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1

Introduction

Mac computers are renowned for their ease-of-use, stability and security, with good reason.

They are an excellent option for anyone, particularly senior users, since they usually do exactly what is required of them. This chapter introduces the range of Macs and shows how you can add your own personalization.

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Life and Times of Apple

Apple, the makers of Mac computers, was founded in California in 1976 by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne. Originally called Apple Computer the initial emphasis of the company was very much on personal computers. After some innovative early machines, Steve Jobs decided that the next Apple computer had to have a Graphical User Interface (GUI). This is a computer that can be controlled by the user with a device such as a mouse or a joystick. In many ways this was the breakthrough that has shaped the modern face of personal computing.

The first Macintosh computer, using a GUI, was released in 1984. The sales of the first Mac were good, particularly because of its strength using graphics and for desktop publishing. However, shortly afterwards Steve Jobs left Apple which was the beginning of a downturn for the company. Although the introduction of the first PowerBook was a success, the increasing development of Microsoft Windows and IBM-compatible PCs became a real threat to the existence of Apple.

The rise of the iMac

During the 1990s, Apple experienced several commercial setbacks and the company was in trouble. However, shortly afterwards Steve Jobs returned to Apple and in 1998, the iMac was launched. Apple had always been known for its stylish design but the iMac took this to a new level. With its all-in-one design and bright, translucent colors it transformed people's attitudes towards personal computers.

The iMac got Apple back on its commercial feet and this was followed in 2001 by the iPod, a portable digital music player. Like the iMac this caught the public's imagination and Apple have exploited this with dramatic effect with the addition of products such as iTunes, iPhone, iPad and their OS X operating system. The death of Steve Jobs in October 2011 created a potential challenge for Apple but his legacy, in terms of the range of innovative products that he introduced, has left it strongly positioned in the market.

Don't forget



Mac users are usually very devoted to the Apple brand and support it with very enthusiastic fervor.

Choosing a Mac

As with most things in the world of technology there is a wide range of choice when it comes to buying a Mac computer. This includes the top of the range Mac Pro, which is a very powerful desktop computer, to the MacBook Air, which is a laptop that is thin enough to fit into an envelope (if required!). In between these two extremes are a variety of desktops and laptops that can match most people's computing needs. For the senior user some of the best options are:

Desktop

As a good, all-purpose, desktop computer the iMac is hard to beat. This is the machine that helped to turn around Apple's fortunes in the 1990s and it remains one of their most popular computers.

The iMac is a self-contained computer which means the hard drive and the monitor are housed together as a single unit. There are a variety of models that offer different levels of computing power and different monitor sizes. At the time of writing, all models have a DVD writer and come with wireless connectivity for connection to the Internet.

Another desktop option is the Mac Mini, which is a smaller, cheaper, computer that consists of just the hard drive. This means that you have to buy the mouse, keyboard and monitor separately. This is a reasonable option if your computing needs are mainly email, the Internet and word processing. For anything more, the iMac is a better option.

Laptop

More and more people are using laptops these days, as mobile computing takes over from static desktops. In the Mac range, the MacBook is probably the best all-round option. Although not as powerful as the iMac, it has enough computing power for most people's needs. The MacBook Pro is aimed at the business market and the MacBook Air, designed with revolutionary thinness, is aimed at the consumer market for those on the move.

Don't forget



All new Macs come with the latest Mac operating system pre-installed. At the time of writing this is OS X (pronounced 10), or 10.7 to be precise, known as Lion (see next page for details).

Don't forget



If you plan on traveling a lot with a laptop, the MacBook Air may feel a bit too slight due to its very thin design. However, it is surprisingly robust.

The Mac Operating System

The Mac operating system (the software that is the foundation of how the computer works) is known as OS X (pronounced 10). This is now on version 10.7, which is more commonly known as Lion.

Apple is renowned for designing operating systems that are easy to use, robust and more secure than their Windows-based PC counterparts. The OS X operating system is based on UNIX, a system that is both secure and has stood the test of time.

OS X is not only easy to use it also has a very attractive graphical interface. This is created by a technology known as Quartz and the interface itself is known as Aqua, which is a set of graphics based on the theme of water.

The OS X Lion interface is immediately eye-catching as soon as any Mac is turned on:

Don't forget



The design of the OS X interface means that some elements, such as menus, allow the background behind them to show through.

Hot tip



To find out more about your current operating system, click on the Apple symbol at the top left of the screen and click on About This Mac.



Ports and Slots Explained

Every Mac computer has a number of ports and slots for different functions to be performed or additional devices to be attached.

