

ATPM

13.01 / January 2007

Volume 13, Number 1



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

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Welcome

Robert Paul Leitao, rleitao@atpm.com

Welcome to the January issue of *About This Particular Macintosh!* This issue marks the start of our 13th calendar year of continuous publication. We look forward to bringing you our unique view of the “personal computing experience” each month of this year and in the many months and years to come.

iPod Mania

For yet another Christmas season, the iPod ruled the consumer electronics space. According to media reports, the iTunes site experienced a more than 400% increase in activity on Christmas Day 2006 versus the year before. In fact, as many of us with iTunes gift cards encountered, the increase in activity brought the iTunes music and movie store to a near halt.

At press time, Apple has not released sales data for the iPod during the Christmas quarter. We expect surprising iPod sales numbers when Apple releases its quarterly financial reports later this month.

QuickTime's Quick Pace

The iPod's popularity has quickened the pace of QuickTime installations. Anyone with an iPod and new PC at Christmas made a requisite stop at Apple's iTunes site to download the combined QuickTime/iTunes installer. While many people focus on the success of iTunes, the battle for control of content distribution in the personal computer space involves QuickTime and its competitors. Long the straggler against Windows Media Player and Real Player in the fight for media player supremacy, QuickTime is now quickly emerging as a market leader and the preferred player among consumers for multimedia content.

Watch for the importance of QuickTime in Apple's overall product strategy to come into better focus in 2007.

Ten Years of Steve

In [1997](#) ATPM chronicled the return of Steve Jobs to Apple Computer. In the ten years since his arrival back at the company he co-founded, we have witnessed the resurgence of the Mac, the introduction of the iPod, and the release of Mac OS X. This year may be among the most productive for the Mac maker and the most prolific in terms of society-changing product releases for the man at the helm.

I Want My iTV (Now)

The chorus is getting larger, and the clamor is becoming louder as the Mac faithful await the release of Apple's iTV digital content distribution device. Designed to sit between your Mac or PC and big-screen (or smaller screen) TV, Apple's latest consumer electronics

product is expected in the first quarter of 2007. iTunes and QuickTime will be integral to the new product's functionality and commercial success.

Monetizing Time

There's no doubt gift cards have become popular with both gift givers and those who receive them. 2006 witnessed record sales of iTunes gift cards as the ubiquitous iPod in its many colors and models sold more units than ever and iTunes gift cards became a favorite gift to give and receive.

In fact, the shift in music purchasing habits from direct to credit card billing to gift card purchases led one research firm to erroneously claim iTunes Music Store sales had plummeted. The firm tracked the volume of iTunes credit card transactions rather than those transactions plus the redemption of gift cards to purchase music. In short, iTunes gift cards have created their own form of music currency.

What few outside the gift card industry have considered is the value of time—the time between when a card is purchased and when it is redeemed—and the dollars made by Apple as the company invests those dollars pending their use by the consumer at the iTunes music and movie store.

Like the iPod, Apple's iTV will lead to a shift in the way people purchase and enjoy recorded entertainment. Big movies will mean big dollars as consumers purchase both music and movies from Apple for enjoyment on an iPod and iTV. As consumers purchase iTunes gift cards from Apple at retailers just about everywhere, the time value of these purchases will only add to Apple's success.

Monetizing Macs

Lost in all of the holiday hoopla about the iPod, the resurgence in Macintosh sales has infrequently been mentioned in the press. For the three months just ended (Apple's first fiscal quarter), the company will report record shipments of Macintosh computers vaulting the company back into the #3 spot among PC makers in US sales. It's the growth in Macintosh sales that is the unheralded story. Apple's record quarterly revenue and earnings to be disclosed this month are as much about the Mac as the iPod. Expect the Macintosh unit sales report to reveal impressive year-over-year gains in units sold. The year-ago period (the fourth calendar quarter of 2005) was the last quarterly period before Apple's Intel product transition began.

Out With the Old, In With the New

On the final business day of 2006, Apple Computer filed its long awaited and delinquent Form 10-Q for the quarter ended July 1, 2006 and Form 10-K for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2006. The filings were delayed due to the company's internal investigation regarding stock option irregularities. The internal probe of the options irregularities was led by outside director Al Gore, former Vice President of the United States. The report from the special committee led by Mr. Gore cleared all members of Apple's current management of wrongdoing while indicating a restatement to past earnings of \$84 million in

non-cash charges. The 10-Q and 10-K filings bring to an end a matter that had concerned management, shareholders, and regulators since the company publicly announced in July its own findings of stock option backdating irregularities.

January's annual Macworld Expo in San Francisco may bring some surprises. In addition to Apple's previously announced iTV, Mac and iPod enthusiasts are awaiting news on a much-rumored iPod phone and more information about Leopard (Mac OS X 10.5) to be released in the spring of 2007. We'll cover the highlights from the expo in our February issue.

In With the Old, Out With the New

Since the day our [first issue](#) was uploaded to Apple's eWorld server in 1995, the world of Macintosh computing has changed and grown. This year in particular we see growth in the reach of the Macintosh market and new Apple products that will change the way we use technology and enjoy entertainment.

Our mission over the past thirteen years has been to chronicle the Macintosh and Apple product user experience in a unique and personal way. Our mission continues. Our legacy allows us to keep in mind the past while we speak out about today and offer insights about the products and user experience of tomorrow.

Our January issue includes:

Mac of All Trades: Looking Forward to 2007

Mike Chamberlain muses about his hopes and intents for 2007.

Photoshop For the Curious: An Overview, Part 2

In part two of this overview exploring the Photoshop interface, we'll get familiar with Photoshop's palette windows.

Desktop Pictures: Fireworks

This month's set of desktop photos features a new collection of fireworks to help celebrate the arrival of 2007.

Cartoon: Cortland

An unlikely coworker reveals he not only has a girlfriend, but also goes swing dancing and coaxes a reluctant Cortland to come along.

Review: Audio Hijack Pro 2.7

Wes Meltzer likes the many features of Audio Hijack Pro, but all are diminished by its failure at a basic Skype recording session on his 800 MHz PowerBook.

Review: coconutBattery 2.5

David Thompson checks out this free battery condition monitor and ponders why it puts so much load on his CPU.

Review: DAZ/Studio 1.4.16

Chris Dudar joins the ATPM staff and is planning a series of articles about 3D software and Web site publication. This month, he begins with the free DAZ/Studio.

Review: iTalk Pro

Since the [original iTalk](#) earned an Excellent rating, Lee Bennett had high expectations for the iTalk Pro. Those expectations were short-lived.



Outliner Writing Environments

I am waiting anxiously for your conclusions, before I spend any more money and time on new programmes!

I have used [CopyWrite](#), which is fairly simple, but seriously lacking in some basics like rearranging scenes/chapters/characters and changing hierarchy. I have [StoryLines](#) from Anthemion software, which is very buggy for the Mac but has some potential as an outliner. However, it crashes half the time. The only print option is the screenwriting version, so I think it has a long way to go before it's truly useful for me.

I have tried [Tinderbox](#) and like the fact that it is a nice mirror to the way my brain works. It isn't necessarily very beautiful, but then again neither is the inside of my head. It would be very nice if the textbox option had a full-screen view for uncluttered writing, but clicking the little arrow at the bottom gets me close enough. Also, I'd like to be able to see the children's names inside the containers from the base level view. I will probably never use it for a weblog, so it may be overkill; as it is, I'm a long way from understanding what Tinderbox can do for my writing. I've been spending way too much time researching and figuring out programmes and not enough time writing.

I have tried demos of [NovaMind](#) and [Inspiration](#); both are nice enough, but just not exactly what I'm seeking. NovaMind would be better if there was an "explorer-type view" in the outline view or at least a way of seeing written text in the outline view. Inspiration is great for the kids, but I find it pales in comparison to NovaMind for brainstorming and mind-mapping.

It would be helpful to hear how other writers are using the various softwares in their work.

Thanks for tackling this review.

—*Heidi Eder*

Synergy 3.0

You may want to look into the free [Quicksilver](#) tool. Apart from being a true OS X swiss-knife, the iTunes module and the [triggers](#) are equally adept in providing the functionality you describe.

—*Anupam Sengupta*

I use Quicksilver too, although not for controlling iTunes. Good catch!

—*David Thompson*

OpenMenu X 1.0.2

Your questions about the value of this program are spot on. I love it. But then I also use Linux and Windows at work so am used to this kind of customization and using a right-click contextual menu.

People used to the old Mac one-button mouse won't even know what this is about. So call it a power user's delight. My wife has turned the right click on her new mighty mouse to a double-click and would never see the value.

—*Michael McKee*

Fission 1.1

I looked at Fission, and really liked it from an editing standpoint, but missed the ability to record into it in the first place. I'm recording spoken audio for the 365tomorrows podcast, and currently using Amadeus II to capture and edit. Fission appears to be a much more capable editor, and I love the fact that it's Universal, though Amadeus Pro is in beta, and is also Universal (but I haven't tried it yet).

My recording needs are simple, basically to capture a stream of audio from a mic, where I normally read the same paragraph over and over until I'm happy with it, then move on and slice and dice the resulting file at the end, so but for the lack of a recording feature, Fission looks to be an excellent tool. Does Fission have a recording ability that I'm missing, or is there any indication this might be added as a feature? Alternately, what would the best audio capture program be that would complement Fission's editing capabilities?

—*Stephen R. Smith*

I agree that recording capabilities would be nice. You didn't miss anything—Fission does not have a recording function.

You might consider the upgrade for QuickTime Pro, which would let you create both audio and video recordings within QuickTime Player. Those files could then be opened and edited in Fission. Whether or not recording capability added to Fission—someone from Rogue Amoeba will have to respond to that one. I have a feeling something might be in the works.

—*Lee Bennett*

Photoshop For the Curious

This is a great idea for a series of columns. I have had Photoshop on various Macs since at least version 5. Even so, I don't really know the program that well. It sounds like this is right up my alley. I can't wait until we get to some of the color issues. Keep 'em coming.

—*Sylvester Roque*



What a great holiday gift! Thank you so much for the Photoshop column! I have just started to use the program a little bit by trial and error and some tips from others. It is really helpful to have the tool palette explained, and your descriptions are very clear. I look forward to the next edition!

—*Karen Sharp*

Coping With Mac OS X's Font Rendering

My eye sight isn't great, but I still prefer OS X's smooth fonts to any other OS. When I see OS 9's ugly fonts I want to throw up. Don't even get me started on Windows.

—*Mike Cohen*



I just found your site in a somewhat desperate attempt to determine whether or not to keep the otherwise gorgeous MacBook that I just bought. Won't bore you with many details, but this was to be my first Mac in almost 20 years, since high school. Upon using the MacBook (with OS 10.4.6, I believe), my wife and I both noticed the "fuzzy font" issue that you appear to be describing. No amount of fiddling with the font smoothing settings seems to remedy the situation. Neither of us is a writer, but I am an attorney and my wife and I both spend a good bit of time staring at fonts on the screen. We got the MacBook in part for its media capabilities to handle pictures and movies of our daughters, but, if we can't fix the font issue, it might be a deal killer for us as well. Did you ever find an acceptable solution? If we can't find one, I'm afraid we may have to return to the Wintel side of the world. Thanks in advance for any help you might be able to offer.

—*Adam*

I'm afraid I have not discovered any new techniques since writing the article. In my case, if I use applications that let me control the fonts, and if I'm careful to choose the more readable fonts, it's tolerable. The upcoming Mac OS X Leopard will feature resolution independence. This will not make the fonts any less fuzzy, however it will essentially let you increase the font size system-wide. The fuzzy edges are much less of a problem with larger font sizes, so if you're willing to trade some pixels for more readable fonts, this might help you.

—*Michael Tsai*

AppleWorks Files

I read your [review](#) about AppleWorks 6. Just a short question. I have Mac OS 8.6 and am using the 5.0 version. I use it for labels on the back of photos I sell and plan to buy a new iMac.

Can I open my old AppleWorks files on the new iMac when I transfer them to the new computer?

—*Bill*

You would need to upgrade to AppleWorks 6 in order to run it on a new Intel-based iMac, unless you use an [emulator](#).

—*Michael Tsai*

We'd love to hear your thoughts about our publication. We always welcome your comments, criticisms, suggestions, and praise. Or, if you have an opinion or announcement about the Macintosh platform in general, that's OK too. Send your e-mail to editor@atpm.com. All mail becomes the property of ATPM.



Mac of All Trades

by Mike Chamberlain, mchamberlain@atpm.com

Looking Forward to 2007

Ahhh! A new year and new possibilities... A new chance to get things right... The anticipation of things to come... As New Year's resolutions are, more often than not, mere reflections of our guilty consciences, this beginning-of-the-year column focuses on things hoped for and things intended, but by no means resolved. With that brief disclaimer, here's 2007 in review:

Hope #1

Steve Jobs announces the MacPhone at Macworld Expo in January and I place my order before his keynote address ends. Let me make this simple: I want my Mac experience to migrate into more areas of my life. I am weary of having to look up phone numbers on my Palm so I can dial them on my Toshiba. I'm tired of being mystified by the hoops I have to jump through to sync iCal, Address Book, and Palm software and then not get the benefits when it comes time to dial. I know, there are other ways to get things done, but the Mac way will be the best. I want my phone and all relevant information that supports my schedule to work as seamlessly as my iPod works with my music. I know that Apple can do it. The question will be if the economics support the move. Here's hoping.

