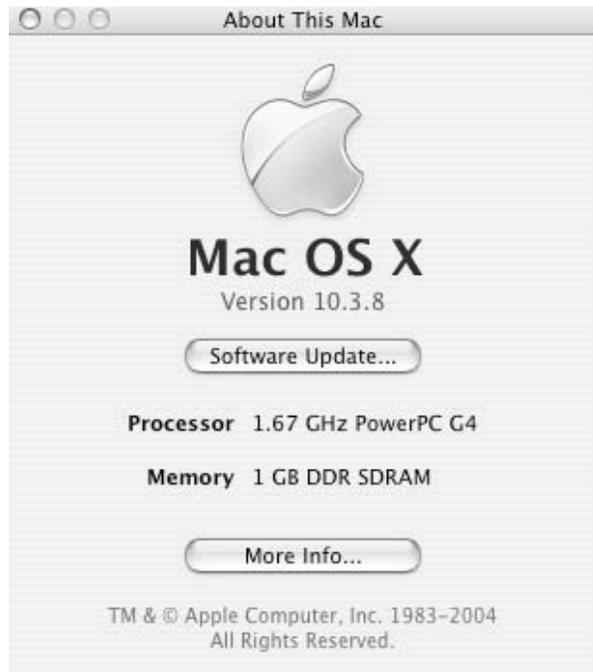# Understanding Mac OS X

The Apple Menu

About This Mac

Click on the Version 10.x.x to see the version number installed on the machine you are using. Clicking again will display the "Build Number." Clicking one last time will display your computer's serial number. This is very important whenever you have to call Apple's Support (AppleCare) Telephone Number (1-800-SOS-APPLe). If you purchase a new Mac, It is highly recommended that you consider purchasing AppleCare. I can't stress that enough if you purchase an iBook or PowerBook. The replacement costs are staggering!

Below the version number is a button labeled, "Software Update." This is a simple way to access and install any Mac OS X System Updates or Upgrades.

Below this button you will see the Processor speed of the computer you are using. You will also see just how much RAM is installed in your computer. While Mac OS X does a terrific job of insuring your applications have enough memory to perform as needed, it really works much more efficiently with as much RAM as you can afford to install in your computer. Be sure to check places like RamSeeker (www.ramseeker.com) online to see what the going rate is for RAM. It is like the stock market in that it tends to fluctuate in price daily.

The last button in this window is labeled, "More info…" Clicking this button will launch the System Profiler. When launched, the System Profiler will check your computer and display its contents. The contents of your computer will be sorted out

in Hardware and Software. Under Hardware, you will see sections labeled: Memory, PCI/AGP Cards, ATA, SCSI, USB, FireWire, Airport Card, and Modems. The Software will be sorted into Applications and Extensions. Also listed will be information for your Network and Logs.

Beginning with Memory we discover how many memory slots, or banks, there are in your computer. Not only does it tell you how many slots, but it tells you how much RAM is in each slot. The PCI/AGP Cards will display your video card information and any other cards you may have installed. The ATA section will list information about the hard disk drive(s) and the CD-ROM/DVD-ROM drives you may have installed. This can be important if you have problems with hard disk drive failure. This area will display the manufacture's name, the drive's capacity (And how much space is available on the drive), and it's file system (How the drive is formatted).

Most of the newer Mac models will not have any information displayed in the SCSI section. At one time, this section was very important to Mac users. Most hard disk drives, scanners, and most hardware added to your Mac used the SCSI method of communicating with each other. Nowadays, we use ATA, or USB. The USB area will display information similar to what you saw under ATA. In this case, however, it will be describing things like the keyboard and mouse. Inkjet printers and scanners use USB as their preferred protocol when communicating with the computer. FireWire will list any FireWire hard drives, digital video cameras (If connected), and iPods – if connected.

If you use Wireless networking, you will see your network card listed under Airport. It will list the type, locale, the network name and channel. Perhaps the most important info listed will be the Firmware version. As you may have guessed, the Modems section will list information regarding your internal modem.

The Software section will list the software applications installed on your computer, and the Extensions. The Extensions are simply files that help make up the operating system. In "Classic" (Operating Systems prior to OS X), we had Control Panels and Extensions. The Extensions in OS X are similar, but most (If not all) are not accessible like they used to be in previous versions of the OS. I would guess that most of us will never know, or understand, what each of these Extensions are, or what they do within the OS.

Get Mac OS X Software

This is simply a shortcut, provided by Apple, to bring the user to Apple's Web Site. At this Web Site (http://www.apple.com/downloads/macosx/), Apple provides a listing of Mac software. Shareware and freeware, as well as updates to System and other commercial software, are sorted into categories by type, with links provided to enable the user to download the software.

