

# 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 January edition of *About This Particular Macintosh!* It's cold outside. The holidays are over. The Patriots aren't in the NFL playoffs. The economy appears headed for a deep freeze of its own. What to do? Read this "Let it Snow" edition of your favorite Internet-based monthly magazine!

## Let it Snow!

This month's cover of ATPM features an image of a snow leopard. The big cat is uniquely and marvelously adapted to its environment. For those who have seen footage of this rare feline, the moving images are a sight to behold. The snow leopard's natural habitat is high mountain elevations and terrain that would challenge human existence. Deftly moving between rugged rocks and steep climbs, the snow leopard is a fierce and silent predator, able to fell prey two to three times its own weight. But it's the natural habitat adaptations of this beast that brings the snow leopard to this month's cover.

Snow Leopard is the marketing name for the next commercial release of Mac OS X, scheduled to make its retail debut in June. Mac OS X 10.6 is being optimized for Intel Macs and is being adapted to incorporate graphic processor resources for computing tasks. Theoretically, this will increase the Mac's performance and make more effective use of components already on the motherboard. This optimization, as well as efforts to make OS X's code more efficient, will set the next release of this product apart from its Windows competitor.

Windows 7, the much-anticipated successor to Windows Vista, is scheduled for release in time for next Christmas. With a six-month lead on its next competitor, Snow Leopard promises to heighten the Mac's performance superiority over Windows no matter Microsoft's efforts to repair Vista's damage to the Windows brand name and the planned release of yet another OS with striking visual similarities to Mac OS X. Snow Leopard will distance its competitors at performance elevations Windows just can't match.

## No Steve, No Jobs

While the economy continues to shed jobs at an alarming rate, it's the disappearance of Steve Jobs from this month's Macworld Expo that is setting off its own media alarms. Phil Schiller will be replacing Steve Jobs as the Apple spokesperson for the event's keynote address, and the company has signaled that this will be the last appearance of an Apple executive in the keynote.

Apple's decisions to have Mr. Schiller deliver this year's keynote and to reduce its role at future IDG January expos have raised new concerns about the health of Steve Jobs and increased speculation as to whether or not a leadership transition is underway in Cupertino. Let us all be reminded that Steve Jobs isn't the only employee at Apple and that trade shows in the Information Age are both costly for companies and staff-intensive events. Economic

considerations are much behind Apple's recent decision. Reaching customers is no longer a concern for Apple. The many Apple retail stores provide excellent connect points for millions of customers each year.

## **Cell Phone Snow Job**

We've all seen the ads for cell phone handsets designed to compete with the iPhone. Aside from the more than 10,000 applications available instantly to iPhone and iPod touch owners, there are many reasons to forego the cheap price of an iPhone wannabe. Apple offers free software upgrades to iPhone users, enhancing functionality and easy-of-use months after purchase.

Additionally, there are many more accessories available for the iPhone than any other smart phone on the market, as well as products that extend the iPhone's uses into the home and living environment. Don't get snowed, and advise friends and family members to think before grabbing at something that might look similar to an iPhone but cannot deliver on the iPhone's user experience nor take advantage of thousand of free and low-cost applications.

Now available at Walmart, the iPhone is not only the best smart phone on the market, but it's also becoming the easiest smart phone to buy and supply.

## **Snowed In?**

This winter season has already been marked by early snow storms and hazardous travel conditions. Although ATPM isn't yet available at Walmart (it would be quite challenging for the mass merchant to undercut our already low price), each issue is conveniently delivered free-of-charge to your digital door. Thank you for joining us again this month.

Our January issue includes:

### **Apple Talk: Xmas Exchange**

Angus Wong finds himself an unwitting iPhone evangelist.

### **Bloggable: Alpacas Cynics Foremost, Revised**

Wes Meltzer is back with a new installment to cover the blogosphere dialog about Psystar and the supposed John Does.

### **Mac About Town: When Worlds Collide**

What happens when one thing you want conflicts with another thing you want? *Mac About Town* meets a Sprint exec and discusses the bottom line on how we market cell phones and cell phone service.

### **Next Actions: Article Line-up**

Ed Eubanks, Jr. begins 2009 asking readers for input on shaping his articles for the coming year.

## **Desktop Pictures: Ken Aspeslagh**

Reader Ken Aspeslagh offers several beautiful landscape photos from around the world, including Vietnam, New England, and France.

## **Qaptain Qwerty**

Excuse me, waiter. . .

## **Review: Freeway 5.3.1**

Ed Eubanks, Jr. is pleased with this Web editor, which includes tools to help build an iPhone-friendly version of your site.

## **Review: ShoveBox 1.6**

Paul Fatula reviews Shovebox, a versatile and unobtrusive application that lets you store, organize, and access the links, documents, and images that would otherwise clutter up your desktop.

## **Review: Vizor SUN**

Ed Eubanks, Jr. is very pleased with this hands-free adapter, which includes a solar panel to keep the battery charged.

## **Review: WordSoup 1.0**

Excuse me, waiter, but there is a fly in my WordSoup.



## **Mac OS X Services**

Thanks for this article. I have been a Macaholic for 22 years and have gotten behind in my all things Macintosh. I had no idea how to use this feature, but now I will explore it some more.

—*Andy Melton*

## **Art Text 2.0.2**

Why would anyone pay \$50 for this application? Most of Art Text's features exist within simple drawing or project programs (such as The Print Shop) that cost the same as Art Text but have many more features. Full-featured drawing and illustration programs such as Canvas X can do everything that Art Text does, and they have layers, masks, and convert-text-to-path functions.

—*Gregory Tetrault*

Sometimes less is more. When I [reviewed](#) Art Text 1.0 I mentioned Word Art within Microsoft Office and some other feature with NeoOffice. While it is true that what Art Text provides may be found in other programs, ease of use is not the same with those programs. I find that with Art Text it is much easier to apply effects and such. Price can be an issue, but you do get frequent free updates with Art Text.

—*Linus Ly*



Art Text is, from my brief experiences, essentially a new incarnation of the old Mac OS program TypeStyler. Some of the same criticisms raised by Gregory above are ones that people used to make of TypeStyler, and Linus's response is, well, pretty much the same response: yes, you can do just about anything Art Text does in another program, but sometimes a program like Art Text will make that work much easier. (To stretch the point a little facetiously, there's very little one can produce in Photoshop that can't be produced in Photoshop Elements, Pixelmator, or Acorn, but there are some things that are going to be a darn sight easier to produce in Photoshop.)

—*Watts Martin*

## **iRecord Pro**

Here's a little something I failed to mention in the iRecord Pro review—the power cord is only three feet long. As far as I'm concerned, any piece of electronics should include a minimum of six feet for a power cable.



Seems to me (new owner of an iRecord Pro) that the iPod problems aren't as insurmountable as your review describes, and that reading the manual would have helped. (Available as PDFs.) One should copy from stick/drive/iPod to PC, import to iTunes, then copy to iPod. OK, clumsy, but no more sync problems.

—Andrew Bustin

Yes, you're correct, and I covered this in the original [iRecord review](#). My position is that there are a number of ways to acquire a recording and keep it, such as recording to a memory stick, or recording to an iPod or iPhone.

You say the "solution" is to record to a USB memory device and then transfer. That, in fact, is not a solution, but rather accomplishing the task via a different means. It still does not "solve" that recording directly to iPods and iPhones is problematic.

—Lee Bennett

## **Expandrive 1.3.1**

Give our latest release [1.3.2] a spin. All known issues with FTP and MacFUSE have been resolved since the 1.3.1 release reviewed here. Thanks!

—Jeff Mancuso

## **Hard Drives as Floppies**

NewerTech has a new unit that looks like the BlacX N0028USU but with a quad interface: NewerTech [Voyager](#) "Quad Interface" FireWire 800/400/USB 2.0/eSATA—SATA I/II Hard Drive Docking Solution.

I saw one listed at the Other World computing site.

I am wondering if anyone has tried one out.

—Doug Hogg

## **Taming the Two-headed Monster**

If you run Keynote there is an explicit option in the preferences to use the second monitor as the display monitor. This puts the second monitor into full screen mode and shows some presenter information on the primary screen. This is a really nice way to use the second screen without changing it to be the primary screen.

When iDVD starts playing a movie it defaults to full screen on the primary monitor. Hit the Esc key to get out of full screen mode. Now drag the window to the second monitor,

then in the playing movie click the icon for full screen mode. The movie will be displayed in full screen mode on the second monitor, and the primary monitor will be darkened.

iTunes works almost the same way. Drag the full iTunes player window to the alternate monitor. Start playing a movie, click on it to get a window then inside the window of the playing movie click on the full screen icon to get a full screen presentation on the alternate monitor.

iPhoto works this way as well when showing a slide show. Drag the open viewer to the alternate screen then start the slide show.

There are probably a number of other interesting niceties like this, but I haven't discovered them.

One problem I have is with older projectors. I'm guessing that Dell laptops for some reason use a higher signal level on the VGA out port. Projectors made to work in business situations with Dell computers expect this brighter signal. (I haven't had the opportunity to figure this out. It may be that people have calibrated their projectors to match to the Dell laptops. It may be something else.) In any event, when I plug in my Mac the video is rather dark.

The solution is to calibrate the signal sent to the projector. I won't go through all the instructions, but in the Display Preferences panel (see above) there is a calibrate button. Click that and soon you will see a button for Expert or Expert Mode (forget which). This gives you access to some brightness and contrast controls so that you can get a usable signal. This might also help with old projectors that have weak bulbs.

—*John Konopka*

## **YouVersion Bible Review**

YouVersion Bible is up to version 1.6 and now has a bookmark feature. If I were reviewing it at this stage, I'd have marked it as an Excellent rating.

—*Lee Bennett*

## **Datahand Keyboard Comments**

As a person who has been using a Datahand keyboard since they first came out (almost 18 years ago), a response to one of the Datahand comments in the current issue might be helpful. I think the company does not provide for enough depronation, and as a result there can be static stress in the arms unless the user fixes the problem on their own. I have a video showing what I have done and how to do it, but in general, I think the hands need to be raised on the thumb side at least 30 degrees for most people. I prefer 45 degrees, and I have known some people who like to put the Datahand at 90 degrees (vertical). That is too much in my opinion, and the company does not guarantee the units will work well at more than 45 degrees (because of the gravity effect on the magnetic switches).

I have tried to get the company to recognize the need for more angle, but I think they are worried a strange looking keyboard will be made more strange looking. I think I know what I am talking about because I have been using the Datahand keyboard for many years, often 12 hours or more per day, and over the years I have communicated with many other users. The company sometimes calls on me to help when users have special needs, and I assist willingly whenever I can. More might be said, but maybe it is enough to offer to send the video to anyone who is interested. E-mail me at [PAEDC@aol.com](mailto:PAEDC@aol.com), but wait until after Christmas, if possible, because things are tight at the moment, and I also have to get a new computer set up. Stuff is going to be in a mess for a while, and e-mail could get lost in the shuffle.

Full disclosure: I am a Datahand shareholder, but that has never stopped me from saying exactly what I think is good and bad about the Datahand keyboard. When the current model came out in 1996, I wrote the company a 28-page memo about the things that I thought still needed to be made better. (I had been using the two prior models already for five years at that point.) Some of the issues have since been fixed, but not all of them. Nonetheless, the Datahand keyboard is the best keyboard I know of, and it has been a lifesaver for me. I could not do as much writing as I do without it. Nothing else comes close.