Intention #1

I really am going to tackle my iPhoto library this year. Let's be honest: most of us have an iPhoto library filled with pictures bearing intriguing names like DSCN0203.JPG or DSCN2371.JPG. Keywords? You must be kidding. But iPhoto offers a number of organizational tools that can make a photo library more than a digital shoebox full of unorganized family pictures. Imagine being able to share a contextually relevant set of photos with someone by choosing a keyword or quality rating or time stamp. iPhoto includes all those capabilities but—this is always the rub isn't it—they have to be used to be useful. If you're just getting started, take it from me, don't wait until your library numbers in the thousands to start organizing.

Intention #2

I really will back-up more often. You already do this, don't you? You've heard the old axiom that there are two kinds of users: those who back up their data and those who wish they had. You believe that there are things you can't afford to lose so you have a plan for regular back-ups of your important data and you follow through on your plan. Right? I've gotten better. I have a Mac Mini-sized 320 GB drive to which I back-up my system, documents, music, and photos. I downloaded Backup from Apple and developed a schedule that backs up critical and dynamic data daily, other data weekly, and everything

but applications once a month. The trouble is, I'm not at my home desk as often as I want so I find myself skipping the back-ups because my drive isn't connected. I suppose the answer will be to move the backup drive to the office, which will be no problem. The point is that the greatest backup system and the most thorough plan are useless if they are not used. Hope you're backed up in 2007.

Hope #2

iCal will be improved and, while they're at it, Apple will upgrade the entire iCal/Address Book/Mail package to the level of integration that we have come to appreciate in the iLife suite of programs. At first blush this may look like a repeat of Hope #1, but iCal is a weak product that I find myself tolerating—barely. My main complaint with iCal is its To-Do functionality, or lack thereof. To be useful as a professional tool, I need a lot more information connected to To-Do's. I need to be able to arrange them the way that I want them arranged (iCal's options are limited). I need better display options for both the To-Do's and the calendar. I would like project management capabilities similar to Entourage. And by the way, Apple, don't forget to make it work seamlessly with my MacPhone.

Intention #3

I really will get my columns to the editor by deadline this year. He is a very patient person who doesn't deserve the grief we writers put him through each month. You can be thankful to him that he is dedicated enough to keep us all moving along.

Hope #3

I hope that each of you have a prosperous and joyful 2007. May all your Mac dreams come true, and may you and yours be blessed with health and good cheer the year long.

Happy New Year!

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Photoshop For the Curious

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

An Overview, Part 2

If you're just now tuning in, I strongly encourage you to hop back one month in your time machine and start with [part one](#) of this overview. You'll probably want to be familiar with the material there before diving into this month's column.

Ah, you're back already. So, you may have noticed that I said I'd cover the palettes and the menu items this month. I suppose I fibbed a little bit. This month's column became too long to cover both, so I'm saving the menu bar items for February. But not to worry—there's plenty of material for you to digest along with whatever holiday dinner might still be in your system.

Your homework assignment last month was to memorize the four main groupings of tools in the Photoshop Tool palette and then start experimenting with the various tools. There's a very good chance you encountered some tools with which you had absolutely no clue what to do. Don't fret. Throughout this series, we'll take a closer look at the tools as we need them and, in this month's column, I'll show you where you can quickly see a hint for what you can do with a tool as soon as you select it.

I'd [love to know](#) some of the things you taught yourself just by experimenting. Maybe you've discovered something I haven't!

Interface Upheaval

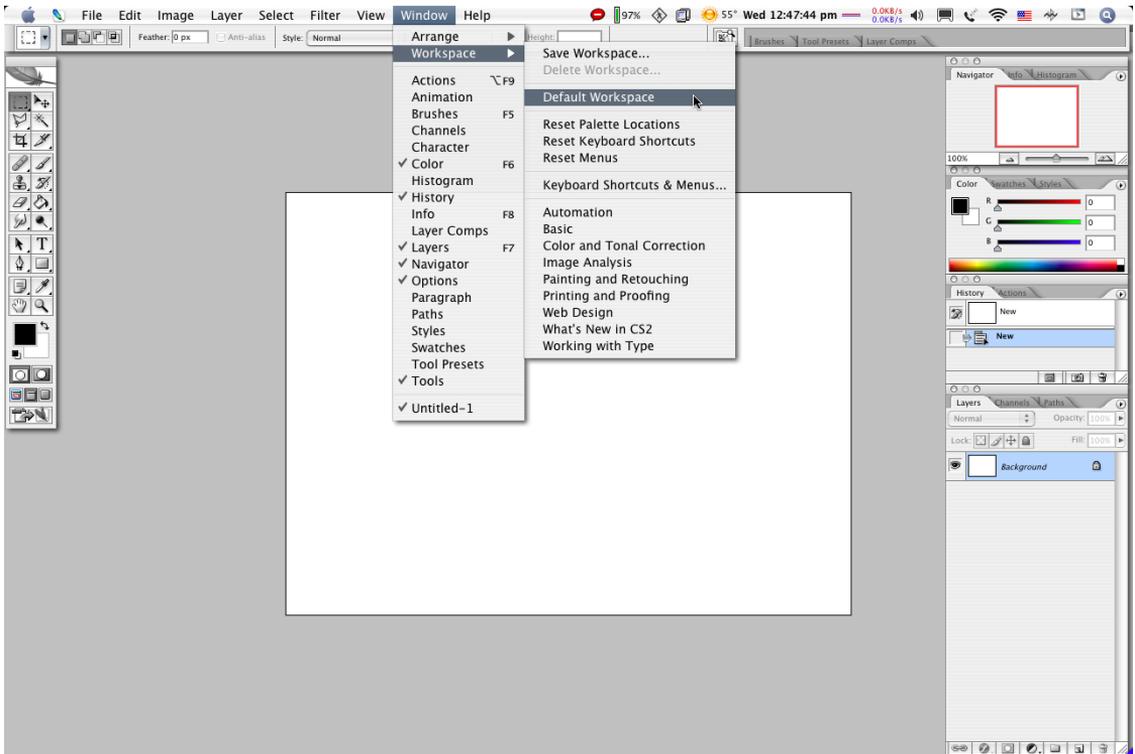
OK, perhaps calling it an upheaval is a bit extreme but, by now, you've probably heard about the [Photoshop CS3 beta](#) Adobe made available to current CS2 users. If you've seen it, you know about the changes Adobe made to the way floating palettes work. Unfortunately, I've not yet had the opportunity to try Photoshop CS3, and I'm a little worried that some of the things I may write in this month's column will be invalidated by CS3. [Based on what I've seen](#), however, the biggest changes lie with how the palettes are accessed and organized—not so much with the actual function of the palettes. Therefore, I'll try to spend minimal space describing how the floating palettes in CS2 can be manipulated and focus mostly on the functions in the palettes.

A Palette of Palettes

Adobe has earned considerable criticism concerning the number of floating palettes generally found in its applications. Personally, I don't feel the criticism is justified since the user can quickly turn on a palette that is needed and, just as quickly, send it away. In fact, the palettes presented by default aren't really overwhelming, and you often don't have to enable some palettes thanks to Photoshop's Options toolbar. The Options toolbar will

update itself with items relevant to the tool you're using—often duplicating settings from a palette you may not have enabled.

Before I go further, let's make sure we're all on the same, um, palette:



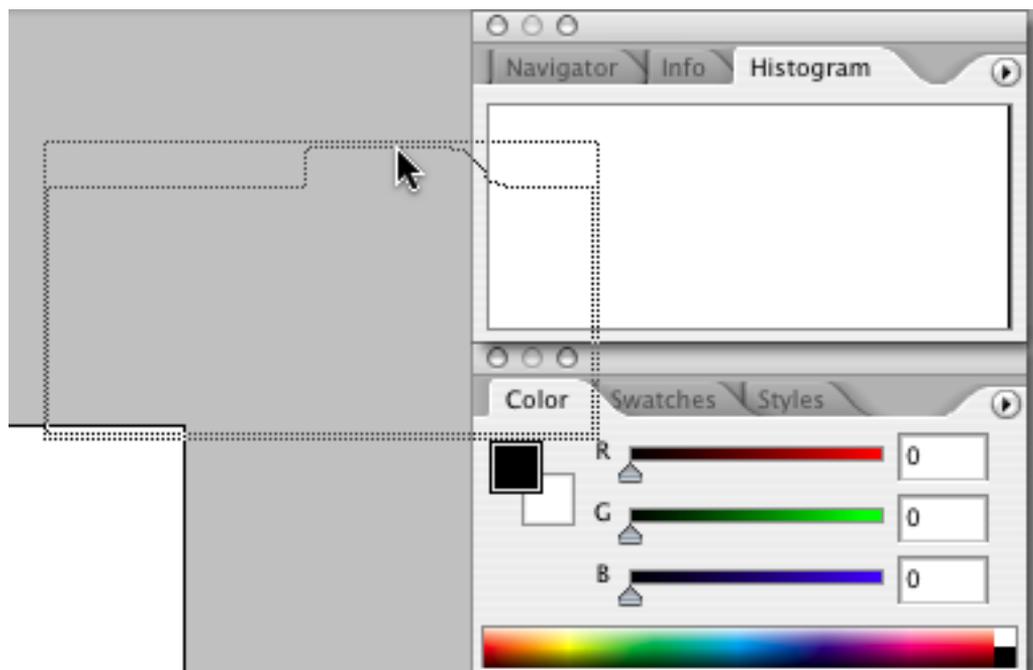
Default palette configuration ([click to enlarge](#)).

As you can see, the basic Photoshop palettes are stacked on the right side of the display. In the Window > Workspace menu, the Default Workspace option will reset the palettes to this configuration unless you've saved the default as something else. Saving workspaces is a wonderful feature since you can lay out any number of palettes however you like, save those locations, move them to another configuration that helps you with a different task, and then save that configuration as well. At my day job, I have a an older 15" Apple LCD in addition to my main 21" CRT. My default configuration has nearly all of Photoshop's palettes open and in a logical arrangement over on the smaller display. As you become more proficient in Photoshop, you may find that being able to glance at the information in a palette without having to open it is very convenient. Keeping them on a secondary display also means your primary display isn't cluttered with the palettes. The result: you can view your image on your primary display with nothing covering portions of it.

For the purposes of this overview, we'll essentially stay with the default workspace.

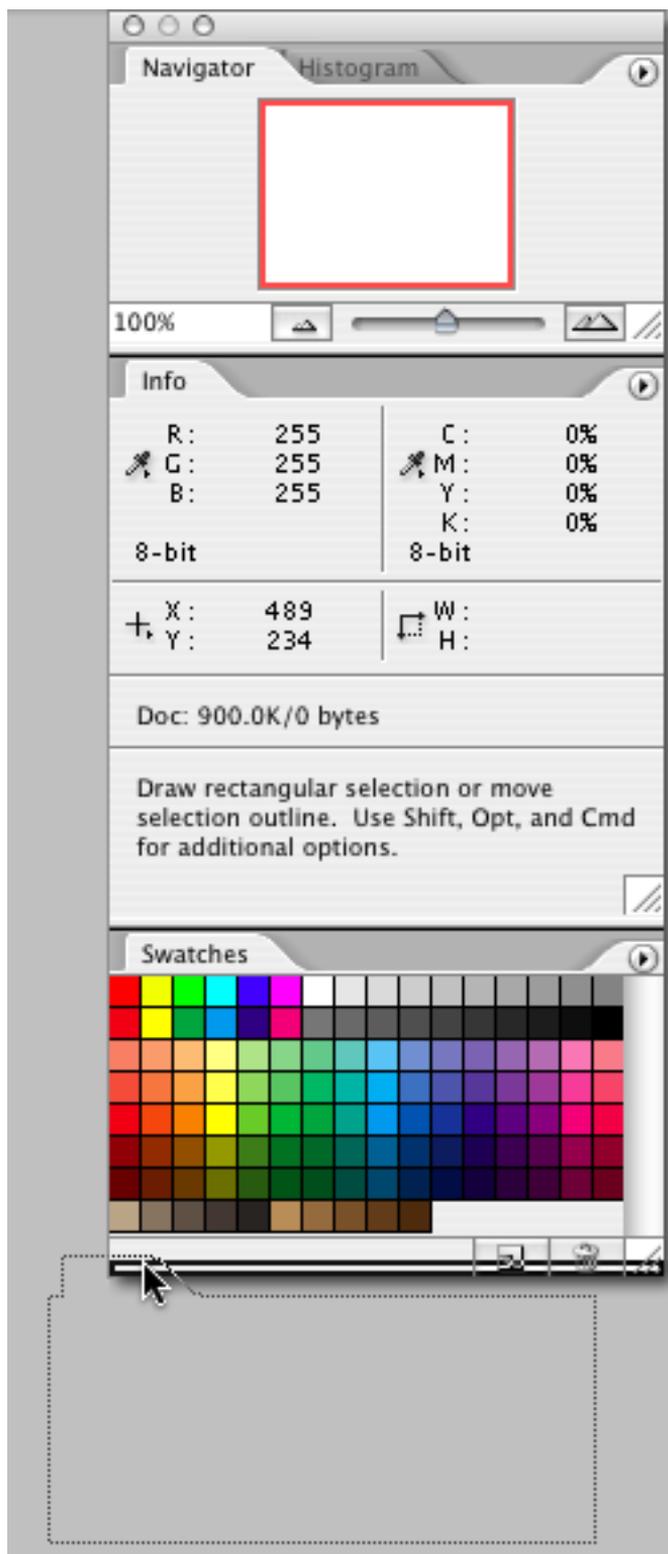
Palette Proliferation

If you looked at the above screenshot for more than just a fleeting moment, you'll have noticed that all four of the default palettes have two or three tabs at the tops. This is one of the ways Adobe has addressed the issue of palette clutter—allowing more than one palette to share the same window. Simply click a tab, and the window refreshes to reveal the selected palette that is named in the tab. But the best part of this feature is that you are neither locked into these tab arrangements, nor do you even have to combine palettes into tabs. You can drag a tab from one palette window to another as well as drag a tab out to the open area where it will live in its own palette window.



