



MAC FACTS

from

Mac Help Desk

SUPPORT, SALES, TRAINING & SERVICE

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A Message from Dru

May the luck of the Irish be upon you and yours. In the words of the poet: May you be dead and gone an hour before the Devil knows you're in Heaven. Have a safe and 'not altogether too' sober St. Paddy's Day.



The Spring fests are here again. For those who celebrate and observe –Happy Easter! He is Risen!



Thanks for the great comments from those that saw my segment on LoadPod (<http://www.loadpod.com>) on NBC 5 news last week. If you missed it, check out the Mac Help Desk web site (<http://www.machelpdesk.com>). Go to the 'Files and Fun Stuff' page. Hopefully the spot will be posted by the weekend.



Although the Apple Corps of Dallas' (<http://www.acd.org>) monthly meeting was last weekend, for those who couldn't attend, there was great presentation on computer security. You can go to their web site and download the presentation on to your computer for FREE! [To show you how good it was, I went out and bought a paper shredder!]

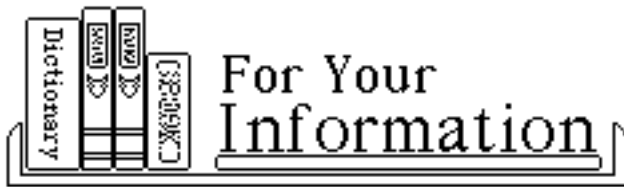


Last month we introduced our Insta-Tech service. So far the response has be astounding. Many have found out (or are finding out) that the ability for me to repair your computers from afar is a great way to save both time and money. For those who missed last month's MacFacts, here's the skinny on Insta-Tech:

What's Insta-Tech? Using the power of OS X and Virtual Network Connection (VNC) software we can repair your computer - just as if we were sitting right in front of it - from our office.

With less time and fewer resources than ever before, individuals, businesses, and IT professionals need to solve computer and software problems as quickly as possible. With VNC, we can analyze, troubleshoot, diagnose and resolve your problems – from across town or across the country.

How Do I Start? Simple, call Dru at 972-783-9787 or e-mail us at machelpdesk@comcast.net and we'll take it from there. Simple!



The Dreaded Spinning Pinwheel; Avoiding Unresponsiveness/Slow-Downs In Mac OS X

Patience may be a virtue, but in the case of Mac OS X's dreaded spinning pinwheel process indicator (*a.k.a. - the spinning beach ball of death; a.k.a. - the spinning pizza of doom - Ed*), even the most tranquil users can find themselves more than a tad anxious for the standard arrow cursor to re-appear and normal system operation to appear.

While virtually all users will experience a spinning pinwheel (and associated unresponsiveness from a specific application, a group of applications or the entire system) from time to time, there are a number of measures you can take to lessen the occurrence of these incidents and eliminate standstills.

Buy more RAM - The primary cause for overall slowness in Mac OS X and unresponsiveness from applications is a lack of adequate memory. For most users, 512 MB is the amount of RAM at which most unresponsiveness and spinning-wheel sessions dissipate. In other words, 384 MB of RAM may leave you in a lurch, while 640 MB of RAM won't provide a huge speed increase over 512 MB.

As an application uses up available RAM, Mac OS X's virtual memory system allocates swap file space on the root file system (your startup disk) for use by the application. With too little physical RAM, this swapping will occur more frequently resulting in two consequences:

- Since all mass storage devices (hard drives, flash memory, etc.) are significantly slower at moving data in and out than physical RAM, applications will suffer a significant speed hit and stall more often.
- Your startup drive will be more occupied with providing virtual memory services to Mac OS X than performing its normal functions (reading/writing files), resulting in slower disk activity and overall lackluster performance. This is also referred to as "disk thrashing."

If you are buying a new Mac, make sure it is equipped with at least 512 MB from the factory, or purchase additional memory modules from a trusted vendor and install them once your system arrives. If you're currently running a Mac OS X system with less than 512 MB of RAM and experiencing frequent slow-downs, consider adding more memory.

