

# The Academy of Plumbing 23

## Back To My Mac; Microsoft Office 2008

# The Digital Plumber

## By Paul Ellis

I have written on several occasions (Plumbers passim) about setting up a Mac so that you can get to it remotely for retrieving files, or to transmit a day's shoot to overnight. There are plenty of ways to do this, but they nearly all involve having to know your Mac's Internet IP address beforehand and setting up your broadband router to forward requests from the Internet to your Mac's local IP address so that it can accept your call. In conjunction with a .Mac account, Leopard's Back To My Mac feature attempts to take the pain out of this procedure by making your other Macs available to you wherever you are, so long as you and they have a network connection. A combination of voodoo tricks is involved, and to understand how it works I'm afraid we're going to have to soil our hands with some rather unlovely nerdy acronyms, but there's actually nothing too challenging here and it'll be worth it in the end. Trust me.

For our purposes, let's say you have a studio Mac and a location Mac somewhere else, and that you want to set up your studio Mac so that you can get to its contents from elsewhere. First of all you must have a valid .Mac account. The 60-day demo will do nicely. Make sure you're logged into it in the .Mac Preference Pane, and then turn on Back To My Mac. You'll then want to enable the appropriate Sharing functions, and go to Energy Saver and set your studio Mac never to sleep.

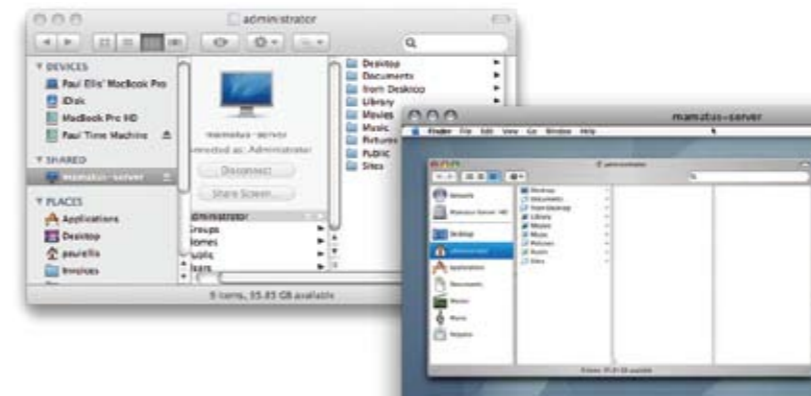


Your studio Mac registers itself with Apple's servers using a new networking trick called Wide-Area Bonjour. Your location Mac contacts these servers and is told what your studio Mac's Internet IP address is, and thereby knows which number to dial, as it were, to make contact. But how do you get past your Internet router to your studio Mac?

Many routers sport a function called uPnP (Universal Plug 'n Play) or NAT-PMP (Network Address Translation Port Mapping Protocol) that enables

applications such as online games which require access from the Internet to automatically open appropriate network ports and route traffic to themselves when they start up. In this way it's possible to launch your network-enabled copy of Doom or whatever and immediately engage in a global shoot-em-up without having to lose yourself in your router's user interface and deal with its hideous port-mapping page. Back To My Mac does exactly this: it talks to your router and asks it to forward TCP port 443, UDP port 4500 and whichever other services you've set up (Screen Sharing TCP port 5900; Apple File Sharing TCP ports 528 and 427; Windows File Sharing TCP and UDP ports 135-139, 445; Remote Login (SSH) TCP port 22) directly to your studio Mac. Job Done. Now, wherever you are, so long as you have a network connection your studio Mac will show up as a Place in your Finder window's Sidebar, allowing you to share files and treat yourself to the somewhat bizarre experience of remote-controlling it in its own window by using Screen Sharing.

Fab! What could be easier? Well, not much, so long as your router supports uPnP or NAT-PMP. But what if it's turned off by default, or your router is the execrable 2Wire "BT Business Hub" which doesn't support these functions at all, or supports them badly? You roll up your sleeves and hit [www.portforward.com](http://www.portforward.com), which not only helpfully offers instructions for setting up the necessary port forwarding on most routers, but also offers an application that will attempt to set up your router for you if it can, and you have a Windows PC. No matter. The setup guides at this site really



are comprehensive, and so long as you read them carefully and keep a cool head, you'll be fine.

Do bear in mind that although data transfer and remote control using Back To My Mac is pretty secure, the whole system is only as secure as your .Mac password. So, if for example your name is Dave Nerd and you've decided to use 'dave' as your password because it's easy to remember, perhaps you should think again. How about combining a simple, short word with a car registration number? 'DaveKN04ATG' or, better still, 'DaKN04ATGve' is memorable but nigh-on uncrackable.

### IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING

...has Microsoft Office 2008, and now, finally, here it is. At least this version has managed to get itself released in the year of its name, unlike earlier versions of the Office suite whose names have often turned out to be a little optimistic. So what's new? Well, rather like Adobe

CS3, most of what's new is invisible, i.e. the fact that it's a Universal Binary, runs natively on Intel Macs and has required recoding from the ground up to do this. It has a new-ish interface centred on the idea that functionality you need should be sensibly named and easy to find rather than buried layers-deep in menus and dialogue boxes; compatibility with the new .docx "open" file format; the ability to open encrypted documents produced by Windows Office 2007; and a load of other new bits and pieces that you probably don't need. You'd hope that it has new, sparkling performance, too, but in its first release version it seems to perform little better on Intel Macs than Office 2004, and is noticeably slower on PowerPC. A good, detailed review by Robert Mohns is at [www.macintouch.com/reviews/office2008/](http://www.macintouch.com/reviews/office2008/)

Sadly, what isn't new is Entourage's database: yes, Entourage still keeps all of its data in one large, proprietary and corruptible database file. This, in the

modern world, is tedious in the extreme and the main reason why it's time for everyone to leave Entourage behind and migrate to a more sensible email application such as Apple Mail.

Why, say you? Simple. Let's say you've hoarded several years'-worth of email and your Entourage database is now a few gigabytes in size. The moment you open Entourage and send or receive a single email (or add or change a contact or calendar event) your database has changed. This causes all backup software, whether Time Machine, Chronosync, SuperDuper! or whatever, to see the changed state of the database and make a fresh backup of it in its entirety. In the case of Time Machine, that's every hour by default and you'll find your Time Machine volume rapidly getting devoured by endless copies of your Entourage database, simply because you've had the temerity to check your email. This situation is just plain dumb, and I'm mystified as to why Microsoft hasn't moved from the single database format to mboxes or other text-based formats as used by Apple Mail, Eudora, and others.

### NEXT MONTH

The Mac's market share is growing, and with it the virus-free age of innocence that we've all enjoyed for so long is drawing to a close. It's time to get smart with anti-virus software. Yes, it's true that there are still no significant Mac OS X viruses "in the wild", but there is one category that is definitely out there and that you can pass on to others without even knowing you've had it: the Microsoft Office Macro Virus. Next month I'll take a look at the best ways of securing your Mac against the inevitable. See you then.

*Those of you still hungry for information can keep up by periodically checking my blog at <http://www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk>, where you'll also find my contact details.*

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