

THE ACADEMY OF PLUMBING 8 – GETTING ORGANISED: FIND ‘ER

Having pored over and absorbed last month’s ‘Plumber’ we’re now conversant with the modern Macintosh’s Unix roots and ground-up multi-user structure. We have subordinated ourselves to the ineffable wisdom of Apple’s organisational concept and given up leaving data around willy-nilly, but keep it in folders on our Desktops or other locations within our Home folder or on external drives, which I’ll come to next month. But how to find this stuff? How best to move it around? Let’s start to tackle both questions by having a look at Finder windows, of all things.

GOT ALL DAY, HAVE YOU?

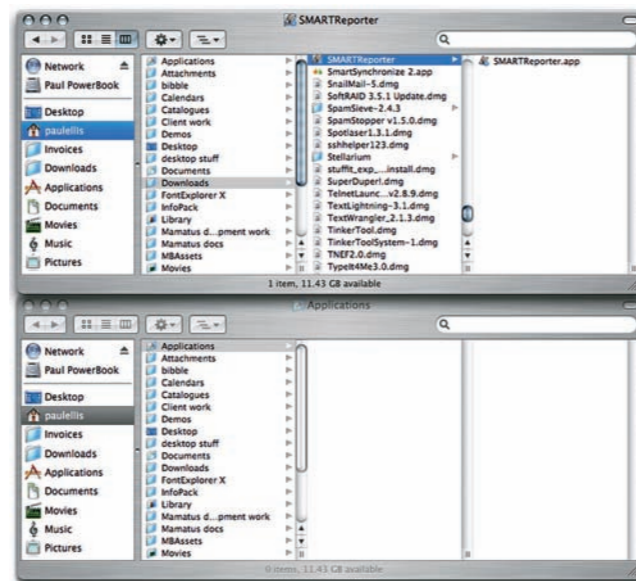
Mac OS 9 and its antecedents were built around the idea of one-window-per-folder and visually drilling down: you double-clicked on your hard drive icon to open its window, which revealed a bunch of folder icons. You double-clicked on a folder to reveal its window, and so on until there were no folders left to open. You’d drilled down to where you wanted to be, leaving a trail of open windows in your wake. Unless, that is, you’d held down the Alt key (or Option key, how quaint) whilst doing this, thereby closing the preceding windows as you went. (This still works.) Either way, you’d found your data, but now what? Let’s say you wanted to copy or move it somewhere. You had to engage in a merry-go-round of window closing, opening, WindowShading and repositioning until you had visible a window with your data in it, and another window to which you wanted to move it. You then moved it, fumbled with the mouse, dropped your data and spent the next half-an-hour digging around for it and putting it back again to where you wanted it in the first place. Not the most productive use of your time.

List view was somewhat better (and is still available, little changed, in OS X) in that folders sported little ‘disclosure triangles’ to the left of their names. Click on one and, somewhat like an outliner, the folder opened to reveal an indented list of its contents. This is an improvement on icon-view screen clutter, but not much – you still have to set up source and destination, and what happens if you open a deeply embedded folder with 1,937 objects in it and want to drag a discontinuous selection of 79 of those objects into the folder one level up? To do this sensibly you’d have to drag to the Desktop, retrace your steps, and then drag the data to its final destination. Not easy with 79 separate objects cluttering up your desktop, unless you’d dumped them into another temporary folder first. You get the picture. Windows users in Browse view are still stuck here.

NELSON’S COLUMN

OS X introduced a third possibility: column view. OS X also introduced another fundamental change to the Finder: it was possible to have two identical windows open. What? Why? Here’s why. Whereas OS 9 was object-centric in that each folder had its own window, OS X is window-centric, which is why the Apple-N keyboard shortcut no longer creates a new folder, but a new window. Also, by default, OS X no longer opens a double-clicked folder into its own window (although you can set the Finder’s preferences to do that if you prefer) but, like a browser, opens that folder into the current window and provides you with a Back button to allow you to retrace your steps. In OS X it’s possible to open multiple windows, all of which display identical contents. Why would you want to do that? To set up a source and a destination for copy and move operations, that’s why.

