

THE DIGITAL PLUMBER








PAUL ELLIS

THE ACADEMY OF PLUMBING 15 – THE LIST

I make no excuses for this month's column being austere utilitarian. All it consists of is a list of the software I find useful and that I recommend you to have copies of. It's categorised by function and accompanied by a sentence of explanation, approximate price and, where feasible, a free alternative. This could turn into a tediously long list of URLs to type, so to make life a little easier I've posted an online version on my website at <http://www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk/thelist.html> where you can simply click on an application's name to go straight to the appropriate supplier or download page. I've also added up what all of this will cost if you buy my starred first-choice software, so be warned. All prices are sterling, and approximate.












APPLE

First of all, don't overlook the applications Apple has provided with OS X.

-  • **Dictionary:** look up any word or its synonyms in almost any document by Control-clicking on it
-  • **iChat:** the best Mac-to-Mac video chat, plus text chat and file transfer
-  • **iCal:** get your team's lives organised by sharing calendars
-  • **Address Book:** used by Mail and many other 3rd-party applications for contact data
-  • **Disk Utility:** format disks in one of several styles; do software RAID 0 and 1, repair disk directories and permissions
-  • **iPhoto:** decent consumer or pro-am level image management with lots of useful convenience features
-  • **.Mac:** £69 pa. Email, file sharing, backup; calendar, bookmarks keychain and Address Book sync, etc. Not cheap, but good






MAINTENANCE & DISK UTILITIES

Never be without Applejack and SMARTReporter. They're free.

-  * **Applejack:** Free. The nearest thing to a diagnostic and maintenance magic bullet
-  * **DiskWarrior:** £50. Nothing repairs disk directory damage better
-  • **Drive Genius:** £50. Similar to DiskWarrior but does more. Have it as a second string to the bow.
-  * **Data Rescue II:** £50. The first choice to recover data from damaged disks that won't mount
-  • **Boomerang:** £100. Expensive, but can 'learn' file signatures to search for and sometimes finds data that Data Rescue II cannot
-  * **SMARTReporter:** Free. Periodically checks your hard drives for their state of health and warns you if a hardware failure is imminent. Usually. Unfortunately, and through no fault of its own, it can't check drives connected by FireWire or USB. For that, I recommend...
-  * **SoftRAID:** £60. Software RAID tool to create RAID 0 and RAID 1 arrays. Live monitoring of disk I/O gives early warning of any drive malfunction
-  * **Onyx:** Free. More than 100 system tweaks, optimisations and maintenance routines
-  • **Xupport:** £10. Similar to Onyx, but with a slightly different feature set. Well worth a look
-  * **TinkerTool:** Free. Change the look of the Finder, optimise broadband connections and much more
-  * **Macaroni:** £5. Runs the built-in OSX maintenance routines to your schedule













BACKUP

If you have no data backups you will one day live to regret it. Have a bootable backup of your Mac's boot volume on a FireWire drive to reboot from should your main drive fail. Update it daily. Keep backups of all of your data drives, too. There are lots of backup applications; none are perfect, most are useful.

-  * **SuperDuper!:** £15. Incremental bootable backups. Erase-and-backup for free. Technically the most complete backups, including all permissions, Access Control Lists, etc, etc
-  * **Carbon Copy Cloner:** Free. A good alternative to SuperDuper! for bootable backups
-  • **Synk Backup:** £15. Scheduled bootable backups plus incremental data archiving
-  • **Backup Simplicity:** £25. As above, but can automatically start backups when target disks are connected
-  * **ChronoSync:** £15. One of the very best for everything except bootable backups





NETWORKING & FILE TRANSFER

There's more to life than simple file sharing.

-  • **FileChute:** £8. Send large files to people without clogging up their email
-  * **iGet:** £25. Fast, encrypted file transfer. The best choice for remotely accessing files over the Internet
-  * **Transmit:** £10. The best-looking and usually best-performing Mac FTP software
-  * **BwanaDik:** Free. Tells you your external and internal IP addresses and can email you if they change
-  • **Lighthouse:** £6. Port-forwarding utility opens ports in your Internet router to let your easily run things such as web servers, file-sharing applications, Apple Remote Desktop, etc, without having to mess around with your router's ugly user interface
-  • **iChat:** Free. Here again because of its file-sharing capabilities
-  * **iStumbler:** Free. Search for and find wireless networks
-  • **Desktop Transporter:** £15. Remote-control other Macs on your network, or over the Internet. Run an old Mac without a monitor as a file server and remote-control it with this
-  * **IP Scanner:** Free. Find the IP addresses of other devices on your network
-  • **Address-O-Matic:** £10. Share and sync Address Books on your network without .Mac
-  * **Bonjour Browser:** Free. See what's running on your network
-  * **Postfix Enabler:** £5. Configure and turn on your Mac's built-in mail server. Never forget, though, that if you know your email username and password, <http://www.mail2web.com> will always allow you to send and receive email, wherever you are

OFFICE & PRODUCTIVITY

There's more to this than just Microsoft Office and FileMaker Pro.

