

The Dr. Mac Consulting Newsletter

Episode #31 December 8, 2009

Greetings from Bob & Pat at Dr. Mac Consulting. In this edition of our newsletter, in addition to the usual Dr. Mac columns from the Houston Chronicle you'll find links to reviews of some nifty iPod and iPhone accessories I've written for [The Mac Observer](#).

I know I've mentioned this in several previous newsletters but it bears repeating: Speaking of iPhones (and iPods), Pat and I have spent a LOT of quality time with ours lately, so if you're having problems with your original or 3G iPhone, any iPod, or iTunes, we've probably had that problem ourselves and can help you resolve yours with a minimum of fuss.

And, as I said last time, I've got a huge pile of interesting Mac products in my office that has grown bigger than ever, so in addition to all the cool iPhone and iPod stuff I've been testing lately I expect to have a lot of cool Mac stuff to tell you about in the coming months.

As always, much of the material in this newsletter is culled from my *Dr. Mac* column in the Houston Chronicle. I apologize if you've seen it before.

In this issue are my Houston Chronicle article covering:

- [Dr. Mac's Gifts for Geeks Part I](#)
- [Dr. Mac's Gifts for Geeks Part II](#)
- [A review of QuickKeys, an automation tool](#)
- [an article about off-site backups](#)
- [a review of Snow Leopard](#)
- [an upgrade guide for Snow Leopard](#)

If you remember back to the last couple of newsletters, you may recall that I told you how the nice folks at Wiley (publisher of my *For Dummies* books) gave me a blog of my very own, and how it was something I've always wanted. The bad news is that the experiment was deemed a failure and that blog is no longer being updated. The good news is that I've started a new blog, called [The LeVitus Post\(s\)](#) <--click there to read it; please let me know what you think.

And don't forget that Pat maintains a most excellent blog known as [MacMousecalls](#) <--click there to read it; please let her know what you think.

Another way to keep in touch is to follow Pat or I on Twitter. What's Twitter? Glad you asked... Twitter is a way-cool real-time short messaging service that works over multiple networks and devices. You can follow our "tweets" with a Web browser, Twitter client software, or iPhone/iPod touch. To get started, sign up for a free Twitter account ([click here](#)), sign into Twitter and then visit either my page ([click here](#)), Pat's page ([click here](#)), or both. If you want to continue seeing our "tweets," click the Follow button on our respective pages.

[Click here](#) to search VersionTracker.com for the latest and greatest Twitter client software; I've been using Twiterrific, which is great, but there are at least two or three others that are probably as good or better including my latest infatuation, Tweetie.

[Click here](#) to search the iTunes App store for Twitter clients for your iPhone or iPod touch.

As always, please don't hesitate to drop us a line <DMCNewsletter@boblevitus.com> if you have a suggestion, recommendation, criticism, or any other thought about this newsletter or any of my other writing/speaking gigs. We'd love to hear how you like our blogs and tweets, too, so please let us know what you think...

Have a happy holiday season and a fabulous New Year. Oh yeah... last, but certainly not least, thanks again for subscribing to my newsletter.

Until next time I remain...

Yours truly,

Bob "Dr. Mac" LeVitus
Head Honcho

Keeping up with Bob

Bob recently finished rewriting two of his books to reflect the latest software and hardware releases, so *Mac OS X Leopard For Dummies* has been upgraded to *Mac OS X Snow Leopard For Dummies* and *iPhone For Dummies 2nd Edition* has morphed into *iPhone For Dummies 3d Edition*. He's just finished work on a hot new title, called *Incredible iPhone Apps For Dummies*, which should be available early next year.

Finally, if you happen to live in Austin, TX, Bob is once again teaching classes for the [University of Texas' Informal Classes program](#). He teaches *Intro to Mac*, *Making Movies*

with iMovie, Making Music with GarageBand, Introduction to Microsoft Office, and Intro to Texas Hold 'Em. The classes are 9 to 15 hours, most meet in the evening from 6-9PM, and all are reasonably priced. If you live in the area, he'd love to have you as his student.