Dragging a tab away from a palette window allows you to position a palette in its own window. Alternatively, while dragging, you can touch a different window and drop the palette's tab within that second window.

If reordering the tabs isn't enough, there's an often-overlooked palette organization feature that allows you to stack multiple palettes as one tall window. To do this, start by dragging a tab as if you were going to move it to another palette window. Normally, the entire border of the new window will highlight in black to tell you that's where you're going to drop the tab. To instead attach it to the bottom, touch the mouse pointer to the bottom edge of the palette window, and you'll see just the bottom highlight in black. When you release the mouse, the attachment is complete. You can then add more tabs to this new section of the overall palette window, or attach another tab beneath, making it even taller. Of course, you can also insert a tab between two attached palettes by touching the separator between them.



In this image, I am preparing to attach a fourth palette beneath three that are already attached. Note the black highlight on the bottom of the Swatches palette that reveals I'm about to attach a new palette below. Remember, you must drag palette tabs—not the title bar above the tabs.

Dragging the title bar instead of the tabs simply moves the entire palette (or stack of palettes) elsewhere on your screen. You'll note that the edges and corners of the window outline being dragged will visually snap to other palette windows, the purpose being to help precisely align the windows to taste. You'll also find that the Tool palette can snap to the other palette windows. Since it does not have a tab, it is not possible to combine it with other palette tabs in a window, nor attach it to the bottom of window.

Now that I've probably caused you to thoroughly louse up the position of your palettes, I'll advise that you go back to the default configuration as seen above, via the Window ▸ Workspace menu. If that workspace does not match the one I've shown, try selecting the Basic workspace instead.

As a final note about the palettes in general, note the circle with a black triangle inside, located in the upper right corner of palettes—the same row as the tabs. Clicking this icon reveals a menu that pertains to the active palette. Go ahead and look inside any of them that you wish. Just remember that as we prepare to look closely at some of the palettes, this is the menu to which I refer when I talk about a palette menu.

Tools You Can Use

Time to jump from where you can put the palettes to what you can do with them. Note that we'll skip a couple of the palettes this month—palettes that a beginner Photoshop user won't need any time soon. I'm going to follow the top-to-bottom, left-to-right palette and tab order shown in this column's first screenshot. If you have settled on a different arrangement of your palettes, or the palette in question is not visible, you can always head to the Window menu to activate the desired palette. Also, go ahead and open a small new document since some items I'll cover here may not appear quite right if there is no image document open.

Navigator

It's appropriate that the first palette on the list is one of the most straightforward to use. The Navigator will always show the entire image that you're working on and a colored box that represents what portion of the image is currently in view. If the entire image is visible on the screen, the colored box will outline the full image in the Navigator palette. If you've zoomed in close, the colored box will squeeze down to the area on which you zoomed. You can drag that box around inside the Navigator to quickly move to another part of the image.

At the bottom of the Navigator, you'll find a simple slider for zooming in and out on your image.

The Navigator palette menu has two options. The first, Dock to Palette Well, is something you'll find in all the palette menus. I'll reveal what that's for in a moment. The second option in this palette menu allows you to change the colored box from the default light red to a color of your choice.

Info

Similarly straightforward, but probably more useful, is the Info palette. The primary function of the Info palette is to show various numeric color value information for the pixel

directly beneath your pointer, as well as to show the coordinate location of your pointer in X (horizontal) and Y (vertical) values. You can view the coordinates in a variety of measurements including pixels and inches. The W and H portion reveals the width and height of a selection on your image.

I received some comments last month suggesting I should've provided a little more explanation on the Tool palette items so that readers would be better-equipped to experiment with the tools. What I should've done was direct your attention to the bottom of the Info palette which is where a short description of what you can do with that tool appears when you activate a tool.

Besides the aforementioned Dock to Palette Well item, the Info palette menu has two other items. Palette options is where you can modify exactly what type of information is displayed. If you're confident in the use of all the Tool palette items, you can also deactivate the tool hints to make the Info palette shorter. You'll note that the Color Samplers option is grayed out. This is because no color sampler markers are present in your image. You may recall last month when I quickly mentioned the Color Sampler tool. When you mark a spot on an image with a color sampler, the Info palette is where the sampled color's numerical values appear. The option in the palette menu simply shows or hides this information.

You should also note that you don't have to go into the palette menu to change the color type or the measurement units in the Info palette. You can, instead, click the icon next to the numeric values to reveal a menu that allows you to make the change more quickly. The W/H icon does not have a menu since it always follows your setting for the X/Y icon.

Histogram

This palette is a bit more advanced so we won't go into detail now. The Histogram palette's purpose is to show a summary of color information from the darkest to the lightest contained in the entire image. The more a particular shade is present, the taller the indicator within the Histogram.

Color

Yet another straightforward palette, the Color palette contains a foreground/background color tool that duplicates the one at the bottom of the Tool palette, sliders to fine-tune the color values, and a color spectrum to quickly sample an approximate hue. The sliders adjust the chosen primary color from dark (on the left) to light (on the right). The palette menu contains options to change what color mode you wish the sliders to work within (e.g. RGB or CMYK) as well as some choices for the spectrum's color mode.

Swatches

The Swatches palette is probably most deserving of the "palette" name because it represents a customizable selection of colors from which you can paint—just like a real artist's paint palette. There are two icons at the bottom to add a new color or trash an existing one. The palette menu contains options to change the size of the palette blocks and choose one of many other presets of colors. Use the Reset Swatches option to return to the default. You can also save your own swatch of colors.

Styles

The Styles palette is a collection of presets for layer effects. We'll cover layer effects in greater detail in the future. Suffice to say for now that Photoshop allows you to create things like drop shadows, special effect fills, bevels, etc., all without destroying the original image. As its name indicates, a layer effect applies an effect to a layer. Some fascinating effects can be created by using multiple layer effects on one layer, and the Styles palette is where you'll find a nice collection of effects already created for you, or you can add your own. Just like the Swatches palette, the Styles palette menu lets you choose other batches of presets or reset to the default.

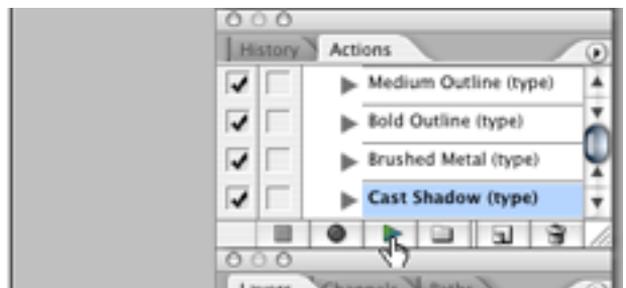
History

Think of the History palette as an Undo command on steroids. In this palette, you'll find a chronological selector for each recent state of your image. The default allows you to go back 20 states. If you have lots of RAM, you can increase this number in the Photoshop preferences. The icons at the bottom allow you to open a brand new document that reflects the current History state of the active document. There's also a tool to snapshot the current state so that you can return to it even if you move beyond the number of states defined in the preferences. The palette menu has some duplicates for the icons at the bottom of the palette and several options for enhancing the History palette for intermediate and advanced users.

Actions

The Actions palette is something of an automation playground. Adobe included a healthy array of actions, but you can record your own, as well as find plenty of cool actions to download and install from the Internet.

An action is simply a series of steps that you would normally do manually. An action does nothing you could not do yourself, rather it automates and speeds up a series of steps necessary for a task. The default actions are just single-step duplicates to select various workspaces (see first screenshot, above) but you can load other Adobe-supplied actions via the palette menu. For example, one of my favorites is in the Text Effects batch. It's called Cast Shadow and is used to create a shadow that appears to be caused by a light source behind your text. There are lots more available by loading other sets from the palette menu.



The Cast Shadow action is one of many Adobe-supplied toys in Photoshop.

Layers

Layers were introduced back in Photoshop 3.0 (that's version 3, not CS3) and, as far as I'm concerned, they make Photoshop what it is. The simplest way to understand layers is to think of two or more paint canvases in front of/behind each other in a stack—not necessarily equidistant. Now imagine that you can not only paint whatever you want on each canvas and add/remove canvases at will, but also slide each one around independently. The real kicker is that, unlike real life, you can make any of the canvases translucent—any value between 100% opaque and completely invisible. Even wilder is that a canvas can be made to blend in a variety of ways that interact with the canvas(es) behind it.

I'm getting a bit ahead of myself because we'll look more closely at the Layers palette in the future. For now, I'll simply add that each new version of Photoshop builds on what the Layers palette can do and that so much of Photoshop's power depends on layers.

Channels

The Channels palette allows for adjustments to be made independently for each color in the active color mode. For example, if you are looking at a photo in CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) mode as would be used for a printing press, you could turn some channels off to see what the photo would look like if only the black and magenta inks were laid down on paper. Spot colors are also managed in the Channels palette. (In brief, a spot color is a single, specific hue of ink used by a printing press.)

Paths

Last month, I briefly touched on the drawing and path tools in the Tool palette. Whenever a path is created, it appears on a layer (of sorts) in the Paths palette. Text is the only exception and would only appear in the Paths palette if it were converted to a path and could no longer be edited as text.

The Palette Well

I said above that I'd come back to the Dock to Palette Well palette menu item. Look at the Options toolbar across the top of the screen. The Palette Well is located on the right side of the Options toolbar. This is another location to which you can drag a palette tab, or use the Dock... command in a palette menu to send it there. The default palettes which live in the Palette Well are as follows:

Brushes

You'll probably visit the Brushes palette often. This is where you can choose the size and shape of your Brush tool as well as how hard or soft the edges are. The palette menu (located on the actual tab whenever a palette is in the Palette Well and is active) has many more brush shapes that can be loaded and an option to turn the Expanded View on or off. The Expanded View options might be confusing to a beginner and you may turn them off if you wish—but some are rather fun to play with.

Tool Presets and the Options Toolbar

Before I can describe the Tool Presets palette, I need to talk about the rest of the Options toolbar. As previously stated, the Options toolbar will change depending on which item

from the Tool palette is chosen. The settings which appear in the Options toolbar will adjust how the tool is used. For example, when using the Magic Wand tool, the Options toolbar has adjustments for tolerance, whether or not to anti-alias the selection, whether you only want to select a contiguous area, whether you want to select from just one or from all layers, and for how the next selection will interact with any previous selection.

You might imagine that you'd have many different configurations to the options of just one tool that you'd like to use over again without having to set them all up again. Tool Presets to the rescue! Once you've configured a tool's options in a way you feel you may use again, just head to the Tool Presets palette and save that configuration with a descriptive name. You'll see that the palette can auto-refresh to only show presets for the selected tool, or it can list presets for all tools, essentially doubling as an alternative Tool palette.

Layer Comps

The last palette visible by default, Layer Comps (short for composites), is a place to save multiple states of your Layers palette. Suppose you are a designer and have created a logo for a client. Within one Photoshop file, you might have several layers containing different versions of a text line that makes up part of the logo—different colors, different typestyles, different amounts of shadow, ad infinitum. Turning layers on and off for just this one part might be easy, but suppose in order to show your client three entirely different versions that consist of changes to many layers, you'd have to turn off 20 or so layers and turn on 20 more. Instead of clicking the visibility mode (the eyeball next to each layer) when the client is at your screen, you can set up the layer visibility in advance and save it as a Layer Comp. Other options such as a layer's position, opacity, and various layer styles can be included in the Comp. Now, all you have to do is switch from one Layer Comp to another to show the different logo versions, and they're all in one handy Photoshop file.