—*Don Patterson*

## **Cortland**

Congratulations! I'm a little late reading the last two issues of ATPM because I was away. It is a delightful ending. I have enjoyed every episode since it began. I will look forward to your next comic strip. Thank you.

—*Heather Isaacson*

## **Soundsticks Advice**

After reading your [review](#) of Harman Kardon Soundsticks II, I figured out that I would seek you for advice.

My name is Lars, and I live in Norway. I just bought myself a tube amplifier that I want to use together with my iMac. In your review of the Soundsticks II you use an similar setup, so I wondered how do you implement the Soundsticks minijack to the amplifier? The connection of the iMac through the amplifier is OK, but what type of connection do you use from the Soundsticks jack to the amplifier?

My pockets are unfortunately shallow so I need to build a music system based on the tube amplifier quite slowly.

I would be very pleased if I can use the Soundsticks together with the components mentioned above, which I already have, while I'm dreaming of some future setup.

Anyhow, thanks for writing such an enjoyable review and for reading this e-mail.

P.S. I actually want to buy one more Soundsticks together with my equipment so I have all in all four satellites and two sub-woofers.

Congratulations on the purchase of your new tube amplifier. I am a big fan of tube amps, as you probably could tell from my article. However, it is not possible to easily connect the Soundsticks to a tube amplifier. You would need to make some serious modifications in order to do this. There are a few reasons why. First of all, the subwoofer has a built-in amplifier, and that amplifier drives both the subwoofer and the satellite speakers (e.g. the Soundsticks themselves). You could theoretically connect the Soundsticks (without the subwoofer) to the tube amplifier, but you would need to change the wiring in order to do this. (You could probably cut the RCA connector off and split the positive/negative cables to form a traditional speaker lead wire, but I have not tried this. Nothing terrible should happen if it doesn't work, but be careful of course.)

However, under this setup the subwoofer would not be in the system. To get the subwoofer working you would need to have a set of RCA outputs on your tube amplifier that could drive the subwoofer and then use an RCA-to-minijack adapter. What you ideally want is a set of RCA outputs that come after the volume pot, or a "variable output" but you could probably manage with a set that come before the pot, or a "Fixed Output" or "Tape Output" and then adjust the volume on the subwoofer itself to compensate. If you use a "Variable Output" then you would want to keep the volume pot on the subwoofer relatively low to avoid overdriving the amplifier and causing distortion.

I have never tried this, but it should be possible. Recognize, however, that you could easily overdrive the Soundsticks and blow them up if you have a very powerful tube amplifier, so do not go crazy if you try this and be careful with the volume level. The Soundsticks are designed to work with the built in amplifier in the subwoofer, which I believe is probably 6–10 watts or something fairly modest.

There are many, many other speaker systems you could use with your new tube amplifier that would work better, and I would encourage you to speak to someone at a local hi-fi shop who can advise you on the best choice.

I hope this is helpful. Thanks for reading!

—Evan Trent

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## Xmas Exchange

Christmas brings us the opportunity to gather with friends, share stories from the past year, and check out who has an iPhone. Call it the “Christmas Indicator.” My rough estimate runs around 20 percent for everyone I’ve met so far (and I’m typing this on the 28th, with the New Year’s party still to come).

Most of the iPhone owners had the 3G version, with a few 2G laggards. Interestingly, there were a few new phones that were not iPhones, with their owners making an effort to not buy an iPhone. I asked a couple of them why they decided not to buy an iPhone, and the answers were mainly a random assortment of myths and misinformation regarding what iPhones can’t do.

For example, one lady told me she needed Bluetooth and was told the iPhone doesn’t have it. I told her I frequently use a Bluetooth headset with mine and, while the iPhone can’t use Bluetooth to send camera photos, e-mail is a great (and probably more appropriate) channel. But she still wasn’t sold because she’s gotten into the habit of sharing digital content (pictures, ringtones, applications) via Bluetooth.

The other guy I talked to said he couldn’t live without a hard keyboard because he does so much e-mail, and that he needed a device that could sync with Exchange. I showed him how fast I can type on my iPhone and that one of my accounts is a push-enabled Active Sync Exchange account. He gave me one of those looks that said, “Damn, I didn’t know all that, but since I bought my Blackberry Bold brand new last week, I can’t feel upset about it, especially not at Christmas, so I’m just going to make an effort to be happy with my decision and wait a few months before I finally spring for an iPhone.”

Aside from iPhone evangelism (I’m not trying, really; it’s just happening that way) I got various Apple-related questions—standard FAQs, which I am sure all of you can answer. The only interesting line of inquiry was regarding the rumored iPhone nano. My take was, “Maybe there will be one in January, but I am pretty sure it will not have all the functionality of the iPhone 3G, if that’s what you’re looking for.”

The other big festive activity was sharing iPhone application tips with other owners. My selection this year: Remember The Milk, Evernote, Stanza, Facebook, Speed Dial 1 to 4, TwitterFon, 1Password, WordBook, LinkedIn, 12C Classic, vlingo, and iBlueSky.

Not all my time was spent mucking around with iPhone stuff. I managed to down a few great wines and (afterwards) check out what the fuss was about Rock Band (similar to Guitar Hero on the Xbox, but my friend had a PlayStation 3). I got 86 percent on the

“guitar” and 98 percent on vocals (“Hungry Like the Wolf,” which was familiar to none of the youngsters).

“Moof!”

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## Alpacas Cynics Foremost, Revised

Some of you might remember that the last time my column appeared [in this space](#), we talked about a little company called Psystar that wanted to sell Macintosh clones from their sketchy office in a nondescript Miami industrial park. In July, I missed some important news, that Apple had filed legal complaints against Psystar, alleging that Psystar had violated their copyright. Psystar countersued with the argument that Apple was—you guessed it—violating antitrust laws. (I was skeptical of this claim in April.)

While I've been off the case, some of the reporters who did such a sharp job in April are still holding up their end of the bargain.

In late November, Psystar's counterclaims against Apple were [thrown out in court](#). Pamela Jones of *Groklaw* nailed the case: she waded through the document to find the pithiest ruling I've read since [Republic of Bolivia v. Philip Morris](#). (Of course, I am not a lawyer. For all I know, pith is a quality that comes naturally to judges.) Judge William Alsup wrote, "The pleading as a whole does not allege facts that, if true, plausibly indicate that Mac OS is an independent, single-product market."

On December 3, Jones reported that Apple had amended its original complaint against Psystar to include Digital Millennium Copyright Act [violations](#) (among other things). She noticed one really astonishing graf, one that sent a whole chain reaction of speculation across the Internet:

18. On information and belief, persons other than Psystar are involved in Psystar's unlawful and improper activities described in this Amended Complaint. The true names or capacities, whether individual, corporate, or otherwise, of these persons are unknown to Apple. Consequently they are referred to herein as John Does 1 through 10 (collectively the "John Doe Defendants"). On information and belief, the John Doe Defendants are various individuals and/or corporations who have infringed Apple's intellectual property rights, breached or induced the breach of Apple's license agreements and violated state and common law unfair competition laws. Apple will seek leave to amend this complaint to show the unknown John Doe Defendants' true names and capacities when they are ascertained.

Jones described this as "the new paragraph that made my eyes bug out."

Let's go back over this, so we're clear. The whole rest of this column hinges on that paragraph. Essentially, Apple is arguing that there are third parties (John Does 1–10) involved in the activities alleged against Psystar.

*Macworld's* Jim Dalrymple and *CNet's* Tom Krazit—who have also been on this since the beginning—interpreted this in its most direct sense, that Psystar has “backers” involved with the company. Dalrymple:

Documents filed with the court on Tuesday show that Apple believes Psystar [may have backers](#) involved with the company and Apple wants to know who they are.

And Krazit:

It's always been [a bit puzzling](#) to ponder how Psystar emerged seemingly overnight with designs on challenging one of the tech industry's richest companies, retaining one of Silicon Valley's star law firms along the way. And it made ambitious, expensive claims, such as attempting to argue that Apple was in violation of antitrust law by refusing to license Mac OS X.

John Gruber [disagrees](#), because although it's the most direct interpretation of the rulings, it's not necessarily the simplest explanation. Gruber's argument is that the John Does are not shadowy corporations or individuals seeking entree to the Macintosh market—they're the OSx86 Project people, who have been attempting to make OS X run on generic PCs.

Gruber's argument is persuasive, although I'm not as sure about the OSx86 Project. To assume that Psystar has shadow corporations backing requires assuming that the mid-1990s clone experiments had been a success for Power Computing, Motorola, Umax, et al., which they weren't, really. And it requires assuming that someone wants to figure out how to get into a premium sector of the PC market without selling premium-level goods. The whole point of Psystar was to sell a Mac cheaper than Apple could sell it, but what you pay extra for isn't necessarily the hardware or the software. It's the *gestalt*, and it's what makes a Mac different from a PC at the end of the day.

(Having said that, *nota bene* for Psystar: *gestalt* is not a component of a viable antitrust claim. Otherwise, Mercedes could sue Toyota for infringing on the German automotive *gestalt* with its high-end Lexus models.)

I'm not sure I can speculate on who the John Does are. The OSx86 Project makes sense, but why not just sue them separately? This is a point *ZDNet's* Adrian Kingsley-Hughes (of *Hardware 2.0*) makes [better than I could](#).

As you might expect, things spun out of control quickly here, with wild speculation about [who the shadow backers were](#) and whether there was some kind of [conspiracy](#). If you want to get back to earth, read Dee Dee Warren's [legal blogging on the topic](#),

So, the world kept on turning. And Psystar filed an amended counterclaim, saying that Apple [misuses its copyrights](#) for OS X, according to Warren.

This filing was then misinterpreted—*I can see why!*—by several influential commentators, including *InformationWeek*'s [Paul McDougall](#), *Computerworld*'s [Gregg Keizer](#) and *Ars Technica*'s [Chris Foresman](#) as saying that Apple hadn't copyrighted OS X at all. I'm reasonably confident this isn't what Psystar is claiming, after I read the entire ruling myself, but it certainly set off another round of wild speculation.

Foresman's larger point about the case is worth looking at, beyond the narrow claim of non-copyright. It's stronger on the technical merits than the other two articles, as you might expect. Foresman writes:

Psystar criticizes Apple for purposely adding checks in Mac OS X that prevent the OS from running on non-Apple hardware, describing in detail the methods Apple uses, such as the kernel entering an infinite loop unless certain CPUs are detected. In the next breath, Psystar denies that it creates or sells any computer with modified versions of Mac OS X that, as Psystar says, won't run on unauthorized hardware. Psystar doesn't explain how it enables unmodified Mac OS X to run on its hardware.

[...]

Psystar's claims seem like reverse circular logic that spins so fast it collapses on itself to form a black hole, and then sucks reason right out of the universe.

I know I say this a lot, but I'm not sure what to make of this. All I know for sure is that it doesn't sound like Psystar has a leg to stand on.