DVD/CD slot

This is the slot into which DVDs or CDs can be inserted to play their content. It can also be used to burn content onto blank DVDs or CDs. This slot is at the side or front of the computer, depending on the type and model of the Mac.

USB ports

These are the ports that are used to connect a variety of external devices such as digital cameras, memory card readers, pen drives or external hard drives. On most Macs there are a minimum of two USB ports.



Don't forget



USB stands for Universal Serial Bus.

Firewire ports

These are similar to USB ports but they are generally used for devices that are required to transfer larger amounts of data. One of the most common uses for Firewire is the transfer of digital video. Firewire ports look similar to USB ones except they are slightly chunkier.



Thunderbolt

This is a port for transferring data at high speeds, up to 12 times faster than Firewire. It can also be used to connect a Thunderbolt screen to a MacBook



Ethernet

This is for the connection of an Ethernet cable for a cable or broadband Internet connection.



The Mac Desktop

The first thing to do with your new Mac is to turn it on. This is done by pressing this button once.



The first thing you will see is the Mac desktop. This is the default layout and, as we will see in the next few pages, this can be customized to your own preferences.

Some of the specific elements of the desktop are:

Apple Menu

Finder Menu bars



Dock

The Finder

Background

12

Don't forget



If the Finder is not showing, click on this icon on the Dock. The Dock is the collection of icons at the bottom of the screen.



Customizing Your Mac

All of us have different ideas about the way we want our computers set up, in terms of layout, colors, size and graphics. Macs allow a great deal of customization so that you can personalize it to genuinely make it feel like your own computer.

The customization features are contained within the System Preferences. To access these:

- 1 Click here on the Dock (the full workings of the Dock will be covered in detail in Chapter Two)



- 2 The System Preferences folder contains a variety of functions that can be used to customize your Mac (see following pages for details)



Hot tip



Click on the Show All button at the top of the System Preferences folder to show all of the items in the folder, regardless of which element you are currently using.

Changing the Background

Background imagery is an important way to add your own personal touch to your Mac. (This is the graphical element upon which all other items on your computer sit.) There are a range of background options that can be used. To select your own background:

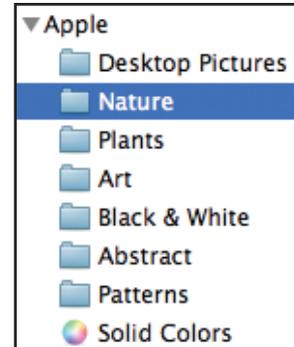
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



- 2 Click on the Desktop tab



- 3 Select a location from where you want to select a background



- 4 Click on one of the available backgrounds



- 5 The background is applied as the desktop background imagery

Don't forget

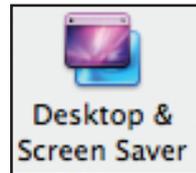


You can select your own photographs as your desktop background, once you have loaded them onto your Mac. To do this, select the Pictures Folder in Step 3, and browse to the photograph you want.

Changing the Screen Saver

A screen saver is the element that appears when the Mac has not been used for a specified period of time. Originally this was designed to avoid screen burn (caused by items being at the same position on the screen for an extended period of time) but now they are largely a graphical element. To select your own screen saver:

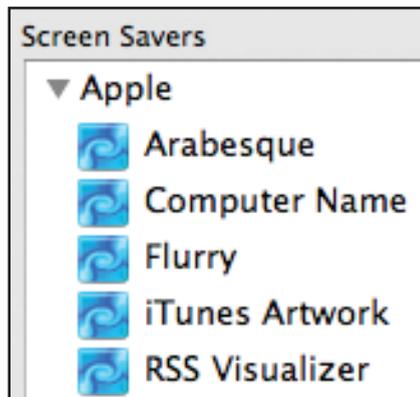
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



- 2 Click on the Screen Saver tab

Screen Saver

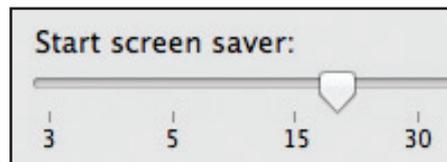
- 3 Select a location from where you want to select a screen saver



- 4 Click the Test button to preview the selected screen saver

Test

- 5 Drag this slider to specify the amount of time the Mac is inactive before the screen saver is activated



Don't forget



Screen savers were originally designed to prevent screen burn (areas of the screen becoming marked as a result of elements remaining static for a prolonged period of time), but now they are more for cosmetic graphical purposes.

Changing the Screen Size

For most computer users the size at which items are displayed on the screen is a crucial issue: if items are too small this can make them hard to read and lead to eye strain; too large and you have to spend a lot of time scrolling around to see everything.