You might be thinking, "Why not simply have a different file for each version?" One argument for keeping all versions in one file could be that that if you have a text layer with a phone number, and that phone number has different colors, layer styles, and/or positions in each version of the logo. Suppose your client told you the number had changed. You'd have to update the number in every file. With Layer Comps, you can change the phone number just once and that change can be reflected in every Layer Comp immediately.

Character and Paragraph Palettes

There are a few other palettes I won't spend time on right now, but two which do not appear by default deserve some attention.

Head to the Window menu and turn on the Character palette. Photoshop's default settings will show the Paragraph palette as a second tab in the same palette window. If you plan to do much text manipulation as part of your Photoshop work, you'll want both of these open. Familiarize yourself, also, with the palette menu options for both. We'll cover more ground on these palettes' capabilities in the future, but anyone with intermediate skill at text editing will understand the purpose for most of the Character and Paragraph palettes' items.

Tiny Tips

To appease my error of planning to do the overview in two parts and instead dragging it out to three, I'm going to share a couple of little tiny tips that I've picked up over the years which help make using Photoshop more pleasant.

Crop Snap

If you've ever tried to use the Crop tool to remove just a smidge of pixels from the edge of an image and were annoyed that the crop selection snaps to the edge of the image if you get too close, simply hold down the Control key while dragging the crop box to temporarily deactivate the snapping feature. (Sorry, I'm not sure of the Windows equivalent. It may also be the Control key, but since ATPM is a Macintosh publication, those are the keyboard commands I'll always be using.) Yes, there's a menu setting for turning overall snapping on and off, but I generally like to leave that on, so the temporary crop snap deactivation is most handy.

Ad Hoc Polygonal Lasso Tool

If you're using the Lasso selection tool and want to just quickly switch to the Polygonal Lasso tool briefly, holding the Option key will change to the Polygon mode. The tool immediately reverts back to the standard Lasso tool when you let go of the Option key. As such, it is possible (though tricky) to have both standard and polygonal lasso selection shapes in the same run.

Brush Size

If you're content with all of the current Brush settings but simply want to change the size, instead of heading to the Brushes palette, you can use the [and] keys to make the brush smaller and larger, respectively. This keyboard tip applies to many other situations as well, such as the tools for Clone Stamp, Healing, Dodge, Burn, Sharpen, Blur, etc. Any time you see a Brush selector near the left side of the Options toolbar, you can use [and] to change the size.

Next Month

As I've said, I decided to not overload this month's column and will save the menu items overview for February. But, in addition to the third and final overview chapter, I'll bring a tutorial along, too, that will teach you some useful things you can do with Photoshop.

In the mean time, your homework assignment is to play with the Layers palette. Discover how you can move around the order of the layers, group them into sets (the folder icon at the bottom of the palette), change the opacity and the blend mode (use the pop-up menu to the left of the opacity setting), etc. I promise you, *any* amount of time spent learning more about the Layers palette is time well spent. Webreference.com has a [nice write-up about working with layers](#). Consider this reading material as part of your homework.

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Desktop Pictures

Fireworks

This Month's Desktop Pictures

Happy New Year! This month's set of desktop photos features a new collection of fireworks to help celebrate the arrival of 2007. This set was photographed by Lee Bennett in St. Louis, Missouri, standing atop the Edward Jones Dome during the 2005 Independence Day fireworks show. The camera was a Nikon D100, and all photos went through Adobe Photoshop CS2 to receive a subtle color saturation and contrast bump and to have a few of the camera's stuck pixels erased.

Previous Months' Desktop Pictures

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

Downloading All the Pictures at Once

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

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

OmniWeb Choose "Save Linked > Images..." from the File menu.

Safari Use [this Automator workflow](#).

Contributing Your Own Desktop Pictures

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

Placing Desktop Pictures

Mac OS X 10.3.x and 10.4.x

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

You can also use the pictures with Mac OS X's built-in screen saver. Select the Screen Saver tab which is also in the "Desktop & Screen Saver" System Preferences pane. If you

put the ATPM pictures in your Pictures folder, click on the Pictures Folder in the list of screen savers. Otherwise, click Choose Folder to tell the screen saver which pictures to use.

Mac OS X 10.1.x and 10.2.x

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

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

Mac OS X 10.0.x

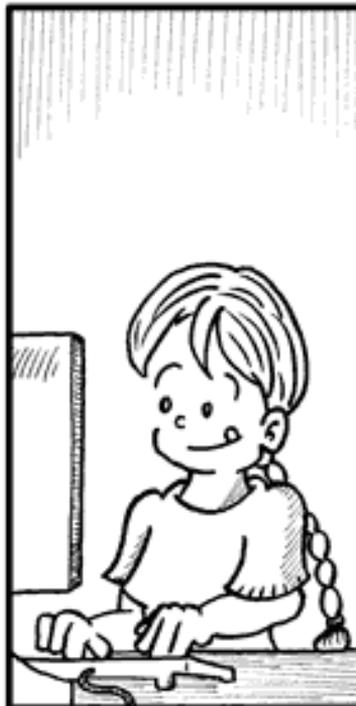
Switch to the Finder. Choose “Preferences...” from the “Finder” menu. Click on the “Select Picture...” button on the right. In the Open Panel, select the desktop picture you want to use. The panel defaults to your ~/Library/Desktop Pictures folder. Close the “Finder Preferences” window when you are done.



Cortland

by Matt Johnson, mjohnson@atpm.com

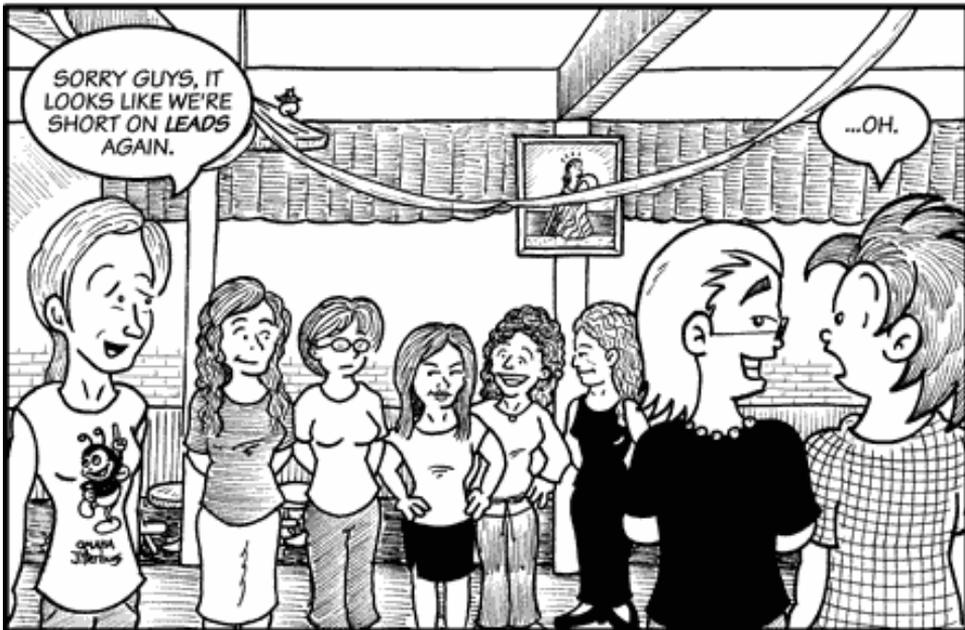












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Software Review

by Wes Meltzer, wmeltzer@atpm.com

Audio Hijack Pro 2.7

Developer: [Rogue Amoeba Software](#)

Price: \$32; a lesser-featured version, Audio Hijack, is \$16.

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.3.9. [Universal](#).

Trial: Feature-limited (noise is overlaid on all hijackings lasting longer than ten minutes)



The world is a funny place. If you'd told me, when I started using Prodigy ten years ago, that one day people would exchange recorded monologues and amateur radio shows using the Internet, I wouldn't have believed you. And if you'd said that to me five years ago, I would've said, "With what equipment?"

But a few months ago, a friend said to me, "Why don't we make a podcast?"

I'm not really sure what the plan of attack was—at the time, we were still students, leading this quasi-Seinfeldian existence of days strung together as a collection of different places to loaf around. And I'm not sure we had anything to be interested in. So why anyone would listen to our podcast, I have no idea.

In any event, Apple had given us almost all the equipment we needed in the intervening five years: a built-in microphone on every consumer Mac, an iPod in almost every hand in America, and universal Wi-Fi. The cable companies supplied the bandwidth, and, for those of us operating by remote, Skype made the entire world our oyster; and a cottage industry of would-be Tony Kornheisers, Carl Kasells, and Rush Limbaughs was born.

All that was lacking was the glue to hold the whole thing together and make it into a recording. Without it, it would be a large-scale spectacle designed only for just one person, more like the family "newspaper" I published when I was eight than a piece of broadcast medium. All the audio would stream into my computer, and then be played back over my speakers, and that would be it.

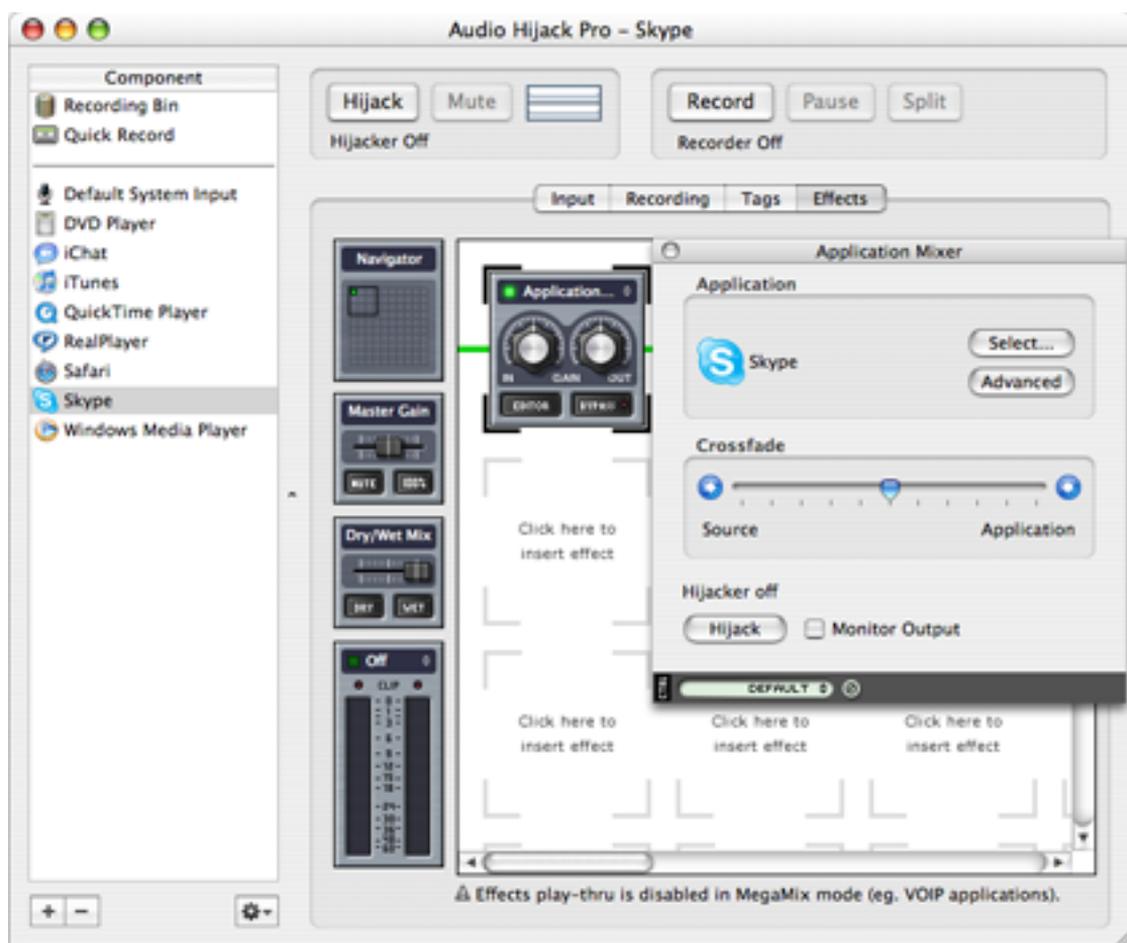
The solution, it turns out, is Audio Hijack Pro. It's a piece of software designed to capture audio input and output from your computer, and route it into a file. This is one of those tasks that it does not necessarily occur to you to do—until you play back a video and realize you want to capture a piece of dialogue for a ringtone, for instance, or wish that you could listen to your favorite radio show on your iPod. Or, you want to record a podcast. It doesn't really matter how it works, but essentially, it wiretaps the system audio stream, which can be split up by application or taken as a whole. Then, it can apply filters to it, and then convert the file (natively, an AIFF) to the format of your choice. Ta-da!

That was the resolution I found to the question of how to make this inaugural podcast. The hitch: Audio Hijack Pro itself.