Dr. Mac's Gifts for Geeks Part I

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 11.24.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

It's that time of year again and I've got gift ideas for everyone on your list no matter how much or how little you like them.

If you love them a lot (a real lot), who wouldn't love to find a shiny new [MacBook](#) (from \$999), [MacBook Pro](#) (from \$1,199), or [MacBook Air](#) (from \$1,499) under their tree or bush.

Moving right along, if a notebook computer would strain your budget, how about an iPod? The fabulous new [iPod nano](#) has video recording, FM radio with live pause, and more, and comes in nine luscious colors (from \$149). Or, if you really like them, consider an [iPod touch](#). They're like an iPhone without the phone or the camera, but they run the same iPhone apps and have never been more affordable (from \$199). Don't like 'em that much? Give 'em an [iPod shuffle](#) (from \$59), the diminutive iPod without a screen that holds up to 1,000 songs and whispers sweet nothings in your ear (as long as your sweet nothings are artist, song, or playlist names). Take advantage of free laser engraving on all iPods ordered online. Or check out the new Reserve and Pick Up program—order a Mac or iPod online and it will be gift wrapped and waiting for you at your local Apple Retail Store between December 15th and 24th. Or, if you just can't decide, everyone loves an iTunes or Apple gift card.

For something more personal, iPhoto makes it a snap to create beautiful printed photo books and calendars. With prices starting at around ten bucks, they're affordable as well as gorgeous. You've got plenty of time to get your order in; if you order before December 18th you'll get your books or calendars by the 24th.

If none of the above tickles your fancy and your loved ones already have a Mac, iPod, and photo books, there are always accessories such as portable speakers, headsets, and earphones.

For portable speakers I like the [Altec Lansing Orbit](#) (\$40), the [Tenqa SP-99](#) wireless portable Bluetooth speaker (\$40), the sexy little [iMainGo 2](#) (\$40), or the stylish and excellent-sounding [Livespeakr](#) Ultra-Portable Speaker System (\$80).

On the earphone, headphone, and headset (with microphone) front, kids seem to love the [Ear Pollution](#) line from iFrogz, which are available in hundreds of colors and designs at prices starting around \$15. Kids also love the wacky [iBlink](#) earbuds, with little LED lights that blink in time with the music (\$20).

For more serious audio fans, the [Klipsch Image S4i](#) (around \$100), [Apple In-Ear Headphones with Remote and Mic](#) (\$70), or [Zagg Z.Buds](#) (\$70) are excellent choices.

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Pat's Doings

We had our first snowfall of the season in the DC area this past weekend. Although little snow remains, we enjoyed our wintry scene. I am busy finishing a few holiday projects and helping some of our clients finish theirs.

If you use iPhoto, be sure to check out the new templates for cards and other printable items. If you use Bento, check the FileMaker web site for their holiday templates. iPresentee.com is offering all sorts of free items for the Mail and the iWork suite. Check them out [here](#).

Is your Christmas card list ready to print the envelopes or address labels? I wrote a detailed entry on MacMousecalls last year that explained how to use Address book to do that. You can find it [here](#).

I have also written several articles about several things you can do in Safari to make your web browsing more enjoyable. Look for them at [MacMousecalls.com](#).

I hope each of you has a happy, healthy and fun holiday season!

Dr. Mac's Gifts for Geeks Part II

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 12.01.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

This week we'll focus on gifts that are extremely cool, yet extremely affordable. One of the cleverest gadgets I've seen is [MovieWedge](#), a flexible stand for your iPhone, iPod, or almost any small handheld electronic device. It's great for hands-free movie watching and works almost anywhere (even on your knee!) and with most protective cases. It looks like a tiny beanbag chair with a little lip to secure your iPhone (or other device). The best part is that MovieWedge costs \$9.95!