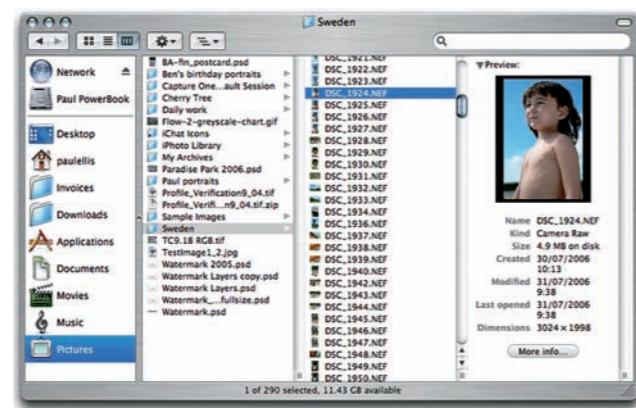
Let’s say I have downloaded the very wonderful SMARTReporter application (Oi, wake up at the back: I know you’re getting sick of this by now) and decide I want to move it from my Downloads folder



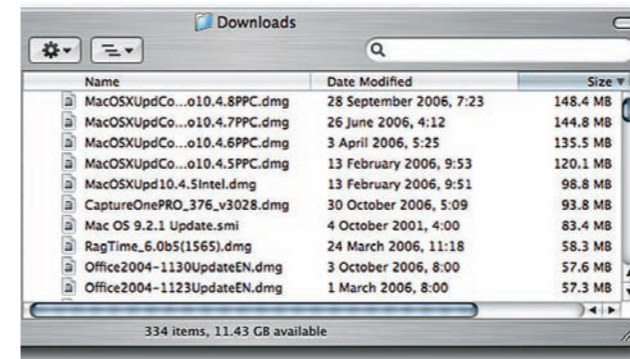
to the Applications folder within my Home folder. I open two Finder windows in Column view and position them one above the other. I navigate the upper window to my Downloads folder and find the SMARTReporter folder within it. I then navigate the lower window to my Applications folder. I can now clearly see both the source of my drag, and its destination. I drag from one to the other. Simple, but unbelievably I goof and drop the SMARTReporter app into some other folder within my Home folder. Where? It could have gone anywhere. Instead of coming out in an OS 9 cold sweat I merely press Apple-Z, our old friend Undo, and the Finder moves SMARTReporter smartly back to its starting point again. Yes, the Finder now undoes, and this is always the best first move when you make an operational error (a.k.a. mistake) in the Finder.

NOT JUST A ONE-TRICK PONY

Column View has other tricks up its sleeve. To make up for the fact that it only displays tiny file icons and file names, and sometimes, truncated ones at that, it offers a Preview pane. Navigate your way to a folder full of pictures, movies, sounds, PDFs or similar. Click on one to select it. The Preview pane will display a thumbnail of the picture, along with quite a lot of other interesting data. You can even watch movies, listen to music or navigate QTVRs in the Finder preview, should you find it amusing to do so.



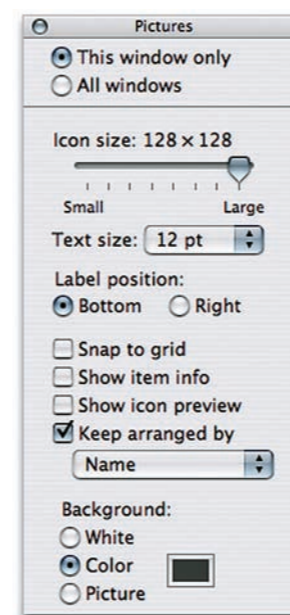
Column View won’t let you change the alphabetical sort order or do any of the other cool things List View will but I’ve found a pair of



Finder windows arranged one-above-the-other to be the best general-purpose Finder navigation method I’ve yet tried. Give it a go. You’ll soon get used to it.