## Andean Leftovers

- A Q&A from Paul Kafasis (at O'Reilly's *Inside iPhone* blog) [answering some questions](#) he had on the App Store from June—answers on questions about trials, upgrades, and other changes to the App Store.
- Kafasis also had a really interesting piece on the way that the manner in which people shop for iPhone apps and the pricing models encourages the [Walmart-ization](#) of the App Store itself. (He links to a phenomenal *Fast Company* story about a lawn mower company CEO who [turned down](#) Walmart's business.) Daniel Jalkut notes the same effect, adding that it's hard to develop an application that's worth buying for more than 99 cents when the ecosystem so [strongly favors](#) 99-cent applications. Lastly, Brent Simmons adds that, for all of its ups and downs, the App Store isn't really a [free market](#), because you can't try the product before you buy it. That, too, strongly disfavors higher-priced applications.
- Apple is now saying that [300 million](#) iPhone applications have been downloaded from the App Store. That's pretty impressive.

- John Gruber has a specific bone to pick with developers using [private iPhone APIs](#) rather than the public APIs. I had no idea it was fraught with such peril, but, well, watch out.

That's all I have in the notebook for this month. Hope you all had a nice holiday season. Now it's time to buckle down until President's Day!

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## When Worlds Collide

I'm a brand-loyal guy. Hook me early and I'm yours for life.

Catsup? Heinz. Soup? Campbell's. Soda? Coke. Football team? Dallas Cowboys. Yeah, I know they stink, they're smart-asses, and I have lived in AFC country for a long time now, but that's the point—hooked early. I can't help myself.

Those of us who experience the ongoing certainty and comfort of brand-loyalty can be shocked, however, when we are forced to confront a direct collision between two competing “givens.” That was the case for me when my preferred computer company collided with my preferred cellular provider.

I have been a Sprint customer for a very long time. I even stuck with them when they were disabling Bluetooth capability on my phone for fear of illicit computer connection, thus also denying me the ability to sync my phone to my Palm to my Mac. I always experienced good customer service, and when I moved to Kansas City, the home of Sprint, my loyalty grew deeper.

Then came the iPhone and AT&T.

Readers of this column will know that I only made the move when the 3G showed up. I've loved every minute and have never regretted the move. Even AT&T has been OK for me, though I continue to miss my Sprint connection. One evening last month, my connection got personal.

In my work here in KC, I meet a large number of people from across the metro area and from a wide variety of jobs. Two of my acquaintances are senior executives with Sprint. In the past, I have relied on both of them for advice on my preferred phone and, in fact, my beloved Treo was a suggestion one of them made to me. I won't mention their real names as I'm not sure that I want the CEO of Sprint—who would recognize their names—to know that they fell down on the job. Let's call them Fred and Barney (Cartoon favorite? Flintstones.) Both Fred and Barney are in product development and services for Sprint. Fred has been with Sprint since the early PCS days, and Barney, a senior VP, took an early retirement not long ago.

I ran into Fred, still cranking out the phones, at a meeting a few weeks ago. One of the others present let Fred know that I was packing an iPhone. When Fred asked me what caused me to go with AT&T (notice his reference). I explained that I had looked at the new Sprint Instinct but that it didn't have a functional calendar (coming out soon according to Fred) and wasn't even close to Apple in the touch screen technology (Fred agreed). I

pointed out one of my current favorite apps, Instapaper, and its ability to save Web pages for later, offline reading. Fred said that Sprint did it faster.

And that's when it hit me.

I realized that in my phone selection I had come to the intersection of two preferred brands and had been forced to choose. The question in this case is, "Why?"

Why do I have to pick either a provider or a phone? Why can't I have both choices?

I said to Fred, "I really liked being a Sprint customer, and I would be a Sprint customer today if Sprint would provide full service for my iPhone. But you want to tell me what phone to use. I don't let the cable company tell me what kind of TV to watch. (Flat screen? Pioneer plasma.) Why should you get to tell me what kind of phone to use?"

Fred didn't have an answer to that. I wonder if he ever will.

Happy New Year, friends.

—*Mike Chamberlain*

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# Next Actions

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

## Article Line-up

I've been working on a couple of pieces for *Next Actions*, and I have a few more in mind. I thought I would take this opportunity, the first-issue-of-the-year column, to run through my tentative plan for the next few articles and get your feedback about it.

### Returning to Inboxes

My next feature piece will be about digital inboxes again. I've written three pieces dealing with inboxes and their content, and some might think I've said enough. In the next piece, though, I want to touch on the concept of "filling" your inboxes—how do you get ideas, materials, etc. into them quickly, efficiently, and without interrupting your workflow.

When it comes to GTD, it can be easy (for me, at least) to consider it mainly as a system for managing how I handle tasks and "to-do" lists. GTD encompasses much more than this, of course, and it's important to think through all of the different sorts of data that pass before my eyes daily—as well as the data that don't—and consider if my processes and workflows best serve my use of these data to their fullest.

Another facet of inboxes I want to focus on is how to automate them, at least as much as possible. I use a number of utilities, tricks, and "hacks" for shifting content from my digital desktop (and my physical desktop) into the various buckets that I have on my Mac and elsewhere. I'm sure readers will have others to share—and I hope you will do so, in the comments.

### Mindmapping as Brain-Dump

"Get it out of your head" is a key GTD principle. If you can't keep this practice sustained in your workflows, your efficiency and productivity will plummet.

There are different ways to empty the contents of your thoughts: some take notes, others doodle. My father worked best with a legal pad and a black fine-pointed pen; I prefer the speed and ease of typing. Some will outline their thoughts, others working out something closer to stream of consciousness writing.

Mindmapping is a great way to develop ideas—particularly ideas in the very earliest stages—into something useful and meaningful. Because it avoids the constrictions of outlines and prose writing, it allows the ideas to flow unfettered; yet, it also maintains enough order and connection that you don't get distracted or sidetracked.

Mindmapping can be done by hand; indeed, the practice has been in place for centuries (long before it was called "Mindmapping"). Still, as one might expect, there are a number

of digital tools available to allow you to mindmap on your Mac. We'll take a look at as many of these as we also discuss how mindmapping serves a larger GTD schema.

## **Project Planning**

Often, tasks beget sub-tasks, which in turn become complex. Before you know it, what started as a couple of related tasks has become a full-blown project.

Many of the GTD applications (and other task-management applications) listed below offer a fair amount of help for planning projects and connecting tasks to one another. It is worth some time discussing how this can work well, which applications are especially strong in this area, and some tips for how to do it well.

Project management sometimes requires more planning muscle—and depending on the nature and structure of projects, often it demands tools for elaborate delegation management, file management, charting progress, and other features that are not common to most task management applications but definitely need a GTD approach. I'll do a brief survey of some of the more popular and common project management applications, particularly discussing how they might fit into a GTD workflow.

This concept will bridge at least two articles, since project management tends to be a fairly substantial subject.

## **Task Tracking**

How do you actually get your tasks accomplished? I don't mean what is the actual work involved in the task—rather, I mean this: as you finish your work, how do you track your progress and know what to move to next? How do you check off your lists? How present is your task management software on your screen real estate?

In this article, I'll talk about meta-practices: not how we get stuff done in the doing of the stuff, but how we get it done in the managing of the doing. It's likely that, for every reader of this column, there are as many or more ways to deal with this level of task management and tracking. I'll try to coagulate them into a few different approaches and offer some comments about each.

This will naturally involve discussion of how the different tools offer support (or lack thereof) for this sort of ongoing management—and I'll comment about this, as well.

The above articles are not necessarily in the order that they'll appear, but that order does generally approximate, in order, which of these topics have received the most attention and thought in my mind, at least in terms of thinking through articles about them. This list will easily carry us through 2009, so this is probably a close preview to what is to come later this year—unless Apple or the Mac community does something huge that merits an aside from the main focus, as Leopard and the iPhone have done in the last 12–14 months or so.

## New Additions

It has been a while since the “Master List” received some new additions—largely, because I was simply unaware of them. But there are some new items now, each worthy of a look-see:

[FlexCal](#) from flexgames is a basic utility that offers on-the-fly entry of events and tasks into iCal without requiring that iCal be open. Very similar to ZooDo, which we’ve featured here for a while.

[NoteBook](#) from Circus Ponies offers a lot of promise to those of us who utilize a collection of tools to organize a lot of data. NoteBook thoroughly exploits the metaphor from which it takes its name, offering a retro feel to a very capable data manager. What’s useful about NoteBook as a data collection and management tool is that it allows users to build their data management (or use existing templates) around a concept—say, organizing an event or planning for homeschooling—while still giving flexibility to content and the way the data is stored. In other words, it isn’t a rigid database in the way that Address Book is, with a limited set of fields and data storage; neither, however, is it a freeform database with no pre-defined structure (in the way that DEVONthink is). It’s somewhere in-between, with task management tools built-in as a predefined template. I’ll be reviewing NoteBook in greater detail in a future issue of ATPM, but I’m surprised I missed this one until recently. Anyone using NoteBook as a task manager for GTD?

[TaskMate](#) might be the most bare-bones task list manager I’ve seen—ultra-simplified. Maybe perfect for the totally uncluttered, simplified, zen lifestyle.

[Task Writer](#) is a new Web application that offers a lot of promise. It has a nicely simple interface, a good set of task-management tools, and is designed well enough that it could be a full-time user for some. It’s still in development, and some will find that it lacks a few key features, but overall it has a lot of promise.

## More About the List

Someone mentioned in a recent comment that it would be a good idea to link the iPhone applications to their Web sites, not their App Store pages. That is now done. (Thanks to Michael Tsai for handling this.)

As usual, I welcome any feedback on my list, or suggestions for additions. I won’t always add every suggestion, but I’ll look at them and evaluate whether they fit with what I’m trying to cover.

## Locally Installed GTD Applications

### [Action Tracker](#)



**Developer:** Mac Productive

**Current Version:** 1.3.1

**Price:** Free

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** FileMaker Pro (free Runtime version available)

**Distinguishing Features:** Also organizes notes, contacts, and other information related to projects.

**News:** None

### [ActionTastic](#)



**Developer:** Jon Crosby

**Current Version:** 0.9.3

**Price:** Free, open-source

**Development Status:** Beta

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** Yes

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Processing engine; iPod sync; Mail and MailTags compatibility.

**News:** None.

### [EasyTask Manager](#)



**Developer:** Orionbelt.com

**Current Version:** 2.1

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** Yes

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** App (free); Web App (free)

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Windows version available; automatic advance of uncompleted due tasks to today.

**News:** Tags are promised as a high priority in the next upgrade.

### [Frictionless](#)



**Developer:** Twin Forces

**Current Version:** 2.0d18

**Price:** Free, open-source

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Quick-entry box; fuzzy repeated actions.

**News:** None

### [Ghost Action](#)



**Developer:** Ghost Park Software

**Current Version:** 1.1

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** .Mac syncing (without iCal running); PDA/iPod syncing.

**News:** None

## [iGTD](#)



**Developer:** Bartek

**Current Version:** 1.4.5.6

**Price:** Free

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Compatible with Address Book, Mail, iSync, and MailTags, as well as Web browser support, Path Finder, Yojimbo, MacJournal, and others; quick-entry feature; simple yet powerful interface.