If I were Malcolm Gladwell, here would follow a disquisition on the history of broadcast media, from Guglielmo Marconi to the state of the media at the arrival of the podcast, and then a few carefully chosen vignettes about the pioneering podcasters, Ze Frank, Amanda Congdon and Adam Curry, inter alia. And it would be 5,000 words of pure gold. It might even win me an American Society of Magazine Editors award.

That's not me. So instead, I will begin with brass tacks.

Audio Hijack Pro did not do the task, for me, by any conventional definition of “work.” When the red light went off and I disconnected Skype, and we were no longer “on air,” such that it was, I opened the file to play it back. Our inaugural podcast was mysteriously choppy for the first few minutes. At somewhere in the neighborhood of eight minutes, it simply skipped forward to a point I knew to have been about three minutes later in our “broadcast.” The intervening three minutes hadn't been recorded at all.



Audio Hijack Pro, all set up for a podcast-recording studio session.

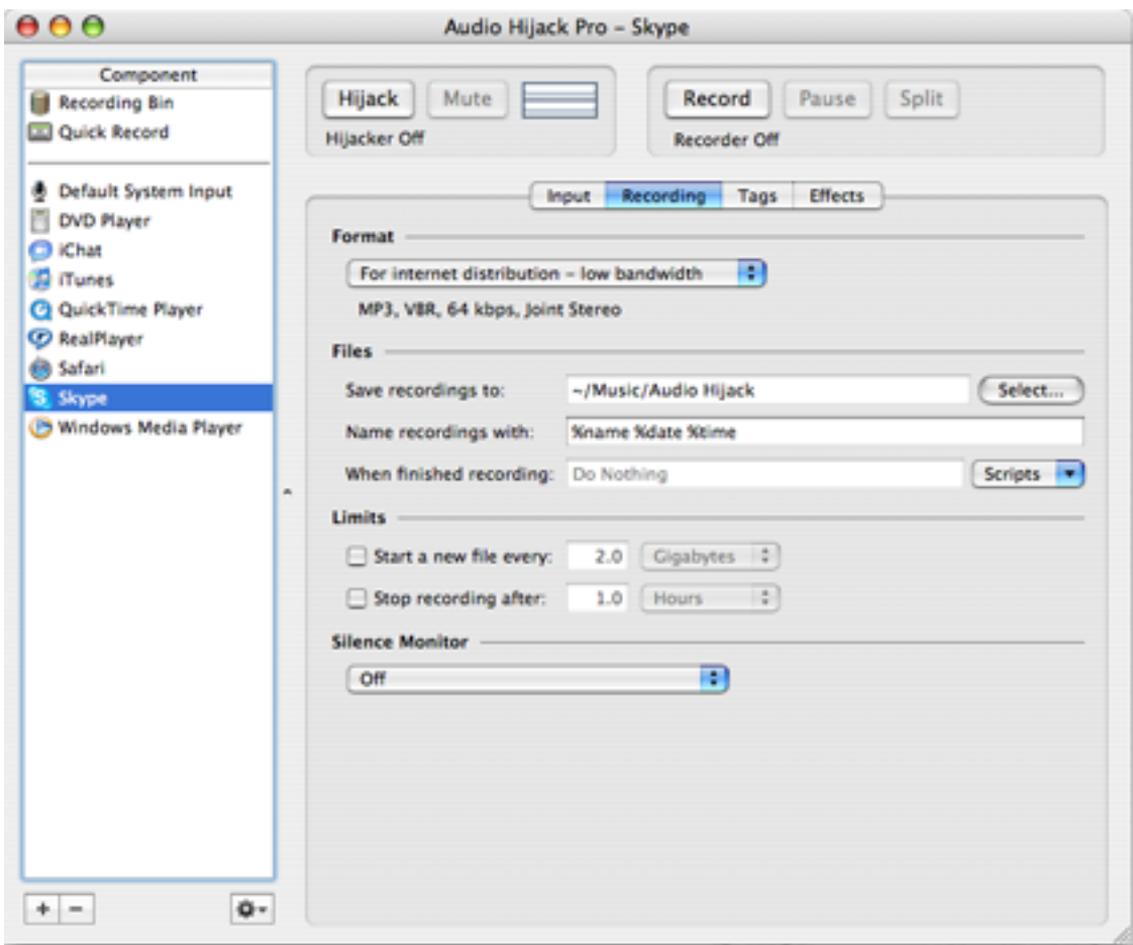
At the time that this occurred, my computer had been in the ideal state for recording the audio. Only two applications were running, Audio Hijack Pro and Skype (version 1.3). My computer isn't exactly state-of-the-art—a PowerBook G4 running at 800 MHz—but it's well within the minimum required hardware parameters for both pieces of software. Skype requires a 400 MHz G3, and Rogue Amoeba does not even state minimum required hardware for Audio Hijack Pro.

This unstated minimum required configuration seems to be the source of the problem, as it turns out. Developer Rogue Amoeba acknowledges, in the application manual, that recording skipping can be a problem, but I still had audio skipping even after following the troubleshooting instructions. I did not even see the warning, in the application, that there had been skipping at all, and did not know what it would look like until I consulted the manual to see what might have gone wrong. I was able to eliminate the skipping problem by running the most bare-bones configuration, encoding the audio to AIFF and certainly using no effects or manipulation at record time.

I simply cannot recommend an application which failed at such a simple task, because most podcasts are rather less low-budget than mine, with music played back between transitions from iTunes, or pre-recorded interviews slotted in from QuickTime, or complex input filters. Without state-of-the-art hardware, you may find yourself struggling to make any of this happen. Your mileage may vary, but you're probably driving more miles than I do, too.

It's a pity that this flaw was so pronounced, to be honest, because it was so easy to set up the recording. I looked into the business of recording a podcast via Skype once, some time ago, and at the time a whole menagerie of supporting software was required. Today it's possible to set the entire thing up in Audio Hijack Pro itself: with just a few clicks, you can set up the required software monitoring to hijack the audio, including the input channel. This is a feature called Application Mixer, and in spite of my trouble, I think it's a brilliant solution to this particular problem.

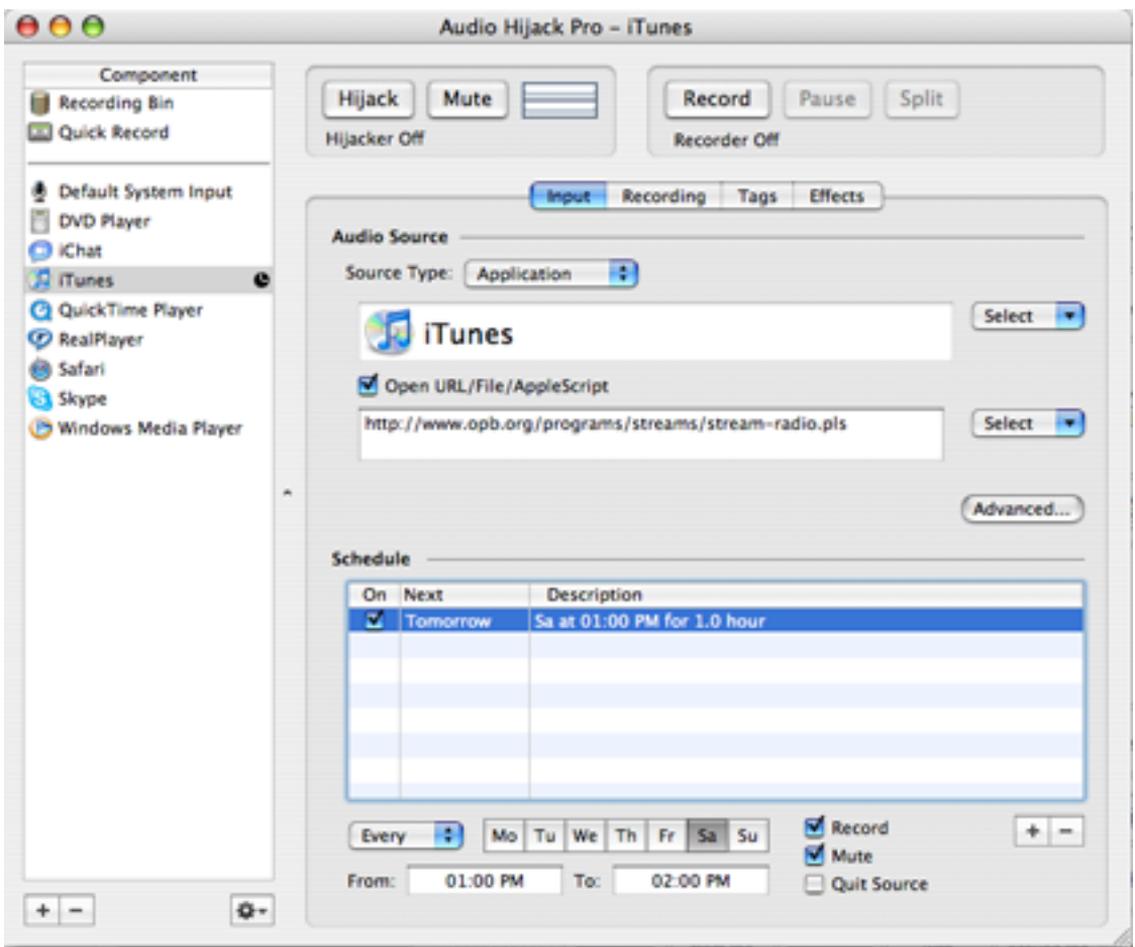
In addition, Audio Hijack Pro allows you to mix in sound effects or interleaved music segments, which you can queue up for playback in real time, like a live radio show. Rather than simply having them jump in, you can fade them in and out, also using Application Mixer.



Application Mixer: Your one-stop shop for podcast recording. As long as Audio Hijack Pro records all your audio.

What's really unfortunate about my experience is that there are plenty of more mundane things that Audio Hijack Pro does really well. For instance, there was a fantastic faux-Indian tune that was the theme music to the Absolut movie-mercial, "Mulit," which I'd wanted to find a way to record since 2003. Audio Hijack Pro gave me a way to do that, easily, and didn't skip any audio. And recording from live streamed audio, a task which would have made it much easier to listen to NPR's "Wait Wait, Don't Tell Me" before they launched a podcast, couldn't be simpler: Once Real Player or iTunes has been hijacked, you can create a recording session from a streaming audio URL and give it a schedule. Audio Hijack Pro will then launch at the specified time, waking your computer from sleep if necessary, and capture its audio and save it to the specified file type.

This functionality, too, went off without a hitch. I don't know if NPR has finally made a podcast for "Car Talk," but I'm rarely in my car on Saturdays anymore, so I used it to create my own faux-podcast, recording from KOPB in Portland, OR, which will always be "my" NPR station.



Timer-triggered streaming audio recordings. Someone's putting Mac OS X's Unix background to work, methinks.

In addition, Rogue Amoeba advertises Audio Hijack Pro's functionality for recording analogue audio, like cassettes or records, or 8-tracks if you're really hard-core, to digital files like MP3s or AACs. I don't own any analogue media to try this particular feature out, because I'm a product of the digital era, but the Silence Monitor feature seems tailor-made for this task. As the manual describes it, it will attempt to decipher the gaps in tracks, and you can either not record the gaps or split the file into multiple recordings at noise gaps. Or, you can press the "Split"—that way, you can split "Blood on the Tracks" into its individual songs without having to manually monitor the record, but leave your "Thick as a Brick" as one MP3. I can see how this would be useful, even without owning a turntable.

There's also a less expensive version of Audio Hijack Pro, called Audio Hijack, which retails for \$16, but it has a wide range of flaws that keep it from being useful for most of the tasks that make its Pro sibling so useful. It won't record MP3s or AACs, it can't merge multiple audio sources (like iTunes music transitions between segments in a podcast), and it lacks the Silence Monitor. It does have the timer-recording feature, but I'm not sure how useful that would be when it will only output AIFF files, Mac OS X's native sound output format.

These files tend to be very large, so while your iPod will play them, they will require a much larger amount of space for the same play time. You'd probably want to convert the AIFF files to MP3 or AAC using iTunes.

Unfortunately, the skipping recording in my podcast—which would have been about an hour and 20 minutes, and ended up at about 35 minutes of recorded audio—keeps me from recommending the application more strongly. It's likely that if I owned a state-of-the-art computer, I wouldn't see this problem, but I can't vouch for that. I've contacted Rogue Amoeba's technical support, and the only solution that we were able to identify is to switch the recording to AIFF. This, in concert with only the most bare-bones recording options, kept the skipping to a minimum, but also eliminated most of the useful features. Rogue Amoeba really ought to consider publishing a minimum recommended hardware configuration for Audio Hijack Pro.

With the exception of the relatively smaller numbers of people who either record their own podcasts, or capture audio in real-time in one format or another, it has long seemed to me that Audio Hijack Pro is an application in search of a problem. For that crowd, the problem is real, and Audio Hijack Pro may be just the solution.

Caveat: Without the right hardware, you will probably find yourself highly limited in the features you can use in this application.