Speaking of protective iPhone and iPod cases, everyone ought to have one. [Marware](#) has cool cases in 7 colors that can be laser etched with a message of 12 characters or less for under \$30. The [iSkin](#) solo cases are also sweet, especially the \$35 Special Edition made with Microban antimicrobial protection. I also like [iFrogz Luxe](#) and [Frosted Luxe](#) cases, available in a dozen luscious colors for under \$30. Or if your budget is really tight, one of my all time favorite iPhone cases is the \$15 [Radtech ARC](#).

Everyone loves the iPhone but nobody likes it to run out of juice. So rechargeable batteries make a great gift for the iPhone owners in your life. The [Mophie Juice Pack Air](#) is like a battery backpack for your iPhone. It adds very little weight or bulk and protects your phone just like a case but it extends your iPhone's battery life up to 2x for around \$80. The [Richard Solo 1800](#) is the Swiss Army Battery, with a built-in laser pointer and flashlight plus a custom hard-shell case, all for under \$70. And I love the cleverly designed [Kensington Travel Battery Pack and Charger](#), which has a built-in dock connector and a flip-out USB dongle, so there are no cables to pack or lose. And its protective cap flips open to act as a kickstand, making it perfect for hands-free movie watching on a tray table and a great choice for long plane flights.

Finally, you know how I feel about backing up, so consider Iomega's 3d generation [eGo Portable Hard Drives for the Mac](#). They have multiple connections (USB 2, FireWire 400, and FireWire 800), are HFS+ formatted to plug-and-play with any Mac, and are beautiful to behold. Available in sizes starting at 250GB, they are clad in a brightly colored thin poly-coated aluminum casing. And you don't have to worry if you shake, rattle, or roll this drive because it has Iomega's Drop Guard technology, which allows it to handle drops from up to 51 inches. You can get one for under \$100 but knowing that your loved one's data is secure is priceless.

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Check out Bob's Other Articles and Reviews

In addition to his Houston Chronicle columns and books, Bob is the Reviews Editor for *The iPod Observer*. These are links to some of his recent articles:

- [WildCharger Bundle](#)
- [iPod nano \(5G\)](#)
- [iPod touch \(3G\)](#)
- [iPod shuffle 3G](#)
- [GrooveMaker](#)

QuicKeys: *Still* a Must-Have Automation Tool

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 08.18.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

When I reviewed QuicKeys for Mac OS 9 in this column way back in 1999 I said, “I’ve used QuicKeys for more than 10 years—I wouldn’t dream of operating a Mac without it.” Today, after using QuicKeys for over 20 years I feel the same about the recently-released QuicKeys 4 for Mac OS X—I wouldn’t dream of using my Mac without it.

QuicKeys is a program that saves you time and effort by letting you automate things you do on your Mac with “shortcuts,” which perform specific tasks on your computer. You can build these shortcuts yourself with QuicKeys easy-to-use Editor or you can let QuicKeys build them for you automatically by recording your actions.

Your shortcuts can be triggered from the keyboard, a menu, a click, a specific time and/or date, and more. You can even create your own floating toolbars containing shortcut buttons. And your shortcuts can work in all applications, or be application-specific.

Here are some examples of how I use QuicKeys to save time and effort:

I have all of those otherwise useless F-keys assigned to programs I use often—F1 is Microsoft Word, F2 is Adobe Photoshop, F3 is Apple Mail, F4 is Safari, and so on. These F-keys launch the program if it's not running, or switch to it if it is. And, if I press Option

along with the F-key, the program launches or becomes active while all other open programs and windows are hidden.

I also use shortcuts to open my most-used folders in the Finder just the way I like them, without touching the mouse. These shortcuts switch to the Finder, hide all other open windows and applications, and then open the folder I want in Column view and move it to the middle of the screen.

I have other shortcuts that reprogram existing keyboard shortcuts. So if I can't remember a keyboard shortcut provided by a program, QuicKeys lets me easily change it to something I can remember. And QuicKeys lets me create keyboard shortcuts for menu items that don't have their own keyboard shortcuts.