**News:** None.

## [iCog](#)



**Developer:** HensPace  
**Current Version:** 1.90  
**Price:** Free  
**Development Status:** Release  
**iCal Sync:** No  
**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No  
**Web-app Sync:** No  
**Print Lists:** Yes  
**iPhone Presence:** None  
**Required Applications:** Python 2.4 or later  
**Distinguishing Features:** Compatible with any OS running Python (including Windows); very simple text-only utility.  
**News:** A recent jump to version 1.9 includes a date bug fix and a Python maintenance issue, plus it adds support for plug-ins, thereby opening the door to user modifications.

### [mGTD](#)



**Developer:** Jeff Fisher  
**Current Version:** 1.3  
**Price:** Free  
**Development Status:** Pre-final  
**iCal Sync:** No  
**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No  
**Web-app Sync:** No  
**Print Lists:** Yes  
**iPhone Presence:** None  
**Required Applications:** Mori 1.6.11  
**Distinguishing Features:** Expands Mori (digital notebook) functions to include GTD principles.  
**News:** None

### [Midnight Inbox](#)



**Developer:** Midnight Beep Softworks

**Current Version:** 1.3.1

**Price:** \$35

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Action timer; quick-note and quick-action hot keys; Mail compatible; automatic data collection.

**News:** The latest OS version (10.5.6) causes a crash under certain circumstances; a bug-fix is promised.

## *OmniFocus*



**Developer:** Omni Group

**Current Version:** 1.5

**Price:** \$80

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

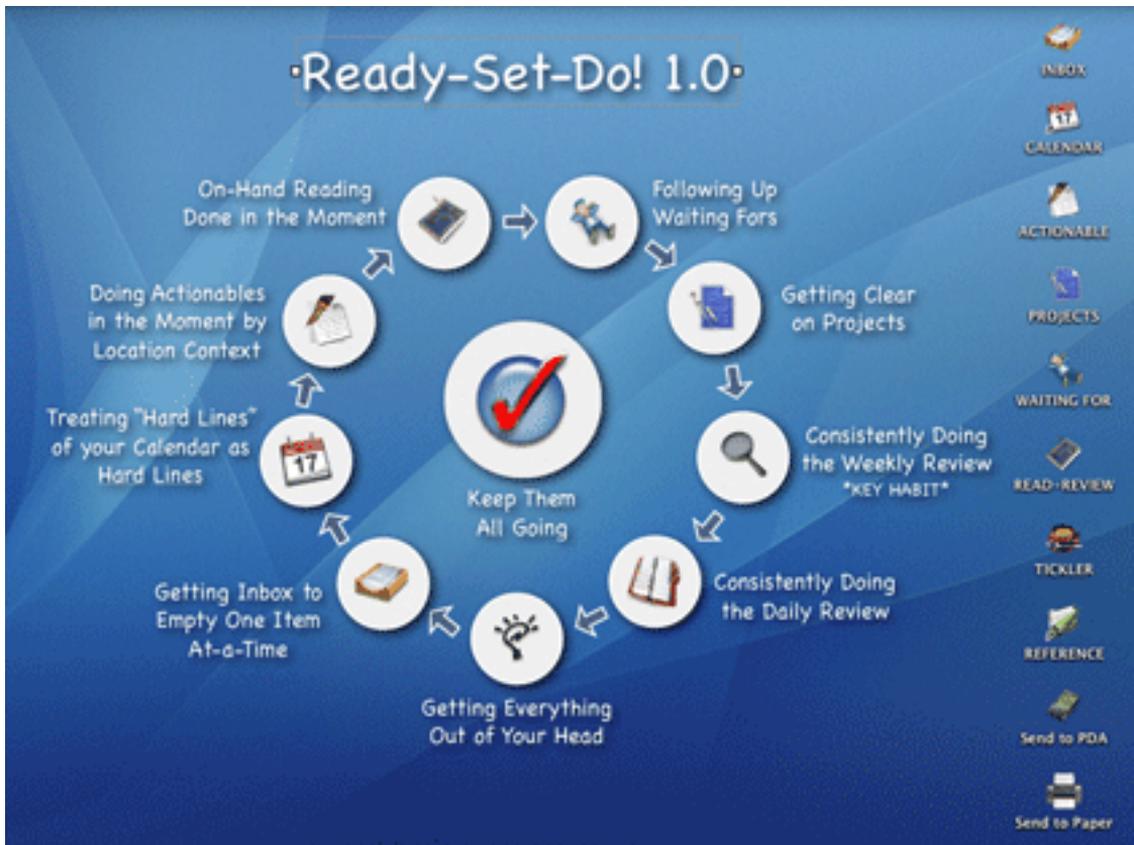
**iPhone Presence:** App (\$20)

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Mail- and Spotlight-compatible; simple interface with powerful view features.

**News:** Version 1.5 is now in full release, bringing interface improvements, Bonjour syncing, better archiving, and an improved ability for the database to self-maintain and repair.

## Ready, Set, Do!



**Developer:** Todd Vasquez

**Current Version:** 1.3f

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A very different approach using a set of AppleScript routines to impose organization and communication across a computer's entire file system; multiple language support.

**News:** The last 1.3 release, according to the developer—version 1.4 is on the way. 1.3f brings “speed and performance” improvement and some bug fixes.



**Developer:** Hog Bay Software

**Current Version:** 2.0

**Price:** \$19

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Simple, text-based system; no-frills, intentionally designed as an alternative to more fully featured systems.

**News:** New version 2.0 brings a system-wide quick entry window, AppleScript support, improved search, and a handful of other improvements.

## Things



**Developer:** Cultured Code

**Current Version:** 0.9.4

**Price:** \$50 (pre-release price of \$40 with sign-up for newsletter)

**Development Status:** Alpha

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** App (\$10)

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Features *will* include: iCal sync; repeating tasks; Mail compatibility; network and multi-computer operation; and import/export options.

**News:** Cultured Code has announced that Things 1.0 will be released at Macworld Expo on January 6, 2009.

## Thinking Rock



**Developer:** Avente Pty Ltd

**Current Version:** 2.0.1

**Price:** Free, open-source

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Cross-platform compatibility through Java; interactive collection and processing; can be run off of a flash-drive.

**News:** The developers have a new Web site, including “membership,” which apparently offers, at least, member-only modules for Thinking Rock.

## What To Do



**Developer:** Objective Satisfaction

**Current Version:** 1.3.2

**Price:** \$29

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Required Applications:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Drag-and-drop intensive for easy reorganization; .Mac syncing for multiple computers; XML export.

**News:** None

## Locally Installed General Task Managers

### Anxiety

**Developer:** Tom Stoelwinder, Model Concept

**Current Version:** 1.0

**Price:** Free/Donationware

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A menu-bar utility that gives a HUD-like interface to iCal tasks; sorts by calendar; Mac OS X 10.5 only.

**News:** None

### Check Off

**Developer:** Second Gear

**Current Version:** 3.8

**Price:** Free/Donationware

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A menu-bar utility that manages basic task lists; syncs with iPods; a .Mac Backup QuickPick is provided.

**News:** None

## Dejumble

**Developer:** Thinking Code Software, Inc.

**Current Version:** 1.2.b19

**Price:** \$19

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**iPhone Presence:** App (\$8)

**Distinguishing Features:** A simple yet powerful menu-bar style task list manager, with tags, groups, notes, and a handful of other options.

**News:** Beta development continues for the new version 1.2.

## Docket

**Developer:** Surprise Software

**Current Version:** 1.3

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A neat basic list management application. A Windows version is also available.

**News:** None

## Dolt

**Developer:** Jim McGowan

**Current Version:** 2.6

**Price:** Donationware

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** .Mac support and AppleScriptability. Also supports file attachments and categories for lists.

**News:** None

### **FlexCal**

**Developer:** flexgames

**Current Version:** 1.10

**Price:** Free/Donationware

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A task and event creator for iCal—something of a collection bucket for GTD users.

**News:** None

### **High Priority**

**Developer:** Aram Kudurshian

**Current Version:** 1.11 (Mac OS X 10.4 *only*)

**Price:** \$6 (personal); \$12 (family); \$60 (business)

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A system preference pane, creates a menu in the menu bar that lets you create and update your iCal tasks.

**News:** None

### **Hot Plan**

**Developer:** Intuiware

**Current Version:** 1.4.1

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Tracks a substantial amount of information about a given task, including completion status, priority, time remaining; supports tagging, color-coding, and locking of tasks. Also allows collection of URLs and files.

**News:** None

### [iClock](#)

**Developer:** Script Software

**Current Version:** 3.0.5

**Price:** \$20

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**Distinguishing Features:** Offers a menu bar–based method of managing task lists; includes .Mac syncing.

**News:** None

### [Life Balance](#)

**Developer:** Llamagraphics

**Current Version:** 5.0.2

**Price:** \$65 (\$80 bundled with Palm version)

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**Distinguishing Features:** Gives “meta-feedback” about tasks: how much time are you spending in different areas of your life (i.e., work, family, hobbies, etc.), and are you keeping it balanced? Palm and Windows versions available.

**News:** A [Life Balance iPhone app](#) is now available [through the App Store](#) for \$20.

## NoteBook

**Developer:** Circus Ponies

**Current Version:** 3.0

**Price:** \$50 (academic and family pack pricing available)

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** Yes

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**Distinguishing Features:**

**News:**

## Organized

**Developer:** iSlayer

**Current Version:** 1.11

**Price:** Donationware

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Dashboard widget with calendar events, tasks, notes, and world clock.

**News:** None

## Stapler

**Developer:** The Blue Technologies Group

**Current Version:** 1.1

**Price:** €7.50 (about \$10)

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Is a combination notepad and to-do list manager, with creation date, notes, and a check-box for completed items. Tasks can be color-coded based on a low-level preference set-up.

**News:** None

### [TaskMate](#)

**Developer:** Ryan Conway

**Current Version:** 1.1.0

**Price:** Free

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** No

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Ultra-simple task list: remaining tasks in a simple list, completed tasks in a drawer (which can be hidden). Tasks are just single-line descriptions with a checkbox. Could be right for the super-simplified life.

**News:** None

### [ToDo X](#)

**Developer:** Omicron Software Systems, Inc.

**Current Version:** 2.2

**Price:** \$15

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Import from iCal only

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** No

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** Offers categories, priorities, and attached notes.

**News:** None

## [ZooDo](#)

**Developer:** InterfaceThis

**Current Version:** 1.0

**Price:** Free

**Development Status:** Release

**iCal Sync:** Yes

**QuickSilver Plug-in:** No

**Web-app Sync:** No

**Print Lists:** Yes (through iCal)

**iPhone Presence:** None

**Distinguishing Features:** A basic task creator for iCal, serving as a collection bucket.

**News:** None

## **Browser and Web-based GTD Applications**

### [30 Boxes](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Lean and fast, including a calendar, task list, and limited Gmail interaction. Also RSS and iCal feeds, SMS, and sharing. Nice interface, too.

### [43 Actions](#)

**Price:** Free (donations get extra features)

**Description:** Specifically designed as an iPhone web-app, it's light and lean for EDGE network optimization. Submit inbox items via e-mail, Twitter (with donation), Jott (with donation), and the usual features.

### [GTDAgenda](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Another Web version of a GTD tool, with the standard features, plus addition of Goals, check-lists for recurring tasks, schedule management, and an iCal-compatible calendar. A mobile version is also available.