Make sure you have enough free space on your startup volume - Mac OS X requires at least 10 percent of the volume it is contained on as free space in order to maintain the integrity of the file system. However, even with 10 percent free space, Mac OS X's use swap files - as well as extra data generated by third-party application caches, etc. - can quickly put you back into a position of possible directory/file damage and increased incidence of spinning pinwheels.

Realistically, 20 percent of your Mac OS X startup volume should be kept clear in order to achieve best performance and avoid disk problems.

Delete problematic .plist files - Mac OS X uses .plist (preference) files to store various information about applications. Applications routinely interact with their respective .plist files, and

when these small docket files become corrupt, individual programs may be more prone to the spinning pinwheel.

If you are having these slow-down issues with a specific application, try deleting its .plist file. It will generally be located in the Home Folder/Library/Preferences folder, and labeled as follows:

com.(name of developer).(name of product).plist
[For example - *com.adobe.Reader7.0.plist* - for Adobe Reader 7.0].

Simply drag the potentially offending .plist file to the trash, re-launch the hampered application, and check for continuation of problems. In some cases, applications will have several .plist files, so make sure you check for any that contain the product name. Also, note that you may lose some settings or other personal data used by specific applications when these files are deleted.

Alternatively, if you're not sure which application is slowing down your Mac or you'd like to check for any existing, but unnoticeable issues, there is a freeware utility called "[Preferential Treatment](http://www.versiontracker.com/dyn/moreinfo/macosx/22790)" [http://www.versiontracker.com/dyn/moreinfo/macosx/22790] that will check for some elements of .plist file corruption.

Limiting the number of open applications - If you aren't able to purchase additional memory, or if your system continues to experience routine slow-downs despite the presence of adequate RAM, try limiting the number of open applications.

Every open application, even if it is not performing any noticeable tasks, uses a portion of the Mac OS X virtual memory block. Closing unnecessary or infrequently used applications can therefore result in a reduction of spinning-wheel episodes.

More uptime, more stalls: Restart more often - Although Mac OS X was designed to run 24 hours a day without a restart and does so well in most cases, some user set-ups may - for varying reasons - benefit from more frequent restarts.

Dealing with most notorious culprit: Safari - The application implicated in far more spinning-wheel stall instances than any other is Apple's own Safari. Since Safari is tied to so many critical and shared components of Mac OS X - the WebKit, Java, QuickTime, etc. - this is somewhat expected. That said, there are a few workarounds that can lessen this behavior.

Disable AutoFill forms A number of user cases have shown that disabling the automatic form filling feature in Safari's preferences can dramatically reduce the number of stalls. In order to do this, open the preferences pane in the "Safari" menu, click on "AutoFill" and de-select all of the available options.

Use keyboard shortcuts instead of mouse clicks - For reasons unknown, Safari is sometimes more prone to stalls when mouse clicks are used to perform actions like closing windows or moving to different text boxes on Web forms. Using keyboard shortcuts instead (Command-W to close a window, or the tab key to move between form fields) has been shown to avoid this particular type of problem.

Perform an Archive and Install process - As a last resort, performing an *Archive and Install* process will sometimes eliminate inexplicable stalls that may be due to file corruption.

The process will remove all of your current Mac OS X version's vital (and potentially problem-causing) components, and replace them with the components of a fresh copy provided by the Mac OS X disc that shipped with your system, or a retail Mac OS X disc. Unfortunately, this means you will lose some system settings and some or all third-party system add-ons.

Of course, inside Microsoft this looks like a brilliant strategy. But the inevitable result of Microsoft's decision is to hurt users and competitors alike.