Finally, I have QuicKeys shortcuts that click on radio buttons and check boxes in dialog boxes using the keyboard rather than the mouse.

QuicKeys can do much, much more but I'm almost out of space. So I urge you to take advantage of Startly Technologies generous never-ending trial, which allows you to continue using QuicKeys 4 in trial mode even after the basic 30-day trial is over.

Give it a try and I think you'll see why I wouldn't dream of using my Mac without it. QuicKeys 4. Startly Technologies. SRP \$59.95. www.startly.com.

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The problems we are seeing

Snow Leopard is proving to be a very stable operating system. There have been a number of updates, so be sure to check Software Update, located under the Apple menu or in System Preferences to make sure you have applied all the latest items.

We continue to see a few hard drive issues. Some have been caused by over-heating. These typically happen when Mac Mini owners stack hard drives, Time Capsules or Air-Port Extremes on top of or below their Mac Mini. Don't do it unless you have added something to provide several inches of air space between the devices. The same kind of over-heating can be seen in Apple TVs that are stacked on top of other video equipment. Make sure to leave space for air to flow around your hardware too keep it happy and healthy!

We are also seeing hard drive failures in older Macs. These are particularly painful because many of the owners have not moved to Leopard and are not using Apple's Time Machine or anything else to back up their data. All hard drives eventually fail. Hard drives older than about five years are more prone to failure.

Why not add a backup drive to your holiday shopping list and make a New Years resolution keep your hard drives backed up. Look for a new article on [MacMousecalls](#) in a few days about how to choose a good backup drive.

We can help with technical issues, troubleshooting, training, or pre-purchase advice, and we can answer almost any Mac question you ask. Our rates are as low as \$30 for a 15-minute consultation, and we unconditionally guarantee your satisfaction.

Just give us a call at **(408) 627-7577** or drop us a line at [<urgentrequest@boblevitus.com>](mailto:urgentrequest@boblevitus.com).

For more information about the excellent Mac HelpMate software, click here: [<http://boblevitus.com/Tech/Tech.html>](http://boblevitus.com/Tech/Tech.html)

Could Your Data Survive Vaporization?

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 08.25.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

If you're not backing up important files on your hard drive I have some bad news for you: You are going to lose those files forever someday. Even if you can afford a couple of thousand dollars for a disk recovery service such as DriveSavers (www.drivesavers.com), even they may not be able to resurrect your files regardless of how much money you have.

The simplest solution is Apple's Time Machine. If you're not backing up your files yet, I suggest you buy a large external hard disk or an Apple Time Capsule and start using it a.s.a.p. Then, after you have it up and running, ask yourself if Time Machine alone provides adequate protection for your data.

Consider this: If your home or office and everything in it were vaporized tomorrow, would you be OK data-wise? If not, you need at least one additional backup stored off-

site. You could create another Time Machine backup on a second hard disk and store it someplace else. Or you could use one of the hosted Internet backup solutions such as Mozy (www.mozy.com), Carbonite (www.carbonite.com), BackJack (www.backjack.com), MobileMe (www.me.com), or CrashPlan (www.crashplan.com) to store your back up files on a server far, far away. Now, if your Mac and its Time Machine backup are vaporized you'll have all (or most) of your files safely backed up in another location.

Now consider this: How much down time can you afford if the aforementioned vaporization occurred? You'd need another Mac, of course. But after that, how long will it take you to restore your files and get back to work? If your second backup is stored on a remote server, it could take a week or more to restore all your files. Could you live with that?

I can't afford to be without my Mac for even a day so I keep a second backup offsite but nearby and that backup is of a type we call a "bootable clone." It's an exact duplicate of my startup disk that I can use to boot any relatively new Mac. To create this bootable clone I use software such as SuperDuper (www.shirt-pocket.com), Carbon Copy Cloner (www.bombich.com), or ChronoSync (www.econtechologies.com) with an external FireWire or USB 2 hard drive.