-  • **AB Transfer:** £20. Export your contact list from Excel, FileMaker Pro and others, and get it into Address Book so that it can be used by...
-  * **AB Menu:** Free. Quick menu-bar access to your Address Book contacts, almost as good as the now-unavailable iAddressX
-  * **Snail Mail:** Free. Good, versatile envelope and label printing from the Address Book database
-  • **Mail Factory:** £20. If Snail Mail can't do it, Mail Factory probably can

MICROSOFT EXPRESSION MEDIA VERSION 1.0.8076

So, today, I received an email from iView sales informing me that I was eligible for a free upgrade from Media Pro to its reincarnation as Microsoft Expression Media. The mail included a link to a page containing my new Expression Media licence key. I clicked, copied, downloaded the software, launched it and pasted, to be informed that the licence key wasn't valid. Sorry to sound cynical, but why wasn't I surprised? To their credit, iView/Microsoft fixed the problem the following day, but a comment on macupdate.com perfectly sums up this whole pantomime:

Here's how it goes: Group of Mac guys develop a great little Mac app. Group sees app grow and continues to improve it. Program is pretty good. Group decides to dip toes into Windows market. Boosts price. Sells out to MS. Mac users flee to other better, more capable programs for similar price. MS kills Mac port. Group disbands and retires from sale of App to MS, or starts new project. Wash, rinse, repeat.

What's new? They've made the toolbar icons uglier. It launches a little faster. It appears not to have the licence-management features of Media Pro. They've added some Windows-only video encoding features and re-coded it 'to Microsoft coding standards', but it's still buggy. Ho hum. Can I be bothered with it? Perhaps, but perhaps not; if it runs in OS X 10.5 Leopard, Media Pro 3.1.3 will probably do me until someone comes up with a functional equivalent.

MAC OS X 10.5 LEOPARD

It was previewed at last month's World Wide Developer's Conference and some of the new functionality can be seen at (<http://www.apple.com/macosx/leopard/features/>).

There is some useful new stuff amongst the eye-candy and it looks well worth the wait until October for it to be released. Leopard Server is also of interest to those of you running small workgroups: (<http://www.apple.com/server/macosx/leopard/>).



- **DayLite:** £75. Heavy-duty CRM, scheduling and contact management



- * **BlinkBid:** £45. A good choice for an integrated estimating, paperwork and invoicing system. The AoP has negotiated a member's discount with the developer



- **iBiz:** £25. General-purpose estimating and invoicing. The one I use

- **Billings:** £30. Similar to iBiz, but with fancier invoice templates

- **iRatchet:** £25. Again like iBiz, but also tracks expenses



- * **iBank:** £25. Companion to iBiz; track your accounts and categorise transactions. Good at tax-return time

- * **PDFLab:** Free. Edit PDFs and join them together



- * **iGTD:** Free. Advanced To-Do list manager based on David Allen's 'Getting Things Done' system



- **EEAX:** £15. Archive your Microsoft Entourage data, freeing up space and speeding up Entourage



- * **TNEF's Enough:** Free. Extract the contents of those dumb, useless winmail.dat files that Microsoft Outlook users keep sending you



- * **OMiC:** Free. Add-on for Apple Mail that also extracts the contents of those dumb, useless winmail.dat files that Microsoft Outlook users keep sending you

PHOTOGRAPHIC

... and there's more to this than just Photoshop and the big RAW developers.



- * **Photo Mechanic:** £75. By far the fastest application for ingesting (with backup) applying IPTC to and selecting your images



- * **ImageIngester:** Free. Does almost everything Photo Mechanic does except the selecting

- * **Microsoft Expression Media:** £150. Son of iView MediaPro, the all-round best image and digital asset manager.



- * **LensFix:** £15. Advanced lens distortion and aberration correction



- * **Noiseware Professional:** £35. Excellent, fast digital noise reduction



- * **PhotoRescue:** £30. For when your CF cards crash...

COMMUNICATIONS

- **iChat:** Free. Haven't we mentioned this already?



- * **Skype:** Free. Cross-platform video conferencing, SMS and VoIP telephony



- **iGlasses:** £5. Improve your webcam picture when displayed in iChat, Skype and others



- * **X-Lite:** Free. VoIP softphone for making free phone calls over the Internet



- **iSoftPhone:** £40 (!). Better-looking, nicer softphone than X-Lite

MISCELLANEOUS

Odds and sods that don't fit into any of the above categories, in no particular order...



- * **Undercover:** £20. Track and recover your stolen Mac

- **Web Confidential:** £10. Password, personal info and serial number manager using encrypted database

- * **PithHelmet:** Free. Ad-blocker for Safari

- * **TextWrangler:** Free. Advanced text editor



- * **Firefox:** Free. If a site won't work with Safari, it'll work with Firefox. Forget Internet Explorer

- **NetNewsWire:** £15. The best RSS newsreader



- * **Flip4Mac:** Free. Supersedes the awful Windows Media Player and allows you to view most Windows Media within QuickTime

- * **RealPlayer:** Free. Watch and listen to the BBC

- **QuickTime Pro:** £20. Unlocks functionality within QuickTime, turning it into a surprisingly useful media format converter and editor

- * **LCDTest:** Free. Expose banding and dead pixels in your LCD

- * **Stuffit Expander:** Free. Decode most compressed archive formats

- * **Hazel:** £8. Very clever automatic rules-based file manipulation



- **Default Folder:** £16. Finder Open and Save dialogue-box enhancer, making the Finder rather easier to use



- * **Little Snitch:** £12. Alerts you when an application wants to make a network connection, eg to send your credit card details to the Russian mafia (or Adobe)

- * **Default Apps:** Free. Allows you to choose your default mail and browser applications and select which application opens (or not) when you double-click on a file, amongst many other functions

- **Virus Barrier:** £35. Anti-virus, not that we really need it except as a defence against Microsoft Office macro viruses

- **ClamAV:** Free. Most of what Virus Barrier does

- **Toast:** £50. Advanced CD, DVD and Blu-Ray disc burning for when the Finder's built-in burning won't do what you want

And finally...

- **KidsBrowser:** £25. When you've finally decided to get up from the computer and get a life, and your five-year-old wants to surf the CBeebies website...

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE, THEN? £658! Phew!

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.