

The Academy of Plumbing 27 Lucky Dip

There is no specific theme this month. Looking through my notes for this column I realised that I had collected several snippets, all of them useful, none of them big enough to warrant an entire article. So this month here they are, in no particular order.

NEVER CALL THE MANUFACTURER

A gross generalisation, obviously, but containing more than a grain of truth. I could tell legions of stories about being kept on hold to Bangalore for hours only to finally get through to someone who has no Macintosh knowledge, claims that their routers don't work with the Mac and urges me to get a "proper" computer (a BT speciality), or tech calls to Adobe who always seem to recommend a software reinstall (rarely the most appropriate solution to the problem), but the one I'll relate here concerns Apple.

A couple of months ago I received a plaintive mid-evening phone call from the mum of a distraught teenage girl who'd just completely wiped her iMac. She'd bought a copy of Leopard to upgrade it and was worried that she'd make a mess of it, and so called Apple Customer Support for advice. The first person she spoke to told her to "back up her data" and advised her to drag her Documents folder to an external hard disk. That's all. So she did, and having done so, called Apple again. The second Apple person asked whether the iMac had been "backed up". The girl replied in the affirmative, and was then instructed to carry out an *erase & install*. The result? As you can imagine, a squeaky-clean system running Leopard and Apple's bundled applications and an external disk with some irrelevant

documents in it. Lost and irrecoverable were the applications that the Apple Store had installed for her when she bought the iMac (and for most of which, for some reason, she didn't have installer disks), her photos, videos and iTunes library. Most of her documents and schoolwork had been in folders on her Desktop and were only partially recovered after I'd spent a good deal of time on it. There is always the possibility that this girl wasn't paying attention, of course, but I somehow doubt it. Two points:

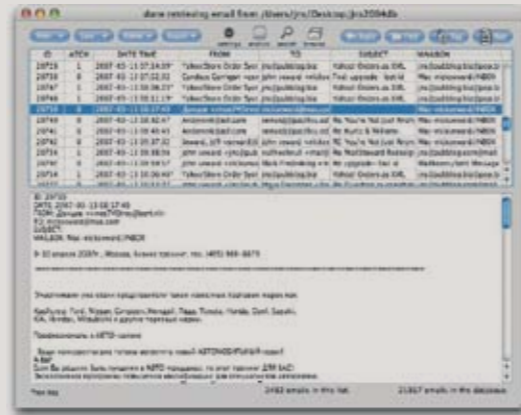
- 1) dragging your Documents folder to an external disk doesn't constitute a "backup"
- 2) an Erase & Install is only required in unusual circumstances, and never when simply upgrading a properly-functioning system.

The manufacturer's helpline is the absolute last resort. Why? Because their call-centre staff are reading from flowcharts on screens. They'll usually tell you to wipe and reinstall because that puts the system back into a known state represented on their flowchart. Hence this rule of thumb: *When in doubt, ask someone who knows*. For you lot, that means asking a question on the AOP Forum, Pro-Imaging or ProDig. That's where you'll find the expert help you need.

MANAGING EMAIL

In the past couple of months I've had two clients lose their entire Microsoft Entourage email database. The first one had a database approaching

12GB in size, which would sometimes open and sometimes not. Fortunately, and I'm sure more by luck than judgment, I managed to get it to open. I immediately launched Apple Mail and imported the lot. The second client wasn't so lucky: her database was irrecoverable by any Microsoft tools. EntourageAid (<http://tinyurl.com/5l7ysm>) managed to extract the bulk of her emails but she lost her calendar and all of her contact data. I've said this before and I'll say it again: the Entourage email database is a bad design, vulnerable to corruption and a backup hog, especially for Time Machine. Lose this, lose the lot. Move to Apple Mail, Thunderbird, MailSmith or any other email application that uses mbox or individual mail file storage rather than placing all of its eggs in one basket as Entourage does. Alternatively, use something like MailSteward (www.mailsteward.com/) or Entourage Email Archive X (<http://tinyurl.com/ajpqs>) to back up your email, and then clear everything out.



The Digital Plumber

By Paul Ellis

APPLEJACK

Many people have asked me when Applejack, the world's favourite free Macintosh troubleshooting magic bullet, will be updated to Leopard compatibility. I think it might be best to let Applejack's programmer Kristofer Widholm tell the story:

"Probably months, I'm sorry to say. Developer (me) is working 60+ hours a week and renovating his apartment by hand. Because Apple refuses to provide any documentation on the dependencies of their utilities in single user mode, getting it to work is a matter of pure trial and error. Load launchd X, does diskutil work? No. Okay load launchd Y, then launch C, does diskutil work? No. Okay load launchd C then launchd Y, oh, hmm. now it kinda does, but hangs etc etc etc. I have tried to talk to them but all I've heard back from them is "This is not a user supported scenario". With about 20 lines of documentation, I could probably make all the necessary changes in 30 minutes flat."

So now you know. If you want to know more, look at <http://tinyurl.com/ysfjgs>. In the meantime, what should we do to replace it? Restarting in Safe Boot mode can often clear niggling problems. Do this by pressing the Shift key at the chime, and hold it down until the grey Apple and spinning wheel appears. Then release it. The Mac will undertake a range of diagnostic procedures and then start up

with no third-party or inessential services running. Log in, and when start-up has completed, restart normally.

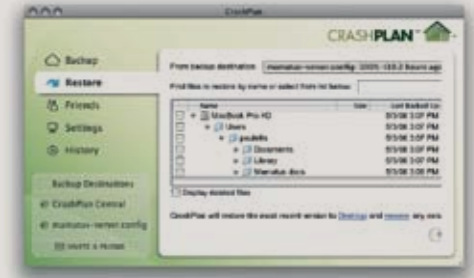
If you want to do more than this there's no direct one-step Applejack replacement, but the following procedure comes close. Be warned: *this procedure can take over an hour*.

- 1) Start in Safe Boot mode by pressing the Shift key at the chime, and hold it down until the grey Apple and spinning wheel appears.
- 2) Launch Disk Utility (in the Applications/Utilities folder) and Verify Disk. If Verify Disk fails, reboot from a bootable backup and use Disk Utility to repair the disk. Then go back to step 1.
- 3) Launch IceClean (<http://tinyurl.com/2m57v9>), go to its OS X Maintenance menu and select All Tasks – Shut Down.



4) Restart in Safe Mode and relaunch IceClean. Go to its OS X Cleanup menus and run Remove System Caches>User, then Remove System Caches>Root, and then Deep System Cleanup>Remove All Files. Then restart.

This doesn't do all that Applejack did, and does some other things Applejack didn't, but for Leopard it's a reasonable substitute. Come back, Applejack.



OFFSITE BACKUP

A hardy perennial, this one. Those of you who have your images archived on disks in Sonnet Fusion enclosures, or similar, will know how straightforward it is to swap disks out to keep a complete backup of your archive off-site. But what about our other data such as emails, contacts, letters, etc.? There are now more than a few online services that offer offsite storage but they're nearly all subscription-based and tend to be PC-centric. I've been experimenting with CrashPlan (www.crashplan.com/), which allows you to use your other computers, or friends' computers, as backup destinations. This is a very clever approach, more economical than commercial remote storage and much faster if the backup computer is on the same network (or wireless network) as yours. Use it to back up your entire Home folder, and if you're using your Mac properly, you'll never lose anything vital again.

Never mind the blog, I got a life instead. Find me at www.thedigitalplumber.co.uk. © Paul David Ellis, 2008. All Rights Reserved.