Now, even if vaporization happens, I merely connect the clone drive to any relatively new Mac and hold down the Option key during startup. Then I select my clone drive as the startup disk and that Mac starts up from it with all of my applications, email, and other files right where I expect them to be and I'm back to work in minutes rather than hours, days, or even weeks.

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Just Where Are We Located?

Just a few years ago, small businesses had to have a physical location. People needed to sit across the table from one another to work.

The Internet has certainly changed that! So just where are Bob and Pat, and where is the telephone? Bob works from his office in Austin, Texas, and Pat works from hers in Fairfax Station, Virginia. We have other agents around the country. We work together by iChats, telephone calls, and Skype meetings.

While the telephone has a 408 (Silicon Valley) area code, in fact it sits on both of our desks and actually, on all of our computers. We use Skype to provide our telephone presence, so we can be anywhere that has a broadband Internet connection to work.

So, what are our office hours? Pat begins her day by 7 a.m. Eastern Time, and tries to finish her calls by about 10 p.m. She frequently works with clients in Europe and the Far East and will arrange meetings to suit their needs. However, Pat can only conduct help sessions in English. Since Pat's office is in her home, she can often take weekend calls.

Bob answers the telephone when Pat is not at her desk. When the problem is a tough one, Pat and Bob confer about the best method to fix a problem. Bob also handles calls that are specific to his special knowledge and talents. Ask an advanced question about GarageBand or Logic, and Bob will certainly answer your questions!

Sometimes, when you call, both Bob and Pat are busy working with clients. If no one answers the telephone, please leave a voice mail with a number and time we can return your call. When you contact us via email, please give us a number and suggested time to call.

When we call you back, there is no charge for time spent determining if we can help. We also do not charge you for the time used to install our software and establish a connection. If we cannot diagnose the cause of the problem, there is no charge. We charge for the time spent fixing your computer.

Be sure to give us a phone number and suggest a time for us to return your call in your message.

We can be reached by phone at **(408) 627-7577** or by e-mail at: urgentrequest@boblevitus.com.

There's No Leopard Like Snow Leopard...

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 09.08.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

My first column about Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard (October 23, 2007) was a lot like last week's column. In essence it said you should read up on incompatibilities and other issues, back up your hard disk, and then wait for the first bug fix release. Three weeks later I still felt that you should wait for the point release (i.e. 10.5.1, 10.5.2).

It's only been a week since Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard shipped but it's been quite stable and I don't think its necessary to wait for the point release this time. While there are still some issues with third-party software including device drivers from M-Audio and software such as Pro Tools, Suitcase Fusion 2, QuickBooks, and some older Adobe apps, most of the comments I've seen this week indicate relatively smooth sailing after the upgrade. That's been my experience as well. After a solid week with Snow Leopard I haven't found a single issue that made me long for my old Leopard.

So, assuming you've scoured the Snow Leopard Compatibility List Wiki (<http://snowleopard.wikidot.com>) and other online resources and you haven't found any showstoppers, what are you waiting for? Fork over the \$30, install Snow Leopard, and in under an hour almost everything you do with your Mac will be faster, and almost every feature you came to know and love in Leopard will be improved and refined by Snow Leopard.

I've found that pretty much everything I do in Snow Leopard is faster. Almost every program I use launches faster. Switching from one application to another or from one window to another feels snappier. And moving icons and other Finder operations seem swifter, too.

I've found that almost everything I do in Apple Mail is faster. For example, I have mail folders that contain thousands of messages. When I clicked such a folder under Leopard, it might take 20 or 30 seconds for its contents to appear. In Snow Leopard those contents appear instantly regardless of the number of messages in them. And Web surfing with Safari is noticeably faster most of the time. Better still, I've yet to see Safari "quit unexpectedly," which it did with annoying regularity under Leopard.

It also feels to me like tasks happening in the background—such as a file copy or Time Machine backup—seem to have less impact on what I'm doing in the foreground, like typing, Web surfing, or listening to music.

Finally, there are dozens of tasty improvements and enhancements to make you smile. In fact, there are so many of them you're going to have to wait until next week to hear about them all.