System Preferences
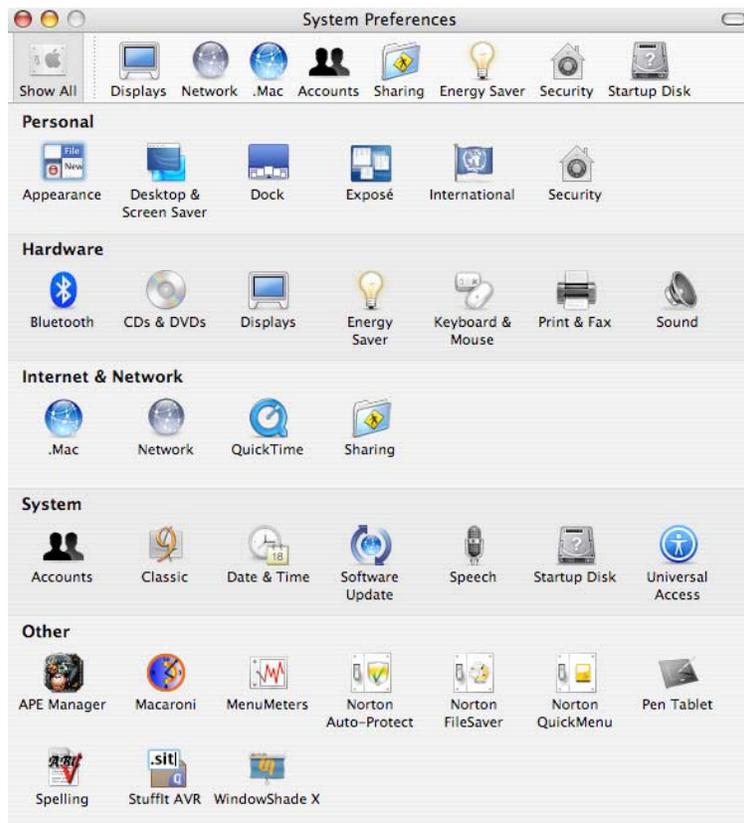
Perhaps the most used item under the Apple Menu, for most users anyway, will be the System Preferences. Here is where the user will find ways to customize their Mac. The System Preferences are divided into five categories: Personal, Hardware, Internet & Network, System, and Other.

Under the Personal category you will find the following: Appearance, Desktop & Screen Saver, Dock, Exposé, International, and Security.
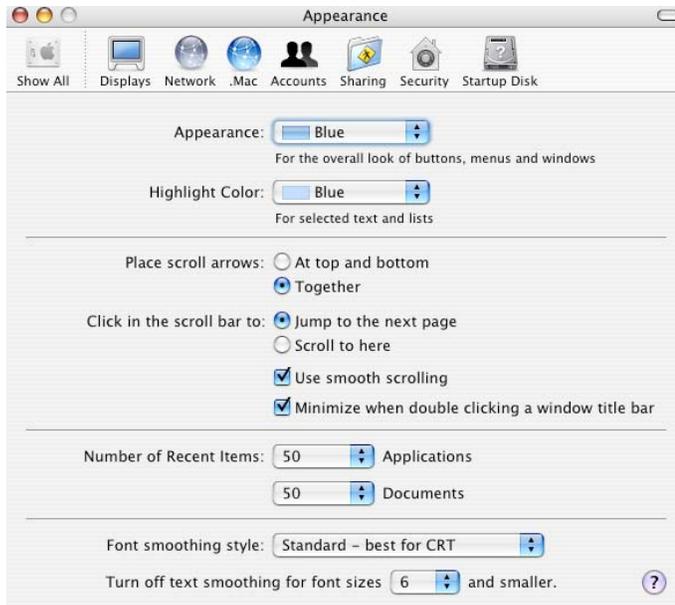
The Appearance section offers the same types of choices that we saw in OS 9, 8, 7, etc. Users can set the color of their buttons, menus and windows. You can even change the highlight color when selecting text and lists. You will be offered the choice of whether or not you want the scroll arrows placed one at the top and one at the bottom, or do you want them placed together at the top and the bottom. I prefer having them placed together at the top AND at the bottom of the window. I just find it easier for me to find those arrows placed together. Another choice you are offered is the Font Smoothing Style. This is where you determine how easy-to-read you want the text to appear on your screen. This is strictly a personal choice. There really is no set way for everyone. It's your Mac, you set it the way *you* want it to look.