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Software Review

by David B. Thompson, dthompson@atpm.com

coconutBattery 2.5

Developer: [Christoph Sinai](#)

Price: free (donationware)

Requirements: Mac OS X 10.4.3. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured



I like small efficient programs that do one task well. That's a hangover from my Unix days, and you can blame [Kernighan](#) and [Ritchie](#) for that attitude. I also own a brand new MacBook Pro (Core 2 Duo). I'm changing jobs in January and will have to leave my almost-new MacBook Pro (Core Duo) behind because it's a university-owned computer. So I now own my notebook and am not using an issued unit. But that's a story for another time.

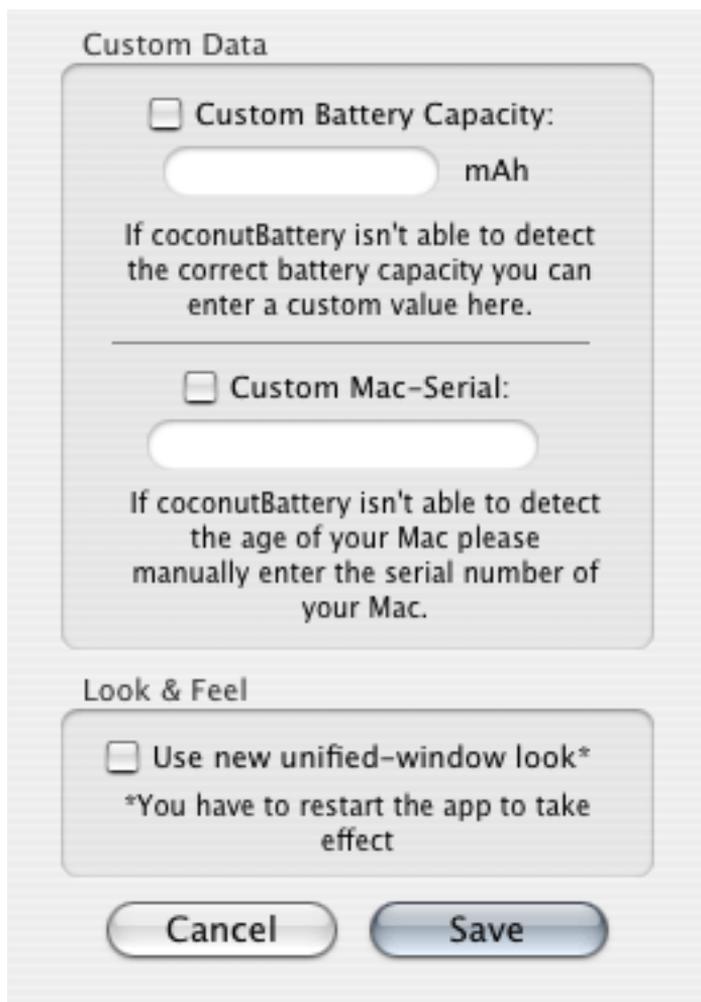
One thing a notebook owner needs to do is keep tabs on her computer's battery. In fact, even with current battery technology, it's a good idea to condition the battery at least once each month. Conditioning refers to a complete depletion of the battery's energy reserves and then a full recharging.

In addition, a tool that monitors the battery's condition is a good idea as well. Enter coconutBattery.

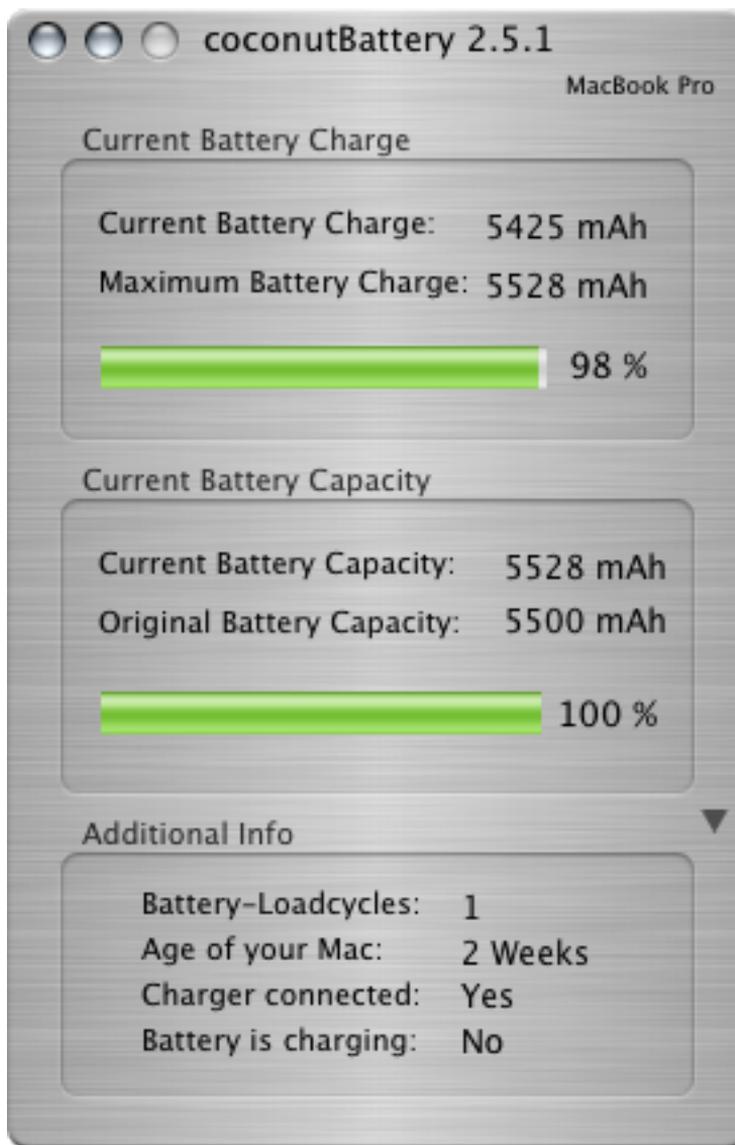
Installation and Use

Installation is simple. I downloaded the archive, decompressed it, and copied coconutBattery to the Applications folder. I then started the program by double-clicking its icon. (Standard operating procedure applies here!)

There isn't much in the preferences list to set, just a custom battery capacity and a computer serial number (should the software not determine these facts automatically). The former is used to track battery condition and the latter to determine the approximate age of the computer. For my system, I left these alone because the program sensed the appropriate values correctly.

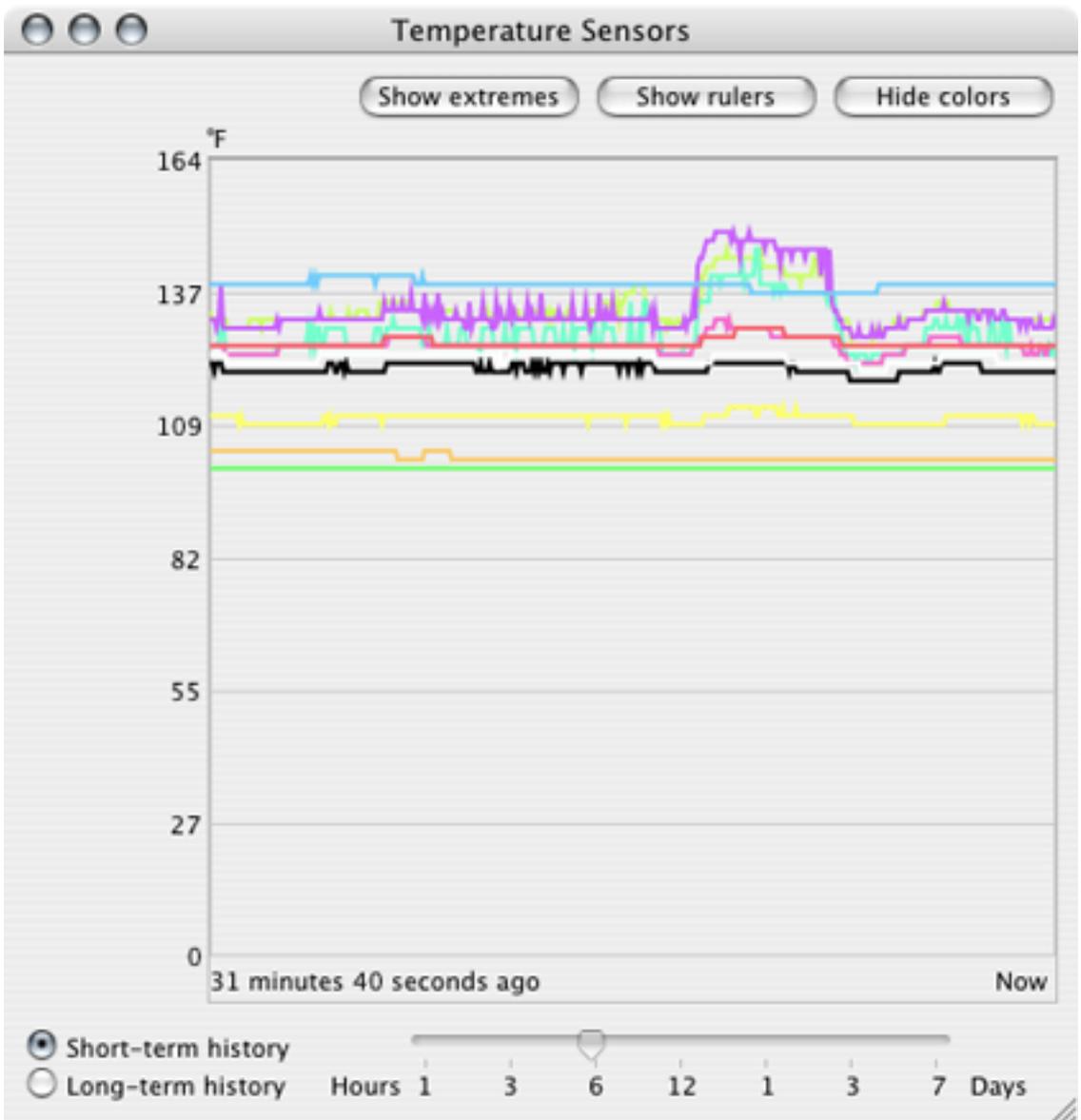


The main program window presents data sensed from the system, including current battery-charge state, maximum energy, number of load cycles, age of the system, and more. A screen capture of the main window is shown below.



coconutBattery offers the facility to store the maximum capacity of the system battery so the user can track battery condition over a period of time. That information is stored in a side panel accessed by clicking the small triangle to the right of the Additional Info heading.

It's a fact that computer batteries age. When they age, they lose energy capacity. Even with conditioning, there are a finite number of charge/discharge cycles a battery can sustain. Knowledge of the number of cycles and the current maximum energy storage capacity of the battery informs the user when it might be appropriate to replace the battery.



I also loaded Activity Monitor and watched the impact on system performance as the program ran. It was second or third on the list, which doesn't seem all that bad.

I also searched the program and Web site for recommendations about when to condition the battery. A feature that acted as a timer or reminder of when to fully discharge the battery and then recharge it would be a useful addition to the program and a significant boon to the end user. (I know I'll have to set a reminder to tell me when to condition my battery!)

Conclusions

I want to monitor the status of my system's battery. I picked up a copy of coconutBattery for that purpose. So I'll be checking the battery periodically with this program. It's actually

a pretty good little utility that fits my sense of how things should be done. I'm giving coconutBattery a Good rating because of the CPU load that appears while the program is running. coconutBattery is a simple, elegant program for monitoring a very important system resource.

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Software Review

by Chris Dudar, PhD, cdudar@atpm.com

DAZ/Studio 1.4.16

Developer: [DAZ Productions](#)

Price: free, plus free 3D content starter package

Requirements: Mac with 700 MHz processor, Mac OS X 10.3.9, 128 MB VRAM, 256 MB RAM. [Universal](#).

Trial: Fully-featured.



If you are a struggling student, graphic artist, or Web designer who would like to integrate 3D images into a project and need a break on the cost of expensive 3D software, or even a weekend artist looking for something new and challenging, then perhaps you could use [DAZ/Studio](#) (D/S) and some of DAZ's free commercial-quality 3D content to get a start. But if you already work with an established program like Cinema4D, Maya, or Lightwave3D, or are well-versed in open source applications like Blender (previously [reviewed](#) in ATPM) you likely don't need to read any further, as your skills and requirements exceed what D/S can offer.

This review will be most relevant to those of you who haven't touched a 3D program and might not know what subsurface [scattering](#), [caustics](#), or [bump](#) and [displacement maps](#) are, but were always interested in computer generated (CG) characters like Gollum and those in *Toy Story*. Well, I don't mean to disappoint you so soon, but as a standalone 3D graphics application D/S won't let you do that kind of work, at least not easily. However, it is a free virtual studio program that can give you a quick and relatively painless start making 3D CG images and basic key frame animation almost right away.

