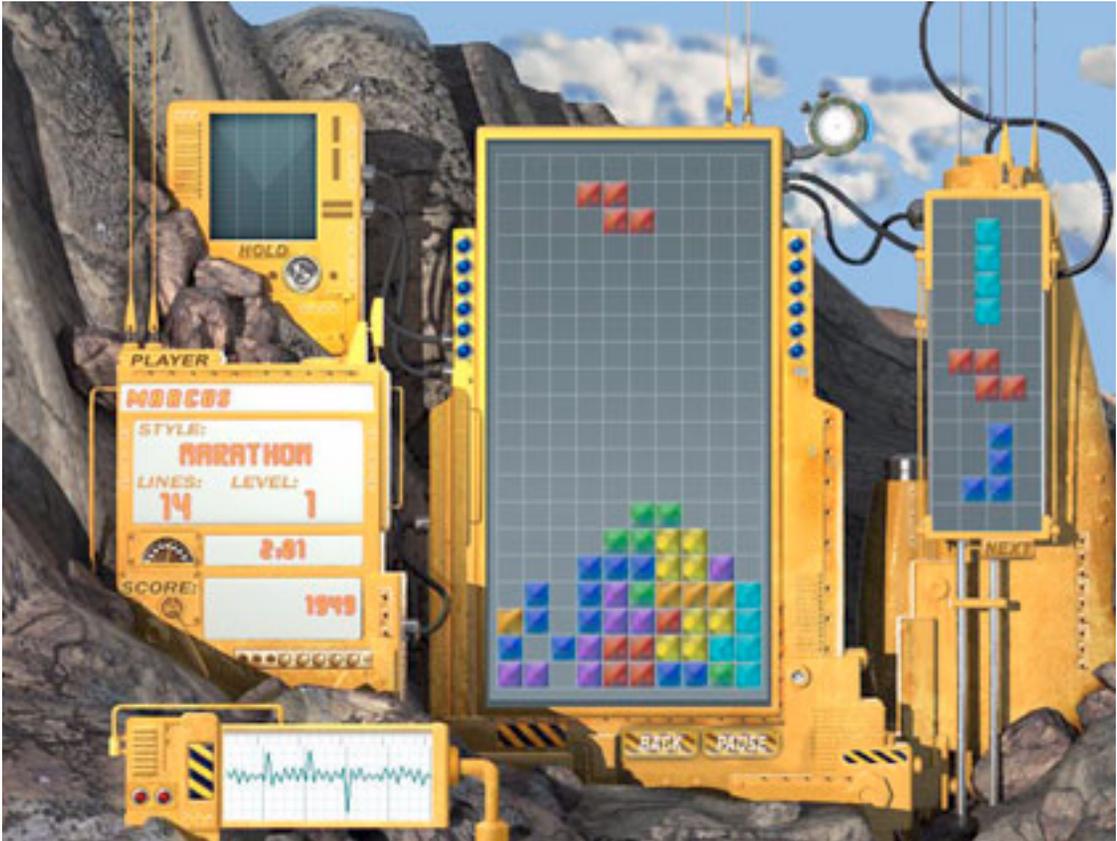
The game of Tetris has spawned more clones than Doom, and has gone through a lot of evolution since its initial release. There have been many pretenders to the throne, but Tetris has always remained the one true king, that game that you are always coming back to for "just one more round." Chances are that, if you play video games at all, you've played Tetris. Whether it's the original home-computer incarnations, the ultra-popular Gameboy version, or the many variants released for the consoles, Tetris is literally a household name.

This is why I was excited to see that Tetris Elements had been released for the Macintosh. Our platform of choice has not seen an “official” Tetris game since the original Spectrum Holobyte release back in 1988. Finally, some official Tetris love for the Mac faithful! Tetris Elements, while a worthy addition to the Macintosh gaming library, is somewhat of a mixed bag, however.



Tetris Elements is a combination of variations of the classic Tetris formula. Differently shaped playing pieces, or tetrminos, fall from the top of a well. The player rotates the pieces and drops them into position at the bottom of the well, creating complete lines across. These lines, in turn, disappear. The goal: don't allow the pieces to fill the well.

With Tetris Elements, there are five new game modes added to the classic gameplay, each adding an interesting element to the Tetris formula. Each variation is based on an element of nature: air, earth, storm, fire, and ice.