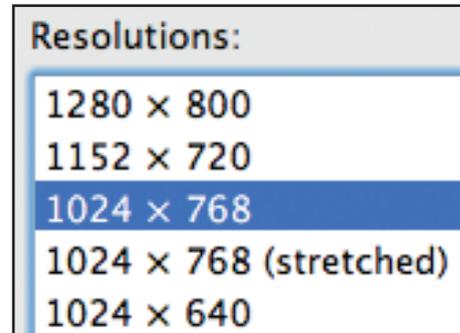
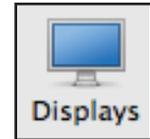
The size of items on the screen is controlled by the screen's resolution i.e. the number of colored dots displayed in an area of the screen. The higher the resolution the smaller the items on the screen, the lower the resolution the larger the items. To change the screen resolution:

Don't forget



A higher resolution makes items appear sharper on the screen, even though they appear physically smaller.

- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder
- 2 Select a resolution setting to change the overall screen resolution



- 3 Click here to select the number of colors displayed on the screen (the higher the better)



Changing the Text Size

Another way to change the size of items on the screen is through the Universal Access options within the System Preferences folder. This is a range of options for users who have difficulties with seeing, hearing or mobility when using the mouse and keyboard. To use the Universal Access options for changing the size of text:

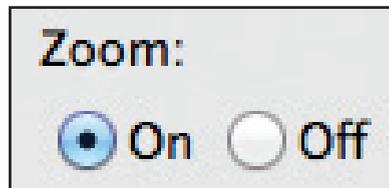
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



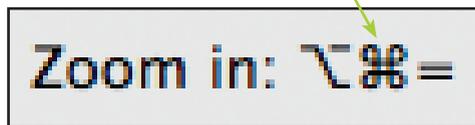
- 2 Click on the Seeing tab

Seeing

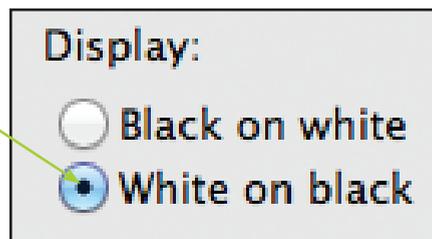
- 3 Click on the On button to activate the zoom function



- 4 Press these keys to zoom in on any items on the screen. Use the mouse to move around the zoomed items



- 5 Click here if you prefer white text on a black background



Beware



White text on a black background can become irritating after a period of time, unless you need to use it for a specific reason.

Adjusting the Volume

For users with hearing difficulties there are options for setting the screen to flash if there is an alert sound on the system. To do this:

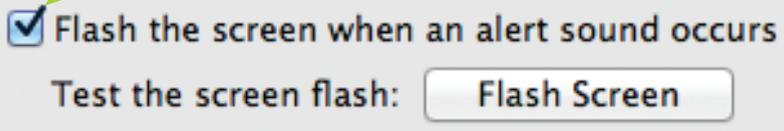
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



- 2 Click on the Hearing tab

Hearing

- 3 Check on this box to activate the screen to flash whenever there is an alert sound



- 4 Click on this button to test the Flash Screen effect

- 5 Click on this button to access the Sound folder

Adjust Volume...

- 6 Drag this slider to change the overall volume



Don't forget



The volume on a Mac can also be adjusted by clicking on the loudspeaker icon that appears at the top of the screen on the Finder toolbar. For more information about the Finder see Chapter Two.

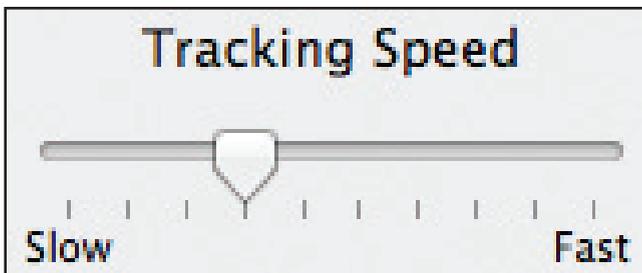
Customizing the Mouse

If you have any kinds of mobility problems in your hands it can be difficult to use a mouse. To use options to make this easier:

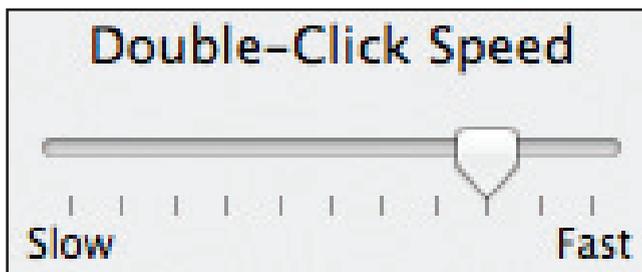
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



- 2 Drag this slider to change the Tracking Speed (this is the speed at which the cursor moves across the screen)



- 3 Drag this slider to change the Double-Click Speed (this is the speed at which you have to consecutively click the mouse button to activate any double-click actions)



Don't forget



The Tracking Speed for a trackpad can be set within the Trackpad System Preference. Click on the Point & Click tab to access the Tracking Speed option.