### [GTDInbox](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** A Firefox extension for GTD integration with Gmail. Prepackaged labels, a Review process, specialized searches within Gmail, quick-entry for tasks, and printable. Works well in conjunction with RememberTheMilk. Current version, 2.0.8.4, is open-source; requires Firefox.

### [GTD-PHP](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** A PHP solution designed to be locally installed. A simple tabbed interface, capture, and process stages; weekly review. Currently at version 0.8.

### [Neptune](#)

**Price:** \$10/year

**Description:** Includes a collection inbox and context or project task viewing panes, as well as inactive projects and tasks. Daily e-mail reminders of tasks; new tasks can be added by e-mail; data export.

### [Next Action](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Uses Google Gears and Firefox; has a lean, basic interface with multiple-list management capability. Works with or without a network connection.

### [Nexty](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** PHP-based, so it installs locally and runs in your browser; supports contexts and reminders.

### [Nozbe](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Has markers for which action will be next and a time estimation for tasks. Contexts are visible and identifiable. And it is easy to collect and process quickly. iPhone-ready.

### [SimpleGTD](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Tabs for next actions, contexts, projects, and done actions; drag-and-drop organization; easy un-doing of tasks.

### [Task Writer](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Easy keyboard navigation, good use of calendaring for tasks, and a useful set of attributes for tasks, as well as the ability to auto-hide unneeded list views, help Task Writer stand out a bit.

### [Toodledo](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** Has a Firefox plugin and a Google gadget for easy collection; also supports e-mail, voice mail, and traditional entry for collection. Includes a good overview of GTD in co-operation with its tools, as well. iPhone-optimized.

### [Tracks](#)

**Price:** Free

**Description:** A Web server that runs locally, or hosted through tracks.tra.in. Fast, lean, and pretty, it offers calendaring and a multi-user component. Currently at version 1.6.

### [Vitalist](#)

**Price:** \$5/month (premium)

**Description:** Is a wide-scale GTD system: collection, project management, recurring actions, and tickler files. Includes a mobile edition, iCal and RSS feeds, and e-mail and SMS reminders. An iPhone-specific version is available. A premium (paid) version also includes security encryption, collaboration, file attachments, and calendaring.

## Other Browser/Web-based Task Managers

- [Backpack](#)
- [Basecamp](#)
- [HiTask](#)
- [Hiveminder](#)
- [Joe's Goals](#)
- [Mojonote](#)
- [Remember the Milk](#)
- [Scribe](#)
- [Sproutliner](#)
- [Task Freak!](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Tasktoy](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Tweeto](#)
- [Zenlists](#)

- [ZenPages](#)

## **GTD and Task Management Wikis**

- [D3](#)
- [GTD TiddlyWiki](#)
- [MonkeyGTD](#)
- [Pimki](#)

## **iPhone Applications (not Web Apps)**

- [Chores](#),
- [Dejumble](#)
- [DoBot ToDos](#)
- [EasyTask Manager](#)
- [Life Balance](#)
- [Lists by MobilityWare](#)
- [Lists by Tynsoe.org](#)
- [My Lists](#)
- [OmniFocus](#)
- [Outliner by CarbonFin](#)
- [Tanjias Checklist](#)
- [Tasks](#)
- [Things](#)
- [ToDo by Appigo](#)
- [To Do by Erica Sadun](#)
- [Zenbe Lists](#)

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# Desktop Pictures

by Ken Aspeslagh, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/foobar>

## Ken Aspeslagh

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

### This Month's Desktop Pictures

This month's desktop photos were taken by Ken Aspeslagh in a variety of locations around the world.



[View Pictures](#)

### 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](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 Through 10.5.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.

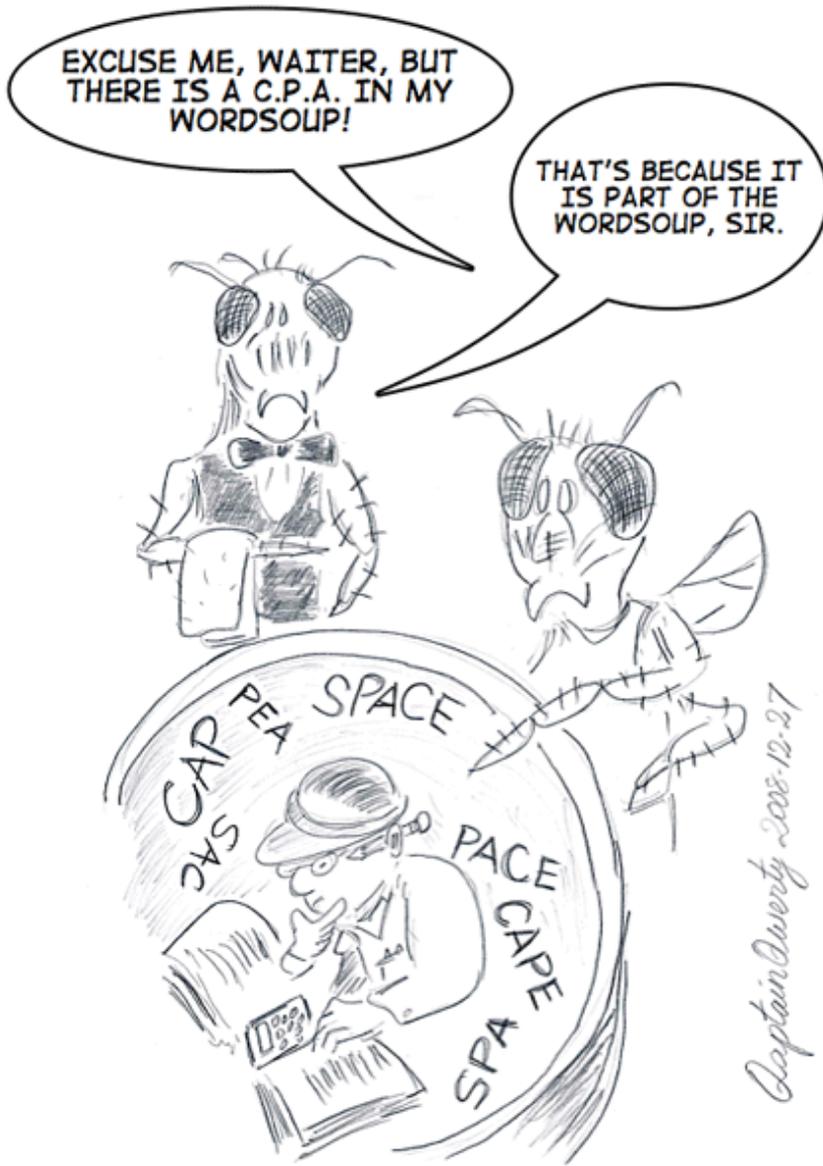
## **Mac OS X 10.0.x**

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.



# Qaptain Qwerty

by Linus Ly, <http://qaptainqwerty.blogspot.com>



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# Software Review

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

## Freeway Pro and Freeway Express 5.3.1

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

**Price:** \$249 (Pro); \$79 (Express); education/senior discounts available

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).

**Recommended:** Mac OS X 10.4.11 or later.

**Trial:** Fully-featured (30 days).



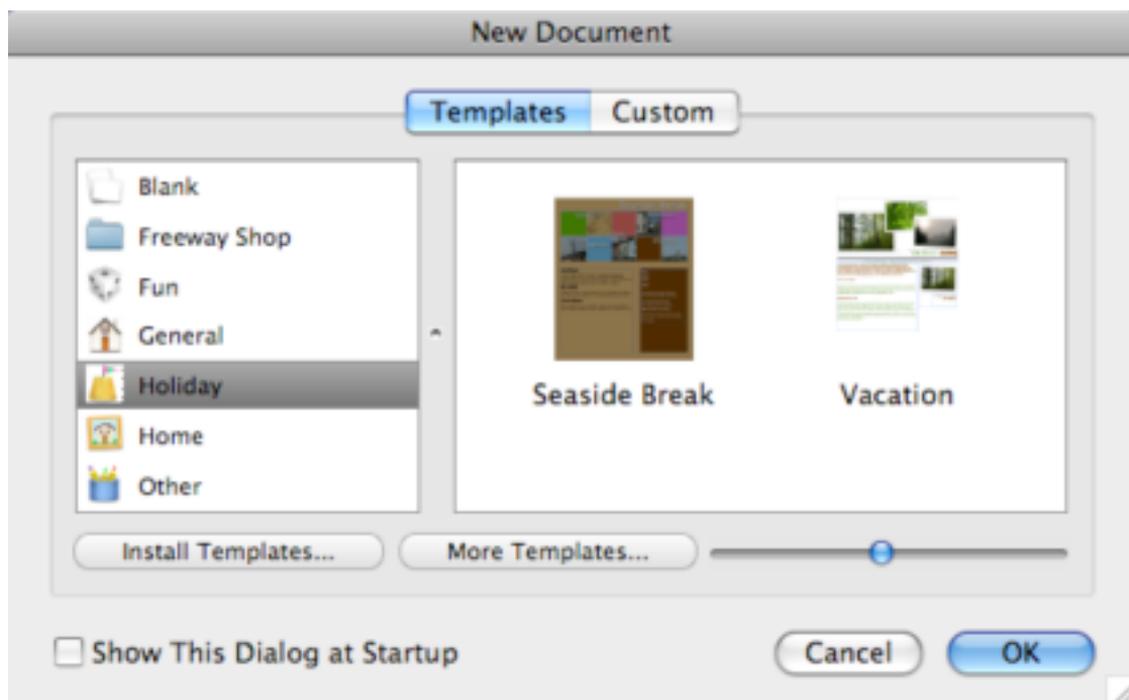
When the Internet tubes were still somewhat recently installed, I dabbled a bit in Web programming. (I still have a quick-reference version of *HTML 2.0 for Dummies* somewhere at the house.) I even figured out how to split a photo into multiple pieces, superimpose text over the top, and re-assemble the photo on a Web site with each piece as a button for a different page. I thought I was pretty smooth.

As programming for the Web matured, however, I quickly lost track of the standards, and while I know enough about *what* the different coded elements do, these days I have only the most basic idea of *how* these elements are coded and assembled into the Web sites of 2009. This isn't a problem, though. Even though I used to build Web sites using high-tech applications like TextEdit and WordPad, these days there are tools like Softpress's Freeway to help a guy build a Web site that utilizes all of the current standards and code, even if I couldn't tease out more than about 10% of what it means.

### Freeway Web Site Basics

Freeway works like many Web site authoring applications: you create a new site file, and it creates a package of content that contains each page within the site, images and media files, CSS files, and other supporting files. Whereas other applications (like Apple's iWeb or Realmac's RapidWeaver) bundle these packages together into a single proprietary file, Freeway automatically creates a new folder to house these files, with a single document within that folder that is the Freeway proprietary file. This is messier when it comes to Spotlight indexing and file management, but it is a more transparent and open system for storing the contents.

[To be fair: both iWeb and RapidWeaver packages can easily be "opened" in Finder to reveal the same contents so this isn't an inherent advantage for Freeway, but simply a difference in the manner of storage.]



Once you've asked Freeway to create a new file, it invites you to choose a template or customize your own page. Even if you plan to change it a good bit, the templates offer a useful starting point; I can see most users never using the "custom" option.

## Making It Your Own

Having chosen a template, then you're off. You'll be presented with the template and sample content, but everything—and I mean everything—is up for grabs.