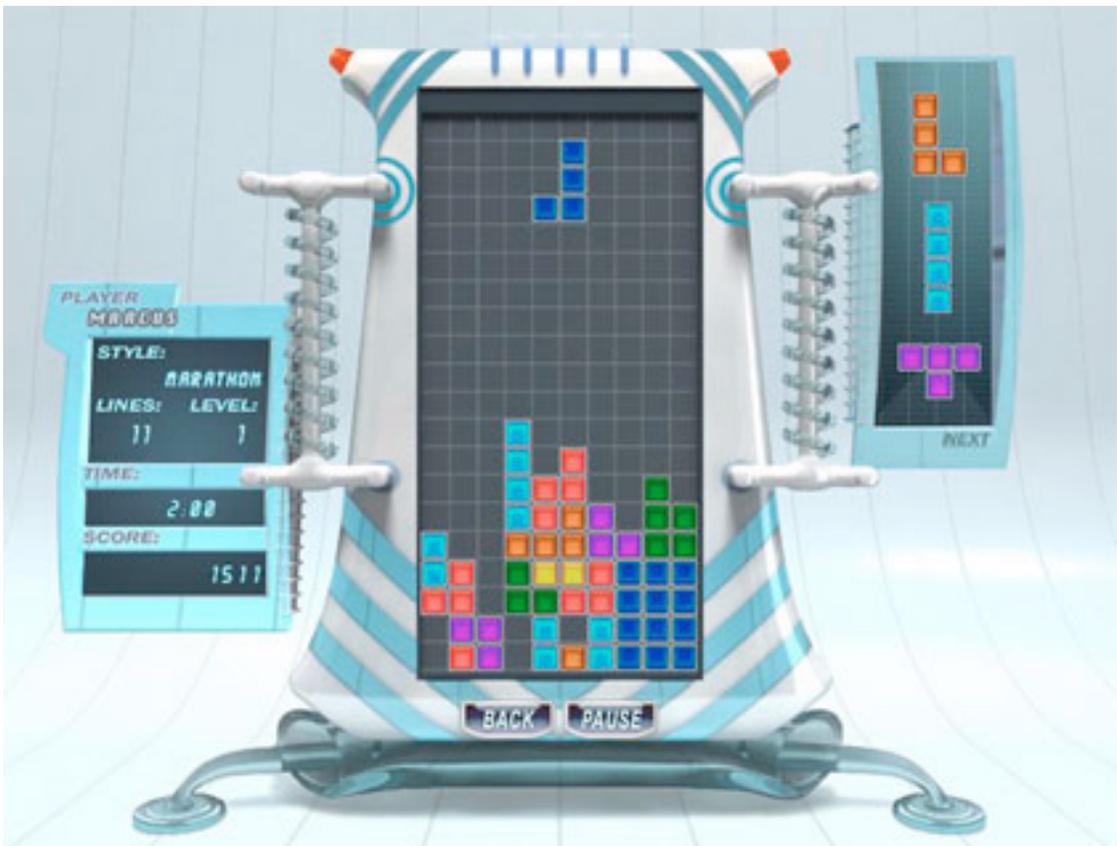


Stratosphere features meteors that fall from shooting stars, bouncing off of the sides of the well to the blocks below. The meteors will eliminate blocks when they finally crash into the rows below. These meteors can either help or hinder your progress. Depending on where you are in creating a particular row, they can hinder by eliminating block needed to create a full row, or help by eliminating the few blocks needed to get to the row below it.

Earthquake Tetris incorporates one of the Tetris variants that I think is the most interesting one to come out in a while, Tetris Cascade. As you complete rows, the leftover blocks from depleted tetriminos will fall into open areas below the completed row. As these blocks complete rows below, combos, called cascades, can occur. This version of Tetris

really adds life to the game, in that even if you are getting close to the top of the well, one lucky cascade can clear half of the well and keep you playing until the next level. Earthquake adds to this variation by creating random tremors that shake the playfield, shifting both the settled blocks and the blocks that are currently falling.

Tempest is possibly the hardest of the variations here. In Tempest, you are in control of two separate Tetris matrices. The raging storm will switch you between the two playfields throughout the game. In all of the variations, you can hold a particular piece for play at a later time in the game. In Tempest, you are allowed to hold multiple pieces. This is the real key to the game. You must remember what pieces you will need to complete rows in the alternate matrix, and then hold these pieces. Once the matrix switches, you will be able to use the held pieces to complete the rows. Each row that is completed with held pieces earns bonus points.



Fire Tetris uses chain reactions to create its variation. In Tetris, you can press a key to immediately drop a piece from where it is falling to its eventual resting place at the bottom of the well. In Fire Tetris, the higher the piece is when you drop it, the hotter it becomes. If you complete a row with hot pieces, they will cause a chain reaction with the pieces around them, causing them to disappear as well. The hotter the pieces, the more rows (up to eight) they will take out at once. Very explosive, indeed.

The final element-based variation is Ice Tetris. Icicles form at the top of the Tetris matrix. As they reach critical size, they will flash and fall into the well. If there is a tetrimino below the falling icicle, it will smash the piece into the blocks below. If there are open spots in the blocks below the piece, the icicle will smash the tetrimino into the open spots, causing cascade-like effects.

While the different variations do make the game a worthwhile addition, the game looks and plays like an online game. There is no attempt to take advantage of the graphical prowess of today's computer systems, or the ease at which Mac OS X handles OpenGL graphics. Everything, while colorful, is very basic from a graphical standpoint. Things like the Cascade/Earthquake variation use different graphical cues to make it obvious that cascades are occurring on other gaming platforms. The version presented here is extremely simple, and it makes it hard to tell what is going on with the cascades quite often. A little more platform-specific attention to the graphics could have turned this game into a real gem.

The music, while defining the earlier Tetris games with its take on Eastern European rhythms and melodies, is standard techno fare. Luckily, it is extremely easy to add your own music to the background, by adding your own renamed MP3 files to the music folder in the install directory.

But, let's face it, when it comes right down to it, if you are playing this game for any other reason than to play Tetris, then you are probably not the audience this game was created for. Tetris lovers can embrace this game with a clear conscience, especially on the Macintosh platform. Buy with the knowledge that you are in for some serious Tetris fun.

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# FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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