Now, I say almost right away because working with even a simple pared-down 3D program like D/S has a learning curve, and it would help if you have previous experience with a more complex image-adjusting program, though this is not a requirement by any means. You must understand that even a single well-rendered CG image is the final product of many separate files integrated by the host program, with some creativity thrown in for good measure. Just register at the [DAZ Web site](#); download [DAZ/Studio](#), which includes a free virtual playset complete with human figure, clothing, hairstyle, accessories, props, trees, rocks, etc.; put a weekend into learning D/S via the tutorial style DAZ/Studio Manual; and you will soon be rewarded.

This is one of D/S's strong points compared to more comprehensive 3D shareware, like the steep learning curved Blender, which was recently used to create the first open source [CG movie](#). You have to know what you wish to achieve in 3D, and then decide how much time you ultimately want to invest in learning one of these programs. If you want to quickly find out if 3D graphics is for you, then D/S is a good place to start.

My Virtual 3D World

I was introduced into this amazing virtual world when a long-time friend asked whether I could create CG still images and animate the 600 or so exercises in the database of his company's personal trainer subscription Web service. I have degrees in Human Biology, Human Kinesiology, and Physical Anthropology, and so a strong anatomical background, but I had no knowledge of 3D graphics. I stumbled upon the DAZ Web site and D/S, which was in beta testing at that time. I became a newbie beta tester when I installed the program and started playing around in a completely new world where I controlled all aspects of light, shadow, form, and the laws of physics.

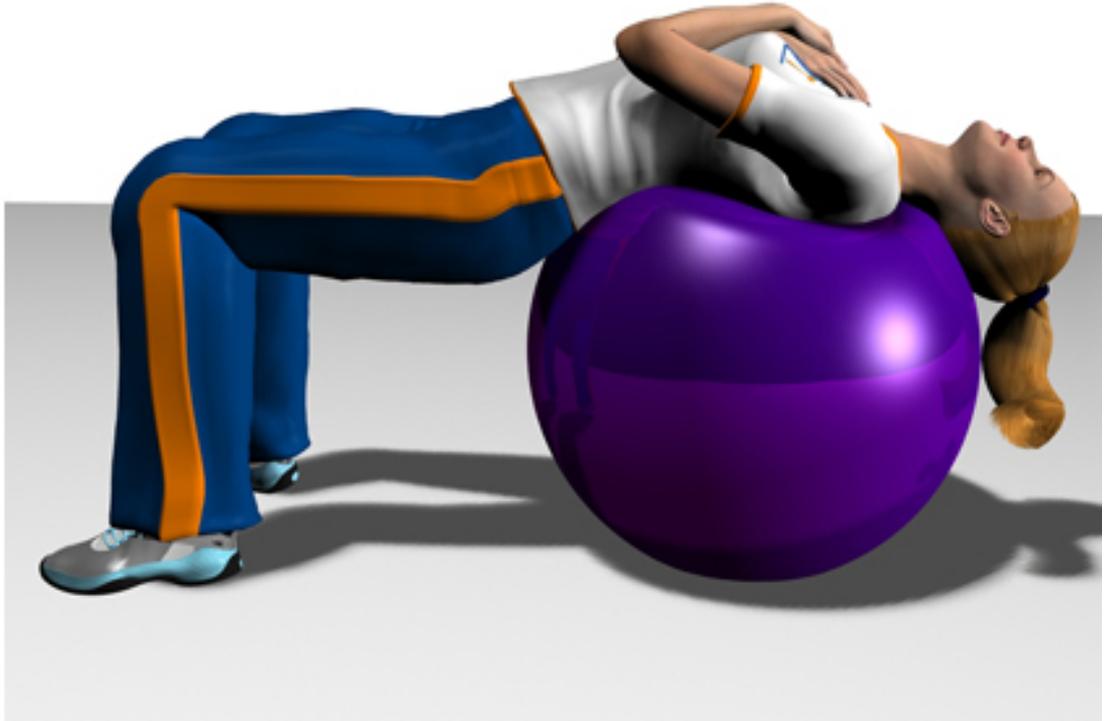
Quite literally your imagination and talent, and your budget should you choose to buy pre-prepared 3D products to work with, are your only limits. With some free downloads and a few purchases, I was able to generate these educational images. I should mention that by purchasing a 3D product from any vendor, you have unlimited rights to its use, to render still images or animation with it, and to sell your copyrighted output commercially, but not to any part of the original copyrighted proprietary 3D files or textures. This creative edge, as well as production cost savings, are the reasons that CG is coming to dominate movies, commercials, and even print media.

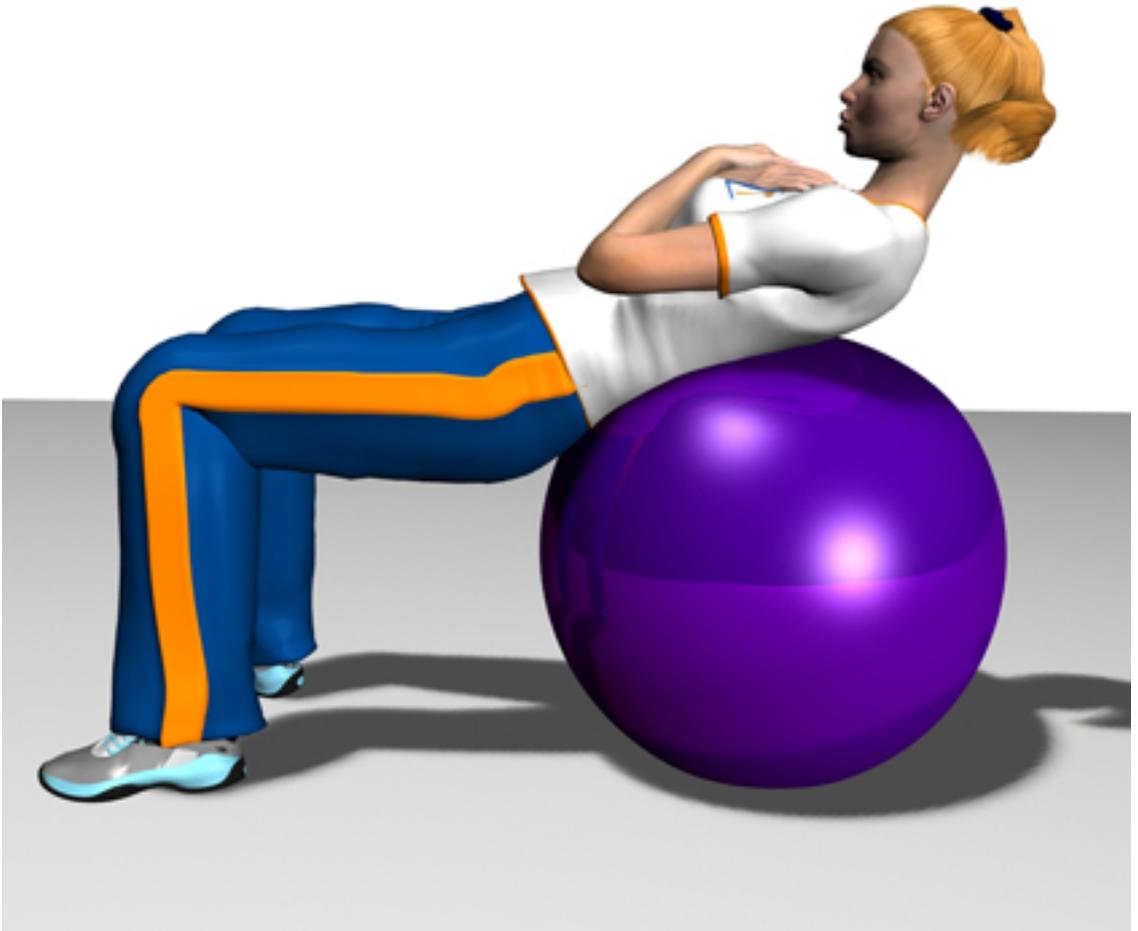


An anatomical image totally rendered in DAZ/Studio.

Here lies one of the major disadvantages of D/S though: it is only a virtual studio application designed to use imported ready-made 3D models. You cannot create new forms via mesh manipulation techniques like other more comprehensive 3D applications. You are limited to importing existing props and characters, creating interior sets, or throwing up a cyclorama (a large curved backdrop to project digital pictures for backgrounds), controlling multiple cameras, and three types of lighting: distant light like sun or moonlight, spotlights, and point source lights like the glow from a dragon's eyes. You can modify basic primitive forms: cube, sphere, and cone; or even alter the human models by applying deforming morphs via a D/S specific plug-in, called [D-Form](#), to create horns on your figure's head, for example, but it is a poor substitute for true modeling tools.

This deficiency can easily be overcome by choosing from many 3D modeling alternatives that export object (.obj) format files, like the open source [Wings3D](#), which I have used and highly recommend, though it doesn't excel with more organic forms like trees. DAZ Productions offers a modeling application called [Hexagon](#), but also a more comprehensive mid-range modeling and animation program [Carrara](#). Both have been on sale at one time or another, and I picked up Hexagon for the ridiculous price of \$1.99 when first introduced into the DAZ nest.





Two frames from an exercise animation. Note the D-Form on the stability ball.

Animation With DAZ/Studio

This now brings us to the topic of animation, and ultimately everybody wants to see their work in motion. Don't expect to be able to generate smoke, explosions, or other particle effects as DAZ/Studio has only basic capabilities for key frame animation, however, hints have been dropped that this aspect is still a work in progress.

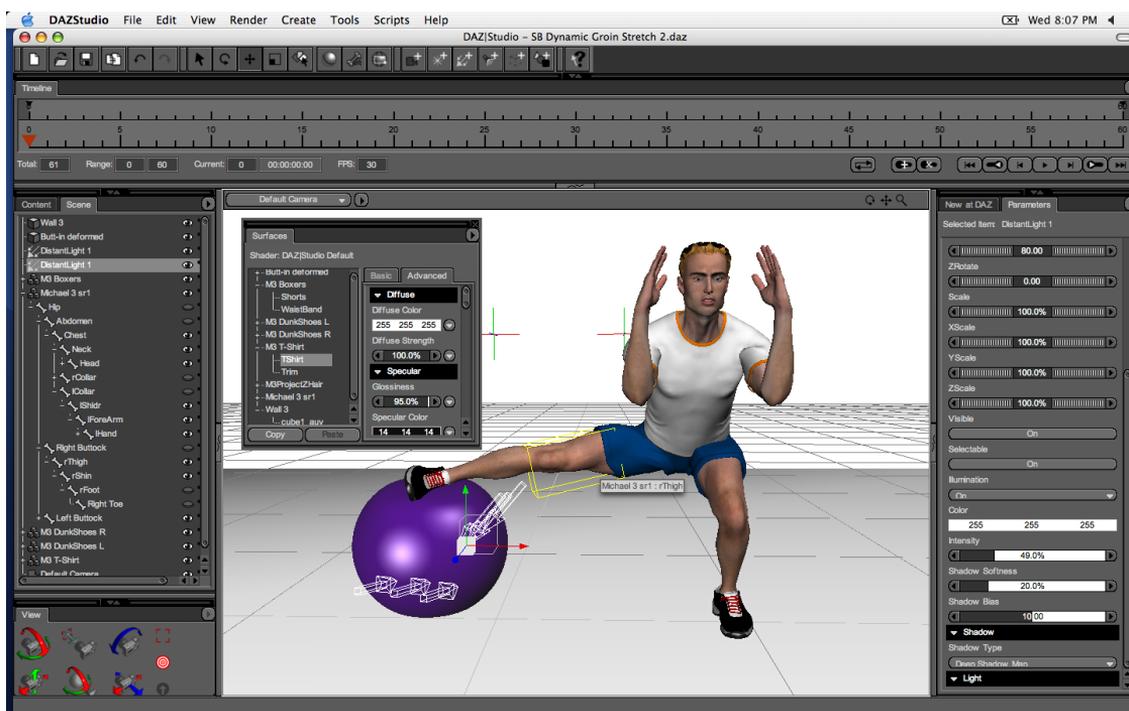
All props, models, and various appendages in the scene can be moved, resized, and morphed, while cameras can be moved simultaneously on all three axes for dolly or crane effects, and lights can be similarly moved, turned on and off, as well as increased/decreased in intensity and color over time. A lot can be done with these basic functions, and [my first animation](#)

was a dynamic 30-second promotional piece for our Web site's exercise database that was cut and successfully edited for sound inside iMovie.

However, D/S's meager key frame editor and absence of other advanced animation features caused a lot of headaches till I figured out workarounds, such as how to pin action by placing two key frames on either side of a movement's apogee in order to generate a more natural motion. Then again, what you see was my first attempt, and I was learning on-the-fly. A weak analogy perhaps is to think of D/S's animation capabilities as a fully manual SLR camera where f-stop, exposure, and focus must all be set by hand. You can learn a lot of basic principles by using tools like that, but then you move on.

The DAZ/Studio User Interface

So far I have deliberately tried to leave out a lot of CG jargon, and thus avoided discussing many application features since I think this program will ultimately appeal to those of you who want to get a start in 3D and have little experience. As mentioned, even simple 3D programs are very complex animals as you can see from the provided D/S screenshot. There are at least a dozen or more potential menus, palettes, and windows.