Text, images, media, background elements—all are easily added, changed, adjusted, removed. Freeway includes a number of ways to customize text, and will export text as a GIF if necessary, to preserve font and style changes. Images are highly editable within Freeway, allowing rotation, scaling, cropping, and even skew adjustments; further edits can be applied directly (without reloading the image), even if done in an external editor.

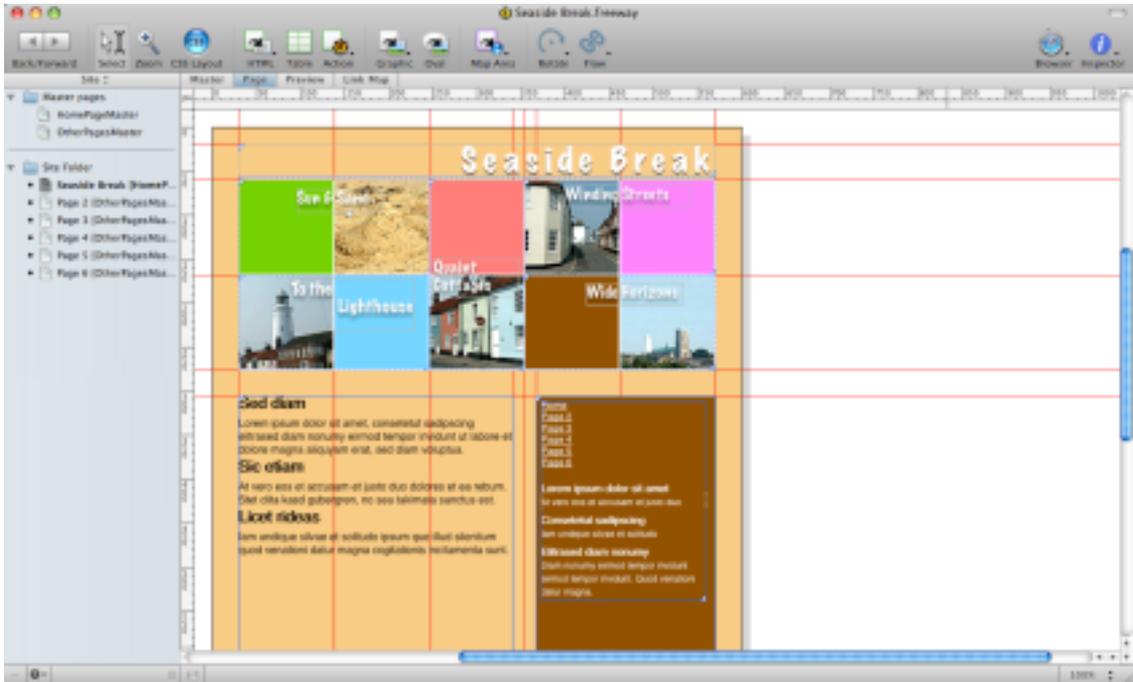
What is more, any part of the CSS can be altered simply, with an entirely graphical menu and dialog system. Honestly, this is reason enough for more serious users to go with Freeway; it's plain and easy to make substantial changes to CSS styles, then save them for future use.

There's a lot to Freeway, and that brings a somewhat steep learning curve. Fortunately, Softpress has provided a comprehensive user manual, as well as a good bit of tutorial online.

## Interface Mac-ness

Freeway felt familiar when I first opened it, but I couldn't place it—until I happened onto an old image I created back in college (back before the Internet tubes were open to the public) in Aldus Freehand. That's right—Freeway reminds me of a System 6 graphics application.

But I mean that in the best way: there's a harmony of simplicity and function that Freeway exudes, much like those early graphics tools. It is based on a layout/graphical concept, rather than the text-based structure that most Web development tools employ—you get grids, rulers, and alignment marks.



In many other ways, it also feels like a contemporary Mac program. It utilizes a two-pane view, with the files for the different pages of your site in a sidebar pane, while the main content is in the large primary pane. The toolbar across the top of the window—customizable, of course—is, again, like many Mac applications; easily identifiable buttons (for adding objects and other tools) pop down into menus, replicating the most common menu commands for quick access from the main window. And it utilizes an inspector for editing the properties of the documents and objects.

## iPhone Love

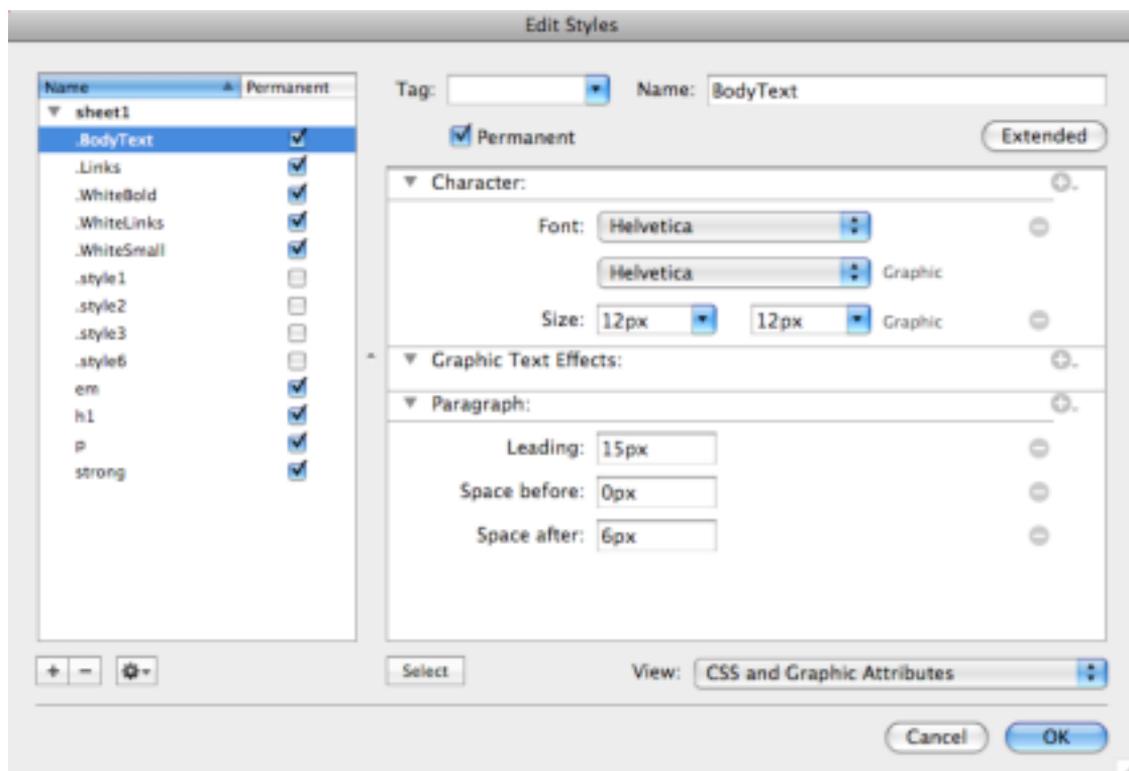
A recent update brought some love for iPhones—and those who want to develop Web sites that are friendly to them. It's a breeze to make your site totally iPhone-friendly, with scaling, telephone number detection, and redirection of surfers to the iPhone-specific pages on your site.

Also, if your site employs Flash video—which isn't supported by the iPhone—Freeway now offers a work-around: host both a Flash and a QuickTime version of the same video on the same page, so that iPhone users will be able to view the QuickTime version instead.

## Code Generation

In most Web development applications, bits of HTML, CSS, and other types of code are used as building blocks for Web sites. The genius of the application is, as much as anything,

the ability to connect all of these pieces together and filling in the blanks, producing a usable and reliable Web site.



Not so with Freeway. Here, the code is generated after the fact—in multiple varieties of HTML and XHTML. With Freeway Pro, a pure CSS Web site is an option. All of the code is very clean and tidy, and highly standards-compliant; it uploads easily through an FTP client—or use the FTP option built into Freeway, accessing your site’s server directly.

## Two Versions

Freeway comes in two versions that are quite distinct—if nothing else, by the price difference between them. Freeway Express is something of an entry-level version, while Freeway Pro is the full version.

You might think of the two as comparable in the same way that Adobe Photoshop Elements is comparable to Photoshop. You don’t lose the ability to create and edit Web sites with Freeway Express, but you don’t get the full array of tools and functions offered by the more elaborate and extensive Freeway Pro.

Freeway Pro offers more tools than Express: color and style management, text and image manipulation, graphics import and editing, more layout options, and a greater choice of actions (as well as the capacity to build and edit your own actions). It offers more function: evaluating accessibility, choosing output and coding options, and editing CSS styles and layouts more capably. If you want or need to have total control over the outcome of your Web site development, Freeway Pro is a must-have option for you.

Still, Freeway Express will turn out nice, customized Web sites that will meet many people's satisfaction. The question for many, I suspect, will be a matter of balancing need with price: do I need the extra features that the (much greater) price of Pro affords me? If the answer isn't immediately apparent, it wouldn't hurt to start with Freeway Express, as an upgrade path is offered from Express to Pro for \$169.

## A Strong Community

Both versions of Freeway make use of templates and actions heavily, so it is imperative that designers have access to a good collection of both in order to build the Web sites they want. Freeway comes stocked with a good start of both, but most Web sites will eventually require more variety than these.

Fortunately, there is a strong community of Freeway users and developers who have provided many templates and actions. While some of the templates make me chuckle or wonder, "What would that look be appropriate for?" it is easy to find a template that is versatile and useful for a variety of Web sites. Likewise, some of the actions evoked a comment of, "Wow—that's esoteric"; still, you should be able to find an action for just about any function you can imagine occurring on your Web site.

## Who's It For?

It's easy to come out comparing Freeway to iWeb—it is a point of reference that every contemporary Mac user has access to. The target audience for iWeb is the user who wants a no-fuss, quick-start Web site that makes up in ease of use and publishing what it lacks in features and customization.

Freeway *can* compete there, but I doubt that is who they are targeting—at least with Freeway Pro, and even with Express. Freeway is much more of a designer's tool, and as that it excels. Few designers are also deep coders, so offering something for a designer to put alongside Photoshop and InDesign—indeed, that even shares the feel of these applications modestly—is a great market to pursue, allowing the designer to single-handedly see his Web site into live status, without having to outsource the coding and configuration.

As such, I see Freeway much more as an alternative to GoLive or DreamWeaver, and marketed to smaller shops, individual designers, and consultants who want to offer Web development as a small part of their services, but not their exclusive focus. (Reference Softpress's Intaglio, a powerful but consumer-priced vector graphics editor, as a similar offering that affirms my hunches here.)

Comparing Freeway to its competitors furthers this inclination. One popular "iWeb alternative" is Realmac's RapidWeaver, which is similar to Freeway in some ways: template-based sites, built with pages that are user-configurable, and allowing a certain degree of flexibility and customization across the board. But whereas RapidWeaver wants to mimic iWeb in that it hides a lot of the layout and customizable "code" from the user, Freeway doesn't "hide" it—though it hasn't created the code yet. With Freeway, you get a lot more direct access to editing layout, (what will eventually be) code, and features. This requires a little bit

more “under the hood” knowledge, but it also allows a lot more when it comes to tailoring a Web site to your needs and wants.