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Are you backing up your computer?

Is your backup solution adequate in an emergency?

If you don't back up your files you could lose everything on your hard disk. And it could happen at any time, even if your Mac is relatively new. Most of our clients know they absolutely, positively should back up important files, but we hear time and time again that they hadn't gotten around to it yet, or were going to do it next week, or meant to do it but didn't know how.

If you are using Mac OS X 10.5, setting up and using TimeMachine is fast and easy, but is it enough?

A complete backup solution involves more than just one extra hard drive stored next to your computer. You need to think about what would happen if there was a fire, flood, or burglary.

Let Dr. Mac Consulting show you how to set up a total backup solution. Our Total Solution Backup Consultation includes a detailed needs assessment to determine how much of your data needs to be backed up and how often. We'll recommend the best and most cost-effective combination of hardware and software for your needs. And we'll set the whole thing up for you by controlling your computer remotely via the Internet while we talk to you on the telephone and explain what we're doing at every step.

Our charges for this service start at just \$120 (not including hardware or software you might need, of course).

Don't make a very expensive mistake. If you're not backing up your data, call or email us today for a quote.

We can be reached by phone at **(408) 627-7577** or by e-mail at:
<urgentrequest@boblevitus.com>

Seven Steps to Successful Snow Leopard Upgrades

This column first appeared in the Houston Chronicle on 09.15.09

Dr. Mac

By Bob LeVitus

Last week I said I'd talk about tasty improvements and enhancements in Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard today. But last week's column generated more e-mail than any column in recent history. Many of you agreed that Snow Leopard is a no-brainer at \$30. But far too many of you are not happy campers. I noticed in most of the unhappy ones didn't listen to the advice I offered last week and the week before. So instead of talking about improvements and enhancements this week, let's try this one more time. Just follow these simple instructions and you'll almost certainly join us in the happy camp.

- Create at least two trustworthy backups of your data, one of which should be a bootable clone as described in my August 24th column.
- Make a list of the hardware you depend on. Now visit the Web site for each and every item on this list and search for info about Snow Leopard compatibility.
- Make a list of the software you depend on. Now visit the Web site for each and every item on this list and search for info about Snow Leopard compatibility.
- Search Apple's Discussion Web pages (<http://discussions.apple.com>) for the latest info on Snow Leopard.
- Search Apple's Support Web pages (www.apple.com/support) for the latest info on Snow Leopard.
- Search Web sites like www.macfixit.com, www.snowleopard.wikidot.com, www.macworld.com, www.macobserver.com, www.macintouch.com, www.arstechnica.com, and www.roughlydrafted.com for the latest info on Snow Leopard.
- Use Google to search for additional information on anything you learned in the previous steps that could be problematic.

Now, do you have time to upgrade today? If you have an important project due tomorrow, or a paper due in a couple of days, I suggest that you wait to perform brain surgery on your Mac.

I try to do my major upgrades on Saturday so I'll have all weekend for testing. I print, scan, fax, and launch every program and System Preference pane I can think of. If everything isn't hunky-dory by Monday morning I merely hold down the Option key during startup, select my bootable clone as the startup disk, and go to work. Later, when all my work is done, I can reboot from the upgraded disk and try to resolve any remaining issues.

Most of the Snow Leopard users I've heard from in the past two weeks have experienced no major issues. Frankly, almost all of the issues I have heard about concern peripherals like printers, scanners, external hard drives, or software that hasn't been updated in years. So if you follow my simple 7-step plan, your upgrade will almost certainly be painless.

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Listen in on our Podcast Appearances

While Bob frequently appears on several podcasts, he has been concentrating on his latest book, and has not done many lately. Check out Bob's latest appearances:

- [MacNotables #938: Bob LeVitus Says Snow Leopard is for Dummies \(and The Rest of Us\), and It's Only Rock and Roll, But...](#)

Pat recently appeared on one of [MacJury](#) Holiday Gift Guides. You can listen to it [here](#).

The End