An overall screenshot of DAZ/Studio ([click to enlarge](#)).

Very briefly, the top *Menu bar* provides access to basic program commands: File, Edit, View, etc. Below that is the *Toolbar* with quick clicks to common needs: Open file, Save, Undo, Redo, as well as icons to open various plug-in menus if installed, and Camera/Light related choices. Below that is the *Timeline* for animation; much to everyone's dismay, when

you create key frames here they are invisible to you. In the middle of the screen is the large *Viewport* (think of it as a canvas) with our free DAZ male model, Michael, doing a dynamic groin stretch.

Alterations to elements in the viewport, such as moving appendages to correct a pose or increasing light intensity, are viewed in real-time (implemented as you make them) because of OpenGL. One limitation to the viewport is that cast shadows cannot be observed until an image is rendered. This is because many complex hardware calculations are required that can take some time depending on how many lights you have creating shadows. Here's a hint: try to enable shadows from only one light in your scene.

Within the viewport, just to the left of Michael, I have opened up the *Surfaces* window, which contains a selectable material surfaces list to the right, and various color and texture map variables to the left. To the right side of the viewport is the overall *Scene* list, showing all 10 elements in even this simple scene. Michael 3 sr1 is the root node for all the various body parts making up the model, with only a small part of the overall body "tree" expanded in this list. When you select an element in the *Scene* list, a plethora of associated variables, like X, Y, Z coordinates, rotations, and scale, are displayed in the *Parameters* palette to the left of the viewport.

Most palettes and windows are contextual, that is, their content changes with whatever you are working on in the viewport. So if Michael's right thigh is selected on the viewport, as seems to be the case in the screenshot, then right thigh parameters should be displayed in the parameters palette. However, in the screen shot the parameters palette shows that DistantLight1 is selected, and this can be verified on the scene list, where it is highlighted. This has happened because the viewport can also be used to select things by hovering the pointer over individual scene elements, which are then boxed in yellow with associated mouseover text. Thus my mouse pointer was over the right thigh at the time the screenshot was taken, but not left-click selected.

Lastly, below the *Scene* list is the colorful *View* palette, providing quick camera controls such as pan, zoom, rotate, target item, etc. All palettes are adjustable for size and position (at the time of writing there is a Mac-specific bug in release 1.4.16 preventing this), and most can also be hidden, though you want to have as many up as possible for efficient work flow. I have discussed only the basics of the user interface here, but once you get the hang of it you can customize and navigate quickly to what you need. Many 3D artists purchase a second monitor to separate the viewport from the menus.

DAZ/Studio and Your Computer

D/S was designed to work with most older computers, but all 3D programs just work so much better with faster processors and more RAM, so take the listed requirements as being a painful minimum unless you like seeing the *spinning beachball of death*. That said, I started using D/S with a 1.8 GHz G5 iMac, which has half the DAZ recommended 128 MB of onboard video RAM, and got by making still images, but that was in the D/S beta days when the program was a bit more basic.

I finally got fed up with the multi-hour render times required for even simple animations, and wouldn't recommend trying that on some older systems. You can of course render-optimize your scene by decreasing image size, turning off all shadows, and lowering other advanced render settings that involve image quality. You could also plan to render overnight, or simply make shorter clips and edit them together in postproduction, such as in iMovie.

On the positive side, D/S is now multithreaded and just screams on my Mac Pro. There are other limitations to the program including a few pesky bugs, but they get addressed with each new version, sometimes only to have others pop up! However, DAZ is committed to resolving them in a timely manner with some updates released in less than a month depending on the severity of the issue.

The DAZ Web Site and Online 3D-Artist Community

At the risk of sounding like a marketing mouthpiece (which I assure you I am not), one can't help but talk about the [DAZ Web site](#) when talking about D/S. They are inseparable because DAZ created and distributes D/S for free not only to generate interest in 3D graphics, and thus promote their other products, but also to provide a cooperative market for talented independent 3D artists and programmers to sell their wares, for which service DAZ takes a cut.

Up until a few days ago, DAZ used to provide their third-generation commercial-quality fully rigged [male](#), [female](#), and [anime-style](#) models absolutely for free. However, they have just introduced their latest generation figure, [Victoria 4](#) and so are now charging up to \$40 for these models, I believe to generate interest in the new releases. If you purchase one of their models (remember though, you do get a free reduced resolution female model with the D/S download to try it out) they are unclothed, have rudimentary skin texture, and are not capable of making much facial expression.

If even a basic level of photorealism is what you're after, you have to buy a few DAZ products like head and body morph packages, which provide a nearly endless range of expression and shape variations, and skin surface textures available at standard and high resolution for close-up portrait-style renders. The good news is that DAZ has been so successful that their prices are quite reasonable compared to the professional commercial 3D markets like [Turbosquid](#), and if you're patient, sales of DAZ's merchandise happen all the time.

Giving-away-the-Barbie-Doll-in-order-to-sell-the-dresses is a brilliant marketing and sales strategy that one may initially rebel at, until you realize you are responsible for your own consumer behavior. DAZ also has a [Platinum Club](#) program that you should look into if at some point you find yourself wildly purchasing content, and it does happen when you get bitten by the 3D bug. I personally just try to buy what I need for current projects, and the occasional interesting item on sale that has potential for future work. Intel Mac users should be aware that some older Mac versions of DAZ items have installers that only work in the Classic environment. These items are being updated slowly. I must also mention briefly that, in the best tradition of the online 3D-artist community, quality items are given away for free regularly ranging from various props and animals, to complete architectural models. DAZ also supports several terrifically active forums for all their software.

There is a surprising large online community of both professional 3D artists and 3D artist wannabes that use applications like DAZ Studio and/or any of the midrange programs, like its main competitor [Poser 7](#), which retails for about \$200 at Amazon.com, though earlier versions are still available for much less. I have not found a need to try Poser out, and thus cannot compare it to D/S. However, many 3D artists collect these applications like others collect Beanie Babies; different programs have their strengths and weaknesses so you have to pick and choose depending on the needs of your project.

The community as a whole is incredibly supportive via numerous and impressive independent artist Web sites, as well as the 3D emporium sites with their forums and merchandise geared towards this market, all of which also provide free tutorials and free 3D items or textures. Some of these include [Renderosity](#), [Content Paradise](#), and [Planit3d](#), to name only a few.

Even though Macs are used by an estimated 20% of 3D artists, some of the freebies you'll find on less travelled sites are Windows-only, but don't let that stop you from downloading them as the shareware [Maconverter](#) was designed just for this and will come to your rescue. I'm sure there are other Mac utilities out there that I don't know about, though PC users have an edge on us in this regard. The online community is an invaluable resource for the beginner, and even for the well-seasoned 3D veteran because of constantly changing technology and trends in the industry. You can learn, or download, something new everyday.

Conclusion

In retrospect, I believe the relatively limited feature set of D/S may be a boon to beginners as there are far fewer menus and choices to get lost in, and thus be intimidated by. If you want to know more about the D/S interface I heartily recommend that you download the application and manual, and then give it a try—it's free after all! Don't forget to download the 54.8 MB free content package as well, since it includes the reduced resolution female model, some fantasy fairy props, and a limited forest environment set with pre-prepared lights. It is required for working on the tutorials in the manual.

If it isn't obvious, I have a soft spot for this program, and continue to use it to generate the clean graphic images I have presented in order to maintain visual style continuity in our database, though I have now moved on to Maxon's Cinema4D. But don't let this dissuade you; others are really pushing its limits and coming up with some truly amazing art. Go to the DAZ Web site and have a good look around for yourself in the [gallery section](#), but try not to get lost.

Thank you for persevering through my review. I look forward to any comments you may have, as this is my first submission to ATPM, and would love to hear your experiences with the program should you choose to try it out. My plan is to start a series on my journeys with 3D software and Web site publication, and I hope there is an audience for it with the ATPM readers.

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Hardware Review

by Lee Bennett, lbennett@atpm.com

iTalk Pro

Developer: [Griffin Technology](#)

Price: \$50

Requirements: 5th-generation iPod video or 2nd-generation iPod nano.

Trial: None.



Unlike its predecessor, which attached to the top of 3rd- and 4th-generation iPods, the iTalk Pro uses the dock connector and requires a 5th-generation iPod video or 2nd-generation iPod nano.

To be candid, I'm frankly surprised that I find myself unable to echo ATPM's top rating for the iTalk Pro that I gave to the [original iTalk](#). This updated version of Griffin Technology's digital audio recorder for the iPod simply has a lot of shortcomings that I didn't sense from the original.

First of all, there's no longer a built-in speaker. The mini speaker of the first iTalk, in spite of its size, was more than adequate to quickly listen to recorded memos without having to fumble around for a pair of headphones or earbuds. The loss of the mini speaker is a significant blow.

The second shortcoming is that the iTalk Pro costs \$10 more than the original. If Griffin Technology were marketing the iTalk Pro as an iTalk with additional features and the iTalk were still available, then the \$10 would be justified. But the iTalk Pro isn't, in my opinion, a feature-added version of the iTalk. "iTalk Pro" is simply the name Griffin used for the same product, only updated to be compatible with the latest iPods. Period. So what happens when they have to be updated again to be compatible? Will it be called the iTalk Pro Pro?

Here's the scoop on the updated iTalk:

- Yes, it now records CD-quality stereo, but this capability was added to the iPod by Apple, not by Griffin. The iTalk Pro simply accesses this capability.
- To take advantage of the better recording capability, Griffin needed only to add a second mic as well as the 3.5mm line input jack, then update the built-in software. In bulk, I guarantee that the cost of adding these two components doesn't reach \$10 per unit—especially considering the cost savings by eliminating the mini speaker.
- Recordings can now be initiated via a button on the front of the iTalk, which also includes an LED to indicate activity. Again, in the bulk quantities Griffin deals with, all of these new hardware parts wouldn't raise the base cost per unit by \$10.

Another factor that bothers me is that, unlike the Belkin [TuneTalk Stereo](#), Griffin did not include a docking port pass-through. As such, it is impossible to charge or set your iPod in a dock while the iTalk Pro is attached.

An issue that is of no consequence to me is that the iTalk Pro only comes in black (with a shiny silver back). My iPod video is black, but the iTalk Pro doesn't match a white iPod nor most of the iPod nanos.

I have to question the iTalk Pro's ability to remain securely connected to an iPod. A few times, my iTalk Pro apparently became unseated and my iPod could no longer record because it could no longer find the recording device.

Audio quality is not bad. I have not had the opportunity to personally try competing products, but have heard samples by other reviewers of Belkin's and [XtremeMac's](#) recorders. Both were superior in quality to the iTalk Pro.

Like its predecessor, the iTalk Pro's recording specs are dictated by Apple. The "High" quality settings records 16-bit stereo WAV files at 44.1 kHz. The "Low" quality setting records 16-bit mono WAV files at 22 kHz. (Note: at the time of this issue's publication, Griffin's product page incorrectly states that the "Low" quality setting records at 8-bit instead of 16-bit.)

Unlike its predecessor, the iTalk Pro now includes a setting to adjust gain levels: automatic, high, and low. My impression is that the automatic setting favors higher gain, and both automatic and high are prone to considerable amounts of background hiss. The low gain setting is adequate for hand-held voice memos. My suggestion is to use high or automatic when recording events such as group meetings. Regrettably, the gain setting always reverts to automatic when the iTalk Pro is reattached.

- Stereo recording with auto gain, multiple distances (1:44, [17.5 MB](#))
- Stereo recording with low gain, multiple distances (0:48, [8.2 MB](#))
- Mono recording with low gain, hand-held distance (0:46, [1.9 MB](#))

Though it was less noticeable in the low gain setting, the occasional sound of the iPod's hard drive activity was present in all gain modes. This wasn't so much an issue with the original iTalk because it mounted to the top of an iPod—further away from the hard drive. Naturally, the problem doesn't exist when using an iPod nano.

Other than a brief click at the beginning, presumably the moment the iTalk Pro switches away from the built-in mic, the line input recordings are great. Griffin should, however, default line input recordings to the low gain setting. The automatic setting causes rapid fluctuations between high and low, rendering line input recordings useless. The low gain setting is appropriate for standard line-level audio input.

- Line input recording with auto gain (0:17, [2.9 MB](#))
- Line input recording with low gain (0:17, [2.9 MB](#))

You may have heard what sounded like some distortion in the music clips above (even the low gain version). That's actually a guitar effect in the music clip and is present in the original recording. My impression is that line input recordings in low gain mode are very clear. The reason I used this music clip is because it's the only quality studio recording I could access which I knew would be OK to use here and not have copyright/license problems.

My verdict is largely the same as with the original iTalk. Since the iTalk Pro is the least expensive of the three main players for this product, it's probably the best choice for a quick-and-easy recording accessory. But if you can afford an additional \$10 or \$20, you should consider either the Belkin TuneTalk Stereo or the XtremeMac MicroMemo.

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