Customizing the Keyboard

As with the mouse, or trackpad, it is possible to customize a Mac keyboard so that it is easier to use for anyone with mobility problems in their hands. To do this:

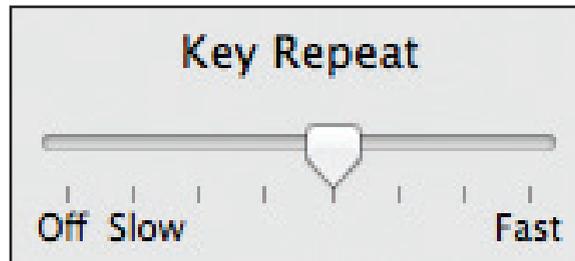
- 1 Click on this icon in the System Preferences folder



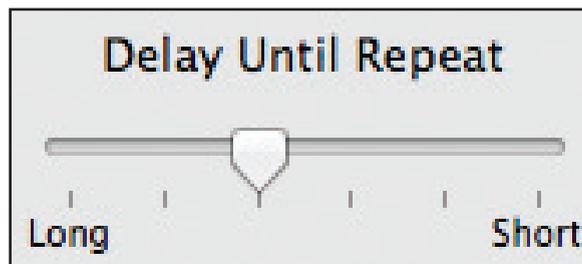
- 2 Click on the Keyboard tab

Keyboard

- 3 Drag this slider to change the Key Repeat Rate (this is the speed a key stroke will repeat if the key is held down)



- 4 Drag this slider to change the Delay Until Repeat option (this is the time it will take for a key stroke to be repeated if a key is held down. If it is set to Off, a key stroke will not be repeated until the key is released and then pressed again)



Hot tip



Click on the Keyboard Shortcuts tab in the Keyboard window to access options for keyboard shortcuts for certain functions. The assigned keys can be changed if required.

Sharing with Windows

General sharing

One of the historical complaints about Macs is that it is difficult to share files between them and Microsoft Windows computers. While this may have been true with some file types in years gone by, this is an issue that is becoming less and less important. Some of the reasons for this are:

- A number of popular file formats, such as PDFs (Portable Document Format) for documents and JPEGs (Joint Photographic Experts Group) for photos and images, are designed so that they can be used on both Mac and Windows platforms
- A lot of software programs on the Mac have options for saving files into different formats, including ones that are specifically for Windows machines
- Other popular programs, such as Microsoft Office, now have Mac versions and the resulting files can be shared on both formats

Sharing with Boot Camp

For people who find it hard to live without Microsoft Windows, help is at hand even on a Mac. Macs have a program called Boot Camp that can be used to run a version of Windows on a Mac. This is available with the latest version of the Mac OS X operating system, Lion. Once it has been accessed, a copy of Windows can then be installed and run. This means that if you have a non-Mac program that you want to use on your Mac, you can do so with Boot Camp.

Boot Camp is set up with the Boot Camp Assistant which is located within the Utilities folder within the Applications folder. Once this is run you can then install either Windows XP, Vista or 7, which will run at its native speed.

Don't forget



Other than for some games, the issue of sharing files between Macs and Windows PCs, and vice versa, have largely disappeared.

Shutting Down and Sleeping

When you are not using your Mac you will want to either shut it down or put it to sleep. If you shut it down this will close all of your applications and open files. This is the best option if you are not going to be returning to your Mac for a reasonable length of time (say, more than one day).

If you put the Mac to sleep, it will retain your current work session so that you can continue when you wake up the Mac. This option is useful if you know you will be returning to your Mac within a few hours.

The process for shutting down or sleeping a Mac is very similar in both cases:

- 1 Click on this icon on the main Menu bar
- 2 Click on either Sleep or Shut Down...



- 3 If you are shutting down, a window appears asking you to confirm your request



- 4 Click on the Shut Down button

Hot tip



Check on the 'Reopen windows when logging back in' box when you shut down. This ensures that the next time you turn on your Mac, it will resume at the place where you closed it i.e. all open programs and files will appear in their previous state.