

# The Academy of Plumbing 38 Christmas Balls

Yes, it's that time of year again. Here are a few baubles to stuff into your stocking. Given that it's probably a bit of an austerity Christmas for many of us, I thought I'd concentrate on practicalities. So this year, treat yourself to a faster Mac, rather than a new one.

## FOR YOUR MAC: SNOW LEOPARD

Yes, really. If your Mac can run it, install it, because it can make your Intel Mac perform up to 30% faster for 25 quid. That'll save you from having to buy a new computer this year, or shelling out an extra £1000 for a 3GHz Mac Pro when a 2.66 will do the job.

Snow Leopard 10.6.2 has sorted out most of the problems that emerged following the release of 10.6, and photographers doing straightforward stuff should have few issues with it. Most things now run properly in OS X 10.6. Sadly, Applejack is still missing in action but that's nothing new; the programmer gets no help at all from Apple and has to do all of the dirty work himself. No doubt he'll get it sorted out in due course.

We get no AOP discount on Snow Leopard and Amazon have it cheaper than the Apple Store, so get it from the link at the end of this article and drop a penny into the Plumber's Christmas box at no cost to yourself.

## MEMORY

The next most cost-effective way to speed up your Mac is to load it with RAM memory. Multitasking Mac Pros

and G5's should ideally have 12GB of memory in them, but 8GB will do. Laptops and iMacs should have a minimum of 4GB; recent laptops will go to 6GB or 8GB. Check your Mac's memory spec in the Mactracker database. Remember to quit an application when you've finished using it: don't just close its windows. Quitting the app releases memory back to the system for re-use. If your Mac starts to feel sluggish, restart it.

I've found Crucial memory to be reliable and cost-effective, although when buying large amounts for current-model Mac Pros, money can be saved by importing it directly from Other World Computing in the USA. Links below.

## HARD DISKS

Our Macintoshes spend a surprising amount of time waiting for disks to deliver data to the processors. If you already have three or four disks in your Mac Pro, a large performance increase can be had by simply reconfiguring them as a RAID 0 array with SoftRAID. Bear in mind that RAID 0 is for performance, not security: this technique creates high-speed temporary scratch and workspace volumes, not reliable storage.

If you only have one hard disk in your Mac Pro or G5, remember that even a single extra large disk partitioned into scratch and workspace volumes will help significantly. The general rule is that the bigger the disk, the faster it goes. I've found MicroDirect

to be a cheap, reliable source of hard disks. Samsung 1.5TB are the cheapest possible disks and surprisingly good; Seagate 1.5TB are a tenner more but go a bit faster; Hitachi 2TB 7K2000 are stonking performers. Put them into your Mac, initialise them in SoftRAID as GPT, create an initial 64GB RAID 0 volume called Scratch, then another RAID 0 volume using the remaining capacity called Fast Workspace. In Photoshop's Performance Preference, select the Scratch partition and move it to the top of the list. Call the Plumber's seasonal tech line if you need help with any of this.

I know that with the possible exception of Snow Leopard's packaging these suggestions don't look particularly pretty in the Christmas stocking, but put all three together and you'll transform the performance of your Mac to a startling extent and likely give it an extra couple of years' useful life that it wouldn't otherwise have had. I reckon that's not a bad Christmas present.

## SOFTWARE

In the 21st century, few things can ruin your day as effectively as having all of your addresses, calendars and email wiped out, and then to find that your backup is corrupt. That's exactly the fate that could befall you if you use any version of Microsoft Entourage, but especially the thoroughly-obsolete Entourage v.X. My advice? Migrate to Apple Mail. If you really can't bear Mail get a copy of Office 2008 but bear in mind that it still uses a single, vulnerable, corruption-prone database

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file in which to store all of its data, which being a database file can't be reliably backed up while in use. Given that some Office process or other is almost always running and using the database file by default, it's practically impossible to back up properly. Why risk it?

And if you're going to migrate to Mail, go the whole hog and get a MobileMe account. I'll write that up next time.

## FOR YOUR IPHONE: APPS I USE

- **WeatherMaps:** <http://bit.ly/x34Yn>  
Free. UK radar weather maps for the next 5 days
- **London Bus:** <http://bit.ly/1qaxOF>  
£0.59. Find your way by bus, tube & train in London
- **b-Tax:** <http://bit.ly/1GANHF>  
Free. VAT & Sales Tax calculator
- **Undercover:** <http://bit.ly/1ghU0v>  
£2.99. Loss/theft recovery software
- **Sunrise Sunset Pro:** <http://bit.ly/3kQaB7>  
£1.19. Sunrise, sunset, inclination & azimuth calculator
- **Helios:** <http://bit.ly/2pXhb1>  
£17.99. As above, but rather fancier. Read the manual first.
- **Scanner Pro:** <http://bit.ly/3LyJaH>

£3.99. Picture stitcher, document scanner & emailer

- **Vicinity:** <http://bit.ly/QyK37>  
£1.79. Find facilities near you
- **Ocado:** <http://bit.ly/40l6wA>  
Free. Do your Waitrose shopping
- **EyeTV:** <http://bit.ly/28FM8I>  
£2.99. Watch the telly.
- **1Password Pro:** <http://bit.ly/3hQdoT>  
£4.99. Password manager, syncs with your Mac



- **LogMeIn Ignition:** <http://bit.ly/3EIJAD>  
Remote-control your computers

## FOR YOU: A BOOK

Just the one, this year. "Vanity Fair" Portraits: A Century of Iconic Images contains some absolutely cracking pictures and is available at a good discount from Amazon. I hadn't realised that Edward Weston was such a good portraitist.

## AND FINALLY...

All the best for 2010. What was that song? "Things Can Only Get Better" ...

## LINKS

- Snow Leopard: <http://bit.ly/3zOMDM>
- Crucial memory: <http://bit.ly/4fOu6>
- Other World memory: <http://bit.ly/3ooc>
- SoftRAID: <http://www.softraid.com>
- Mactracker: <http://www.mactracker.ca/>
- Samsung 1.5TB EcoGreen hard disks: <http://bit.ly/ThFKa>
- Seagate 1.5TB Barracuda hard disks: <http://bit.ly/2BQn7q>
- Hitachi 2TB 7K2000 hard disks: <http://bit.ly/1K1R57>
- Microsoft Office 2008: <http://bit.ly/jFH2Z>
- "Vanity Fair" Portraits: <http://bit.ly/1iUKvE>

PDFs of this and all my other Image articles are available to download at [www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk](http://www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk), each with live weblinks for your browsing pleasure. Go and get 'em.

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