Look how this decision transforms Microsoft. By choosing to no longer support a long list of products (is that even legal?), hundreds and perhaps thousands of developers will be switching to new duties. If this were any other company, I would predict layoffs, but a key strategy for Microsoft is hiring the best people simply to keep them from working elsewhere, so I don't think layoffs are likely. What IS likely is an exodus of voluntary departures. What's also likely is that those hundreds or thousands of reassigned developers will be moved to some other doomsday product - something else for us to eagerly anticipate or fear.

I doubt that the extra labor will be shifted to Longhorn - the next version of Windows - simply because Longhorn has suddenly become less strategic to Microsoft. Tired of waiting for an ever-retreating ship date, the new decision to release a new version of IE for XP/SP2 makes Longhorn less necessary to Microsoft.

Remember that the objective of any Microsoft product upgrade is to stimulate sales. There are two ways to stimulate sales - forcing users to pay for software upgrades or forcing users to pay for hardware upgrades that carry software upgrades with them. The new anti-virus and anti-spyware products perform the former function for current users of Win98, ME, and 2000, while the impending new version of IE 7 will perform the latter function for many of those same users (again) as well as for the rest of us who are already using XP/SP2. That's ANOTHER \$20 billion, again most of it pure profit, and again, all of it coming from us.

I don't blame Microsoft for their behavior - they simply can't help it. It would have been nicer had they taken the course of improving Windows to make it less vulnerable - a course that itself would have stimulated sales, though not as much - but that isn't in their corporate DNA.

But I think this approach is shortsighted not only because it is disrespectful to customers, but also because it means a large segment of users who see themselves as having to get new hardware might well consider abandoning Windows at the same time.

Enter in this drama two new characters - Intel and IBM - with Intel playing the jester.

Look at the top end of the PC market, where profit margins are thickest, and you'll notice that there are lots of servers and workstations running multiple Intel processors and hardly any running multiple AMD processors. Why is that? Why, just this week, did Dell first suggest that it might start making PCs with AMD processors then reaffirm its commitment to Intel? In order to protect its most valuable market, Intel has been essentially paying OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) not to use AMD chips. This is done through the allocation of Market Development Funds (MDF) - essentially a kickback to the OEM. MDF pays for marketing and pays for retail shelf space. Threatening to withhold MDF is what keeps retailers from deviating from suggested pricing. In this case, a big chunk of MDF from Intel came with the strong hint that 8-way Opterons are not a good idea, so we simply haven't seen them. And this week's feint from Dell toward AMD I'm sure resulted in a further Intel cashectomy.

In the case of IBM, I'm told, that bounty for not building multi-Opteron systems has been funneled into Cell Processor workstation and server development.

Here is where I guess I'm updating some of the information from last week's Cell Processor column. I mentioned in passing IBM's Cell workstation only to hear this week from some people who have seen prototypes. Those (9 nanometer) prototypes were running both SUSE Linux and IBM's own AIX and represent IBM's post-Lenovo micro strategy.

First the performance numbers, which I am told are comparable to systems running a pair of Xeon processors, which would cost roughly \$3,000 from Dell. IBM's price point, however, is \$1,000.

The IBM hardware strategy is to sell a box that contains no Microsoft code at all, and so requires no license payments to Microsoft and possibly no license payments to ANY company, including Intel.

If you are a CIO facing the forced upgrading of half or more of your PC-installed base immediately and probably the other half a year later, the opportunity to move away from Microsoft and toward IBM while saving money at the same time has to be compelling. If you are a home user in the same position, you'll feel the same way.

This won't put Microsoft out of business by any means, but it does take some of the profit out of the forced-march upgrade cycle. It certainly will hurt Intel. And it will be yet another sign of the fragility of Microsoft's monopoly that Bill Gates worries about so much.

But in this case, Bill has only himself to blame.



NEWSLINE



Courtesy of Apple

Apple Unveils New iPod mini Starting at Just \$199

Apple® unveiled the second generation iPod® mini lineup with a new 4GB model priced at just \$199 and a new 6GB model with 50 percent more storage priced at \$249. Both iPod mini models feature increased battery life of up to 18 hours , USB charging and an ultra-portable, lightweight design available in four vibrant colors.