The next section within the System Preferences is labeled "Desktop & Screen Saver." Apple offers some of their own choices for what Mac Users call the "Desktop Pattern." Windows users would call it the "Wallpaper." Apple's choices include scenes of Nature, Abstract, and Solid Colors. They also offer images from the user's Pictures folder. I have found that literally any and all image formats have worked for me. You can choose to have the image Fill Screen, Stretch to Fill Screen, Center it on the desktop, or Tile the image. You can also choose to display different images randomly AND set the timing of how long the images are displayed. The Screen Saver section does what you might expect – it allows the user to set a screen saver. Here again, Apple offers choices. They are Flurry, Abstract, Beach, Cosmos, Forest, and .Mac. As you may have guessed, there are plenty others offered via the Internet that may better serve the user's personality. There is also a setting to determine jsu when the screen saver will become active.
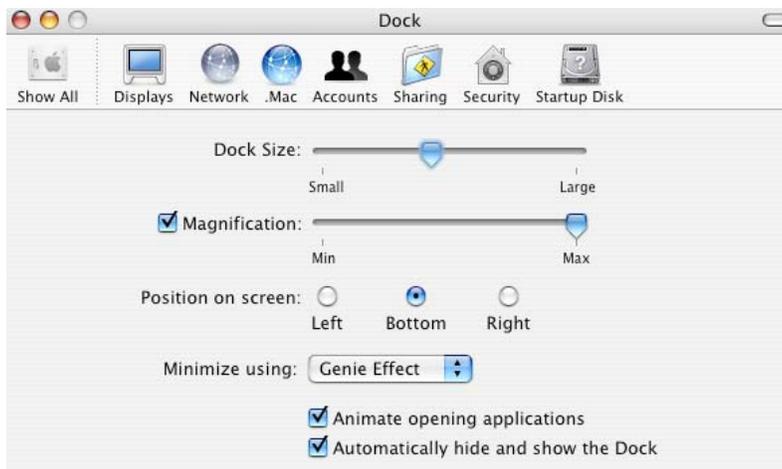
The Dock is very similar to what Windows users call the Task Bar where they find the START button. I've always wondered why you would select the start button to shut the computer down. :-) The Dock is the menu that is by default found at the bottom of the screen. Users can decide to move the Dock to the left side , or the right side of their screen by going to the Dock button in the System Preferences. Here you can set the Dock size and its magnification. The option is there to determine the effect when minimizing the Dock. There are options to Animate opening applications, and whether or not you wish to automatically hide and show the Dock. You can also find the Dock Preferences under the Apple Menu all by itself.

Exposé is truly the "WOW!" feature in Panther (Mac OS X 10.3.x). Picture yourself working on several items at the same time. You could have your e-mail program running, your Web browser, Word, Excel, Acrobat, etc. All with documents open. By simply using the F9 key (fn-9 on a PowerBook) all the documents will disperse to smaller, separate windows on the screen. Moving the cursor over each window will bring up a display with the window's title. You simply select the window you wish to work on and voila – it's at the top of the heap! The F10 key will organize by applications, and the f11 key will clear all windows off the desktop. These keys are all customizable within the System Preferences. As noted within the Exposé Preferences window, other choices are available by pressing the Shift, Control, or Option keys to see more choices. This is something you will not see in Windows. If you want to brag about your Mac and OS X, Exposé is something that will cause jaws to drop! :-)

International is, as you might have guessed already, where you can set which language you wish to work while using your Mac. This System Preference also has some special "goodies" that are very helpful for the casual user. You may have noticed while reading about Exposé that I used an accented e in the word, Exposé. I know, from previous experience, that if I press the letter E while holding the Option key, and then press the letter e, I will get the accented letter é. If I didn't know how to accomplish this, I could also go to the Character Palette to do the same thing. How do I find the Character Palette? In the International System Preferences you will see three buttons: Language, Formats, and Input Menu. The first one, Language, is self-explanatory. It lets the user select a language. Formats will allow you to determine how you want Dates, Times, and/or Numbers displayed. Input Menu lists the languages and one labeled Character Palette and Keyboard Viewer. Since I type, and work, in American English, I see an American Flag along the top of my screen. By selecting the Character Palette and Keyboard Viewer, I will see those two items listed under the U.S. Flag when I select the flag on the Menu Bar in the Finder. (Be sure you check the box labeled, "Show input menu in menu bar.") The Keyboard Viewer brings up what we used to call "Key Caps" in the older Mac Operating Systems (OS 9, 8, 7, etc.). The Character Palette will display all, and I do mean all, the possible characters that may be displayed from all of your fonts. This is very handy when trying to remember how to select, for example, a shadowed box from Zapf Dingbats. You simply find the character you want to use, and select "Insert" from the lower right corner button within the Palette window. Once you've discovered it, you'll wonder why you never used it before now.

Security should be a mandatory place for iBook and PowerBook owners when setting up their computers. I say that because I feel the selections displayed in the bottom half of this System Preferences window allow the owner to protect their computer from prying eyes. By requiring a password to wake this computer from sleep or screen saver, you are keeping your display dark to users whom you don't want looking at your computer. Is it foolproof? No! But it does a pretty good job of scaring them off! I also check, "Disable automatic login." This requires I enter my login password when starting the computer. The top of the window allows the user to encrypt their Home Folder. Remember, when you login while using OS X, you are working in your private Home Folder. This feature didn't work as advertised when it was initially released. Apple has corrected the problems and this feature is considered safe to use. I recommend using this feature – especially on a portable computer.

This concludes what Rick covered at the last RIMUG meeting. I hope these notes will prove to be helpful to one and all. We plan on explaining more next month!

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