## Problems and Complaints

Freeway’s interface is straightforward, and it isn’t difficult to navigate—if you’ve built a Web site before, or have some savvy about how they work, you’ll be able to find your way around in Freeway. Still, it isn’t quite what I would call “intuitive” to use, which separates it from a lot of Mac software regardless of some similarities. I mentioned the likeness to Aldus Freehand, and it mirrors Freehand in this way as well—not difficult to use, but not self-explanatory either, and a bit of intimidation strikes you if you aren’t at home in this type of application. Users looking for something that is essentially iWeb with more power will be frustrated with the learning curve of Freeway over something like RapidWeaver. (In their defense, I will say again that I don’t think the iWeb upgrader is the best market for Freeway, anyway.)

Freeway, like nearly all Web development applications, uses a proprietary format to store its files—and you have to use one of these to make changes to an existing site. No big deal, except that Freeway cannot import existing Web sites. There is no easy way to take a Web site that wasn’t developed with Freeway and begin to edit and maintain it via Freeway. Now, this is true of all modern Web site editors, and I’m not sure why; I do know that, should Softpress add this capability to Freeway, they would guarantee an expansion of their user base.

On a similar note, if you happen to be someone who *is* skilled with coding, the fact that Freeway generates code on output might be a problem for you. There’s no option of making subtle changes or adjustments while developing. This isn’t a problem if you don’t want to bother with code—but if you’re looking to tweak the CSS, for example, you must do it through the menus and dialog boxes, not through direct coding.

## Wrap-up

Freeway is an impressive package. I was pleasantly surprised at how powerful it was for producing highly-functional and complex Web sites, and at how the interface deployed like a design tool instead of a programming tool. I recommend it, especially considering the relatively low cost of entry (with Freeway Express at \$79) and the ease of upgrading, if necessary. If you’re a designer or consultant who needs to offer customized Web sites to clients, Freeway will fit right into your context. Likewise, businesses or organizations that want to keep such work “in-house” will find that it gets the job done well. If you like iWeb but want more power, Freeway might be a bit of a jump up for you, but that shouldn’t keep you from considering it.

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# Software Review

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

## ShoveBox 1.6

**Developer:** [Wonder Warp Software](#)

**Price:** \$25

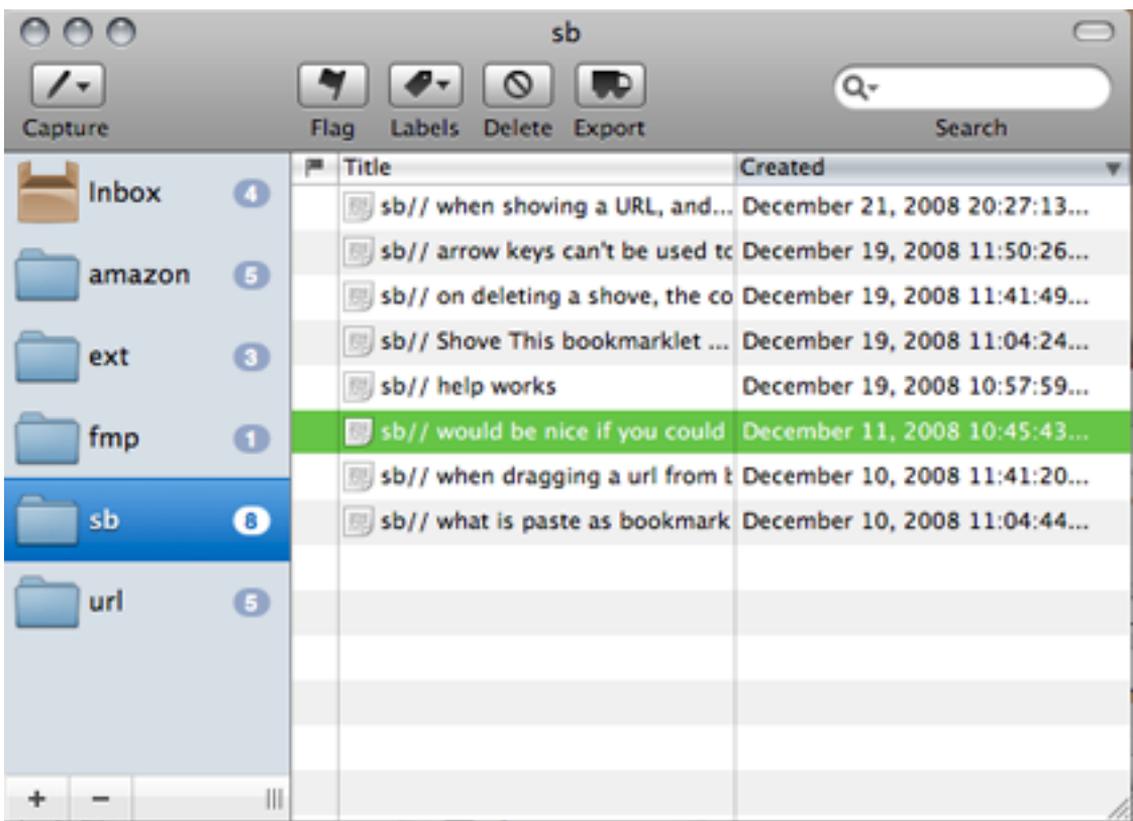
**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).

**Trial:** Fully featured (75 shoves).



A few years ago, I had a menu-bar application called URLwell installed on my computer. It was quite handy: if I had a URL I wanted to save but didn't want to bookmark, I could drag it to URLwell instead of cluttering up my desktop. Though it's still easy enough to find, URLwell has been abandoned. But you know what? That's okay because ShoveBox is much better.

ShoveBox can store URLs either as links or as Web archives (for offline viewing, for example). But it can also store other kinds of documents, such as text and images. An item can be saved to ShoveBox, or "shoved," in a number of different ways: you can drag-and-drop to the program's menu-bar icon, use the icon's Capture menu, or use any program's Services menu. In a Web browser, you can use a bookmarklet to shove the page you're viewing (if your browser settings allow JavaScript to run on that page). A user-definable hot key can also be used to shove the contents of the system's clipboard.



### The Organizer

Once an item has been shoved, it's stored in ShoveBox's Organizer, accessible from the menu-bar icon or via hot key. From there, you can view, delete, export, flag, label, and organize your shoves. By default, new shoves are stored in the Inbox, but you can create other folders and either drag shoves where you want or set up filters to keep your shoves organized automatically. At first I thought I'd only use ShoveBox for very temporary storage of URLs, but soon I found myself storing other things as well, and I was glad for the ability to keep things organized. I only wish there were a way to apply newly-created filters to the existing contents of the Inbox, to save me moving my earlier shoves manually.

While every shove can be viewed in the Organizer (and the ten newest shoves are accessible from the menu bar icon's "Recent Entries" submenu), you can also assign hot keys to individual shoves. A hot key can be used either to open a shove or to insert it into a document. It sounds useful, but in practice it's hard to find a good hot key. On my laptop, the function keys are taken by system functions like volume and brightness adjustment. And since ShoveBox hot keys override other programs' uses of those same key sequences, you have to pick a key sequence that you never use anywhere. Of course, the hot key also has to be memorable. For me, it's easier to use the Organizer.

Probably my favorite ShoveBox feature is QuickJot: hit a (user-definable) hot key and a small black window will pop up. Type a message, press Return, and it's stored in Shove-

Box. It's incredibly simple and convenient. Soon, I started prefixing my QuickJots with keywords—to be used for automatically sorting what I typed into an appropriate folder. Usually when I'm reviewing an application, I keep a notepad beside my computer so I can record my observations: but whenever I noticed something noteworthy about ShoveBox, I tapped Page Up and started typing. Soon I found I was using QuickJot for lots of notes I once had made on paper.

As I use Shovebox, I can't help finding some minor ways it could be improved. I assigned the Home key to open ShoveBox's Organizer, but once the window is open, I have to either press Tab or click with my mouse before I can navigate the organizer with arrow keys; it'd be nice if arrow keys would work right away. I also noticed that if I use the Delete key to delete an item from the Organizer, the count of shoves does not update right away. It should, as it does if I use the Delete button in the Organizer's window.

ShoveBox also has a few Leopard-only PDF issues. In Tiger, a PDF of any document can be saved to ShoveBox via the PDF button menu in the Print dialog box; it's a handy idea, but the "Save PDF to ShoveBox" item isn't available on either of my Leopard-based Macs. I also found one PDF which, in Leopard, displays only as a grey box when shoved and then opened with ShoveBox. Trying to export that PDF results in an error message. That means the shoved PDF is effectively lost. If ShoveBox is unable to handle a PDF, an error message should appear when I shove it, so I know it's not safe to delete the original.

About a week after I started using ShoveBox, my computer developed a (completely unrelated!) hardware problem and had to be taken away for repair. As I settled down to working on an old spare Mac, it took less than a day for me to miss the presence of ShoveBox in my menu bar. At first I shrugged it off: this is only a temporary machine—not worth installing something just for a few days. But it kept happening: I wanted ShoveBox and it wasn't there. So I went ahead and installed it.

This is a well-made and very useful program. Though it isn't perfect, its flaws are fairly minor. It's there when you want it, and it stays out of your way when you don't. Give ShoveBox a try, and soon it will become an integral part of your workflow.

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# Hardware Review

by Ed Eubanks, Jr.

## Vizor SUN

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

**Price:** \$120

**Requirements:** iPhone or iPhone 3G

**Trial:** None.



I've been frustrated with hands-free adapters for a long time. I've never been able to get the wired earbuds to stay in my ears comfortably (even Apple's included earbuds for the iPhone), and I've found the sound quality on wired sets to be poor (again, even Apple's, at least to a degree). I use a [Plantronics MX500C headset](#) in my office, and I saw that it makes an [iPhone-compatible model](#) (the MX510-X1). However, I was concerned about adequate volume while in the car, as I have a fairly noisy Isuzu Trooper. There are other issues, but I won't get into them here.

On the other hand, getting a wireless unit is something of a hit-and-miss enterprise. They are too pricy just to try out several, but not all are created equal in quality. Most of all, finding one that fits my ear in such a way that is, again, comfortable while still giving optimal sound quality, has been difficult. Even the lauded [Aliph Jawbone](#) (I have the original version), as good as the sound quality is, does not work as promised—it won't stay in place no matter which combination of buds and loops I try. (I even dabbled with having a [custom-molded earpiece](#) made for it but decided the additional \$69 was simply too much.)

### Hope Isn't Lost

My mother's car has a built-in Bluetooth setup, so that she can talk hands-free whenever she wants without plugging in or putting something in her ear. Perhaps this is the solution?

I looked around: there are several car kits available that don't permanently mount to the vehicle (which is what I wanted), but they get mixed reviews. The one that stood out is the Iqua Vizor SUN.



## Out of the Box

It's a simple setup—the Bluetooth unit, two different mounting options, and a car charging adapter. It also comes with instructions, which are printed in a wide variety of languages in very small type. (If you have difficulty with your vision, I recommend downloading the manual from the Iqua Web site and zooming in.)



The instructions recommend that the battery be charged for up to six hours before first use; mine took only about 45 minutes to reach full charge, but I had read stories of others who had difficulties because they didn't bother to charge it completely before use.