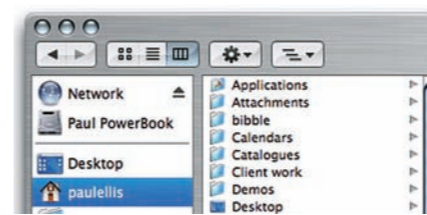
TO DO: LIST

I rarely use Icon View. List View is the next most useful view, because of the columns of data it displays and the fact that you can sort on any of them, in either direction. You change the sort criterion by clicking on a column header to make it active, and sort order by clicking on the little black triangle within that column header to sort A-Z or Z-A, or equivalent. This window is sorted by file size.



Of course, Icon View does have its uses, not least to display a folder-full of thumbnails. I often encounter Macintoshes whose windows are set to display massive icons and nearly fall off my chair when they open. Such violence is entirely unnecessary, because even though you might set the Finder to open new windows in Column View by default, it’s possible to over-ride these settings on a per-window basis and even customise the icon size and window background for each individual folder. This is done by clicking on the window to make it active, then selecting Show View Options (Apple-J) from the Finder’s View menu. I’ve set my Pictures window to automatically keep its contents arranged by Name, to display huge thumbnails and to have a tasteful charcoal background. Where are these settings kept? In those usually-invisible .DS_Store files you sometimes happen upon on CDs or Windows servers.

The observant among you might have noticed that my standard window Title bar sports a non-standard button (furthest right). I put it there: when clicked on it displays the folder path from the contents of the current window all the way back up to the top Computer level. It becomes available, along with many others, if you select Customise Toolbar... from the Finder’s View menu.



And there’s more

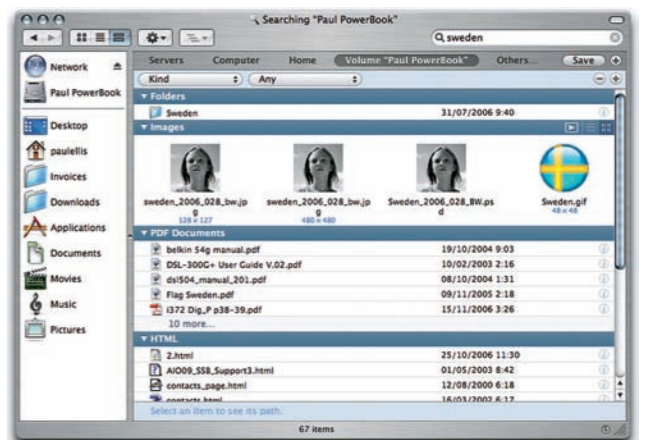
FIND EASY Still don’t like Spotlight? Try EasyFind: (<http://tinyurl.com/ytltp7>). It’s free, uses the Spotlight index and database but allows more traditional, Sherlock-type searches.

APPLEJACK FOR INTEL ...is out. Applejack 1.4.3 is now available here: (<http://tinyurl.com/ylucgw>). I’ve used it without problem on both PPC and Intel Macs. It’s like being reunited with an old friend. Maybe I should start a website?

HAZEL EYES ...your Macintosh. Lucky Hazel. Hazel is a Preference Pane that can keep an eye on folders and automatically do things to their contents when things change, such as copying files to a second folder when new files are added to the first. This amounts to auto-backup on the fly and is very handy indeed. Hazel can do a lot more besides and is much simpler to set up than either Apple’s Automator or Folder Actions (<http://www.noodlesoft.com>).

AND FINDING STUFF? I THINK SPOTLIGHT SUCKS...

You’re not alone, but mostly this is down to presentation. By default, Spotlight searches for file names and within files for your search term, so it will return results including files whose names contain that term, along with PDFs, Mail messages, Word documents and other files whose contents contain the term. That’s right: Spotlight is searching inside the files, too. You can select the types of Spotlight searches and the order in which it returns results in the Spotlight System Preference pane. To find by more than just name or content, type your request into the Find field in a Finder window. You can then select where to search and add or remove search criteria. If you often look for the same stuff you can save your search results as a Smart Folder, or kind-of saved search. Smart Folders can be pretty useful, especially within Apple Mail.



It’s a pity Spotlight can’t yet search IPTC tags within image files, but we live in hope. There are other ways of skinning this particular cat, mostly involving iView MediaPro, and I’ll look at some next week.

Was this sufficiently communicative, if not exactly campaigning? 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.