“The iPod mini is now available at the magic price point of \$199,”

said Steve Jobs, Apple’s CEO. “At this breakthrough price point, and with more than twice the battery life, the new iPod mini should appeal to even more music lovers.”

iPod mini works effortlessly with Apple’s iTunes®, providing music lovers with access to the iTunes Music Store, the number one digital music service in the world. iPod mini features Apple’s patent-pending Auto-Sync which works seamlessly with iTunes to automatically download an entire digital music library onto iPod mini with just one click, keeping it up-to-date whenever iPod mini is plugged into a Mac® or Windows computer using USB 2.0. In addition to keeping the iPod mini up-to-date, plugging directly into the USB 2.0 port will also conveniently charge the iPod mini-so,

one connection does it all.

Apple's iPod, the iTunes jukebox and the iTunes Music Store are leading the digital music revolution. With over 10 million iPods sold to date, the iPod is the world's most popular digital music player, and the iTunes Music Store is the number one online music store with over 70 percent market share. The new iPod mini is a member of Apple's wildly popular iPod family for both Mac and PC which includes the fourth generation iPod, the iPod photo, the iPod U2 Special Edition and iPod shuffle.

Pricing & Availability

The 4GB and 6GB models of iPod mini for Mac or Windows are available worldwide immediately for a suggested retail price of \$199 (US) and \$249 (US) respectively, in a choice of silver, pink, blue or green through the Apple Store® (www.apple.com), Apple's retail stores and Apple Authorized Resellers. iPod mini includes earbud headphones, a belt clip case, a USB 2.0 cable, and a CD with iTunes 4.7.1 for Mac and Windows computers.

An optional USB power adapter is available for \$29 (US) which easily charges iPod mini when traveling. Other accessories include the iPod Dock for \$39 (US) for desktop syncing and charging, in-ear headphones for \$39 (US), an arm band for \$29 (US), a lanyard for \$19 (US) and FireWire® cable for \$19 (US). Laser engraving is available for iPod mini for free from the Apple Store (www.apple.com) and can include two lines of text with up to 23 characters per line.

iPod mini requires a Mac with a USB 2.0 port or FireWire* and Mac OS® X version 10.2.8 or 10.3.4 or later; or a Windows PC with a USB 2.0 or FireWire port, or USB 2.0 or FireWire card and Windows 2000, with Service Pack 4 or later, or Windows XP Home or Professional with Service Pack 2 or later.

All iPods include rechargeable batteries which have a limited number of charge cycles and may eventually need to be replaced. Battery life and number of charge cycles vary by use and settings. See www.apple.com/batteries for more information.

*Firewire options require an optional cable, sold separately.



The Apple Bloggers Must Name Their Moles

By David Litterick

Computer giant Apple has won the first stage of its legal battle to force three online reporters, or bloggers, (i.e. Web loggers) to reveal who gave them secret information about the company's new products.

The company launched the fight in December last year after details of a new product - codenamed "Asteroid" - appeared on a number of websites before they had been announced by Apple.

The three individuals had claimed they were covered by laws that grant journalists the constitutional right to protect their sources.

But a California judge ruled it was irrelevant whether they were journalists or not, saying they had effectively stolen trade secrets. Apple is now entitled to see the e-mail records from the three bloggers to uncover which employee has been leaking the information.

Californian laws protect journalists from prosecution if what they are writing about can be shown to be in the public interest. But Judge James Kleinberg said: "An interested public is not the same as the public interest".

Apple is notoriously secretive about its upcoming products.



Thanks for taking the time to read this month's newsletter. Hope you enjoyed it. If you have any comments or suggestions for stories (or would even like to write a story - hint, hint, hint), please send them to me at machelpdesk@comcast.net. Feel free to share this newsletter with a friend. The newsletter archives are located at <http://www.machelpdesk.com/page6a.html>. Y'all come back now, y'hear.