Once charged, it paired easily with my iPhone. You must follow the instructions to enter pairing mode, so you will need to read that fine print after all. Having paired it, I was eager to try it out.

## Truly Hands-free

Dialing from the iPhone, it immediately sent the signal to the Vizor SUN. The volume was reasonable, but as I accelerated I found it a bit low. Not a problem, as the Vizor SUN had more volume to offer than I needed. The sound quality is very good on my end and reportedly good on the other end as well. Even at highway speeds, I don't have difficulty

hearing the parties on the other end, though I do find myself talking louder than I might if I were using the Jawbone.



There are buttons on the VIZOR SUN: power, of course, volume, answer and hang-up, and mute. Call waiting can be controlled through these buttons as well. You can also program it with a favorite-number fast dial, and it will also redial the last number called. While it would be convenient if a small LCD displayed caller ID, the functions offered are more than adequate. (If your non-iPhone phone supports it, the VIZOR SUN also co-operates with voice dialing.)

One feature that makes it even better is the SUN part of VIZOR SUN: it has a built-in solar panel for charging, which offers at least the possibility that you may never need to charge it manually again. Depending on how you choose to mount it on your dash or visor, you might find that this feature is not as useful—but the option is nice. The way mine is set up, I haven't had to recharge yet.

The VIZOR SUN mounts magnetically to a clip that fits over your visor or to a strip that can be adhered to your dashboard (or any other flat, solid surface). The magnets are strong, and while the unit slides around on my visor clip a little, it hasn't fallen off. The button face is hinged, allowing it to be mounted above the visor (so that the whole unit is hidden) with the buttons neatly hanging on the front of the visor. If you do this, however, you will cover the solar charging panel completely and will have to charge it manually (or take it down and let it sit in the sun).



I've mounted mine beneath the visor, which allows it to slide around a bit, as I mentioned. But it also lets me flip my visor out when I park, charging the unit while I'm in my office or at home.

One small downside: VIZOR SUN automatically powers off when it has been idle for a while, which means I have to turn it on every time I want to use it. This is much less convenient than the sleep status that the Bluetooth ear sets I've had before have offered. It isn't a big deal, but something worth noting.

## Wrap-up

I'm pleased with my VIZOR SUN—it's been a good solution for my hands-free dilemma. The cost isn't much higher than a good Bluetooth ear set, but it offers freedom and ease of use that an ear set doesn't. Plus, I don't have to wear a Borg-like device on my head to talk in the car.

It doesn't have the mobility that an ear set offers. That's a non-issue for me; though I recognize that this would be a deal breaker for many. I could take it with me elsewhere—and if I should decide to use my iPhone for a group speakerphone conversation, it might be a great way to go. Otherwise, my hands-free needs are basically in the car.

For this, the VIZOR SUN is a strong option.

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# Software Review

by Linus Ly, [lly@atpm.com](mailto:lly@atpm.com)

## WordSoup 1.0

**Developer:** [Giant Crayon](#)

**Price:** \$10

**Requirements:** Mac OS X 10.4. [Universal](#).

**Trial:** Feature-limited (only 15 words).



I love word games and have wasted, er, spent, many hours with the many offerings Facebook has. When I found out about Giant Crayon's WordSoup game, I figured I would give it a shot, in case I need it when my Facebook friends are not around. With so many Facebook word games out there, WordSoup has a challenging task to prove its value.

### Installation

WordSoup downloads as a disk image, and installation is simply a matter of dragging the application file to the hard drive. Registration is required to use the game outside of the demo mode, and it can be troublesome. When I entered my registration name, e-mail address, and then serial number, I got a cryptic error message, something about "an unknown error" and "Error = -2003." I had to install the latest eSellerate Install Engine, which is used for registering the software. That resolved the -2003 error, but then I got a new error, -25011. Luckily, tech support correctly pointed out that the new error stemmed from my account not having write access to the folder `/Library/Application Support/MindVision`. I discovered that said folder was created in 2005 and was owned by my 8-year-old son's account. I probably used his account to install some software that happened to also use the eSellerate engine.

In my experience using Mac software, it is too common that when an application is installed only the current user has access to it. In the least annoying scenarios, I usually have to re-enter registration information for my son's account to work with the games. In other cases, I have to update permissions on a certain package to give my son access. Snapz Pro X, for example, offers to make itself available to all users on the computer. Why can't all the applications work that way? Well, back to WordSoup, the game itself.

### Game Play

WordSoup is probably geared toward little kids as the game interface is basically a green chalk board. You are given letters on yellow sticky notes with which you form words, three letters or longer. Words are formed by dragging the letters onto a line above them, then clicking the icon for the Enter key. Acceptable words would appear in the possible word list. If the word is not acceptable it just sits there and nothing happens, no error-sounding

noise whatsoever. Decent typists can just type them and press Enter. The letters can be scrambled to help you form words that you may miss. You earn points for the words you find. To advance to the next level, you must form the longest word possible with the given letters, which is called the mystery word. When you lose, if your score is higher than the preset top ten, you get to add your name to the High Score list.



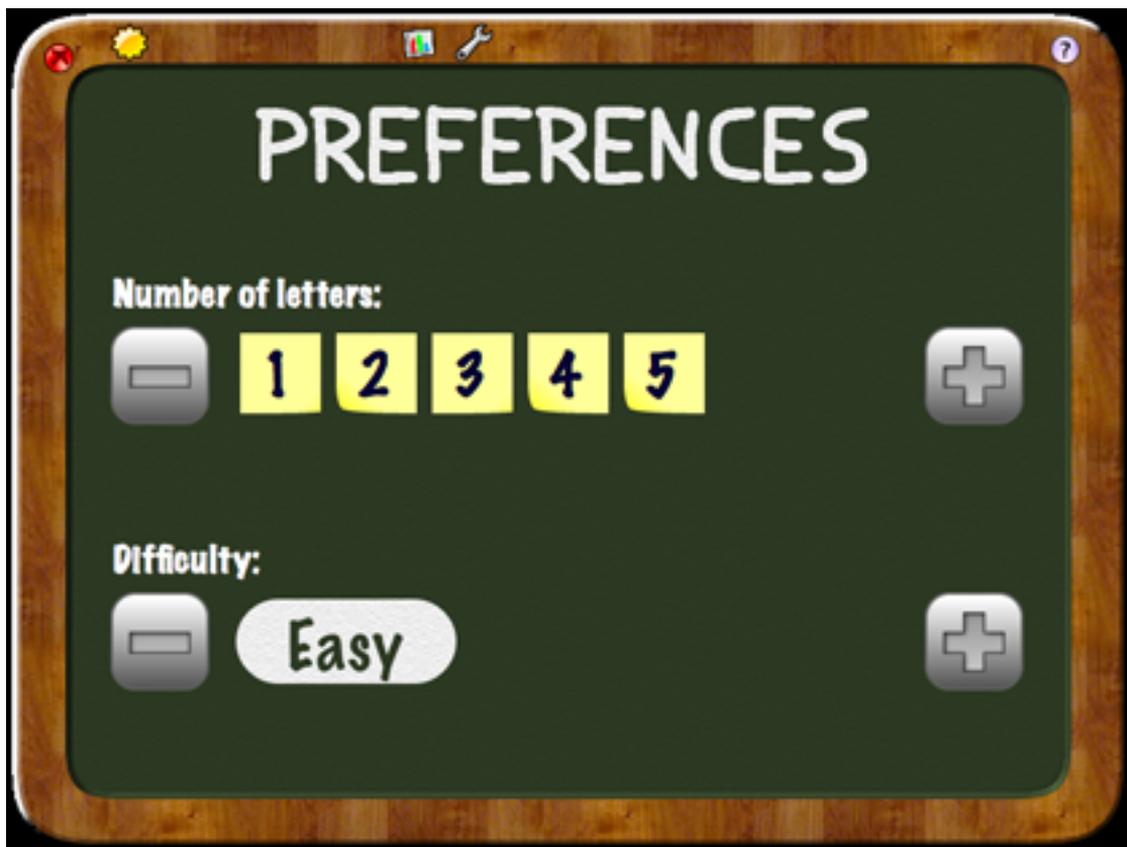
Individual Retirement Account or Irish Republican Army?

That is all there is to the game. No fancy background or custom graphics, no soothing or heart-pounding music. Animations include the letters being written, the yellow stickies flying into place when you type, or moving around when you shuffle them by pressing the spacebar. Sound effects include an exclamatory “ta-da” when you get the mystery word, clock ticking when time almost runs out, and the sound of scraping chalk as the letters are written.

You don’t get to create different players to better keep track of the High Score list. The Giant Crayon Web site mentions “Look up new words as you play,” but I haven’t found any way to do that within the game. There are only a handful of items along the edge of the chalk board to click on: Quit, New Game, High Score, Preferences, and Help. The pull-down menu has the extra Show Game command, in case you want to peek at the High Score list in the middle of the game and then need to get back to the game.

Another advertised feature that I also cannot find is “Make your own wordlist.” I suppose from the Finder I could select Show Package Contents on the single file that comprises the game, navigate to the proper text file, and then add words to it via TextEdit. But for a simple game to advertise such a feature, I expect to find a button within the game to do the job.

There is little to tinker with in the Preferences panel as well. You can increase the number of letters thereby making the mystery word harder to guess. You can also choose a difficulty level: Easy, Normal, or Hard. The only difference between the levels is the amount of time allowed. I think it is perfectly fine to have that little control over the game. However, I really wish there were a mute option for the annoying sound of chalk scraping. Sure, I can mute system-wide, but I do not want to miss out on alert sounds for new e-mail or a low laptop battery.



I could really use a mute checkbox.

You may love the English language for its present participle, past tense, and plural words, because at times they help you string together words of just the right length to score big. You don't have such luxury with WordSoup, which uses the 12dicts Wordlist. You cannot use words like *banging*, *aged*, or *reaches*. On the other hand, you are expected to enter acronyms like IRA and CPA. After spending much time with WordScramble and the

Scrabble clone, Wordscraper, on Facebook, it is a very difficult adjustment to make while playing WordSoup.

## Conclusion

WordSoup is a hard sell. It is simple to play, but then so are many free Web applications. Sites like Yahoo Games and Big Fish Games offer both free online and paid offline versions of many games. The paid versions have extras like full screen and different playing modes. Full screen is an important feature to me as, if possible, I like to compute without my nearsighted glasses. Different playing modes, like Blitz or Strategy, offer something for everyone.

The free versions are simple like WordSoup but are usually served with advertisements. Similarly, the word games on Facebook are presented along with ads, but they are comparable with the paid games in terms of features. If WordSoup really supports custom word lists and word lookup, it would stand apart from the many free word games on the Web. Unless you really hate to see ads for Invisalign and American Lasers Center (“Tired of Waxing?”), stick with Facebook games and such.

The 15-word demo of WordSoup is free to keep, so you can also give it a try. Perhaps you’ll find that it meets your needs. For me, the list of acceptable words is unacceptable, the absence of a way to mute the sound of scraping chalk is annoying, and the lack of variety in the game makes it unenjoyable.

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# FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

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[Back issues](#) of *ATPM*, dating since April 1995, are available in DOCMaker stand-alone format and as PDF. In addition, all issues since *ATPM* 2.05 (May 1996) are available in HTML format.

## What If My Question Isn't Answered Above?

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

