RSS Explained

By Phil Shapiro

RSS - really simple syndication -- is a labor-saving tool that allows people to tune into information sources that interest them. The information source could be a blog, a podcast, a videocast or any web site that includes RSS feeds.

The value of RSS accrues when you subscribe to multiple RSS feeds. You can then monitor multiple information streams with a minimum of effort.

There are many different software tools for subscribing to RSS feeds. One of the most popular is a web site named Bloglines. Some web browsers let you subscribe to RSS feeds. Safari 2.x and Firefox are two browsers that do. Firefox lets you to subscribe to RSS feeds using something called Live Bookmarks. You can also use a Firefox extension named Sage to subscribe to RSS feeds.

RSS’s primary value is that it brings information to you without you having to visit multiple web sites. In a knowledge economy, anything that streamlines the flow of information from producer to consumer gives benefit to both producer and consumer. You tune into the

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MEMBERSHIPS ABOUT TO EXPIRE

Robert Baer
Gloria A. Lemieux
John Watkins

NEW MEMBERS & RENEWALS

Arthur Erb
John B.A. Hostage
Place: Nashua Public Library, 2 Court St., Nashua, NH

Presided By: Paul Bendeck

This meeting was held in the Hunt room of the Nashua Library. Next month we are scheduled to be back in our usual location in the NPL Theater downstairs at the Nashua Library.

Reports:
Secretary’s Report - The minutes from the last meeting were approved as printed in the March 06 newsletter.

Treasurer’s Report - The Treasurer reported $822.50 in the checking account. One renewal was taken in. The bank charged us a monthly fee of $4.95. The Treasurer discussed this fee with the bank and they will eliminate the fee for the next two years; they also will credit us with the March fee. The Treasurer’s report was approved.

Newsletter Report - Articles for the next newsletter are due April 14th to Tim. Past issues of the newsletter are available on the ApplePower home page under the link for Newsletter Archive.

Renewals: There was one renewal and one new member application accepted at this meeting. New attendees introduced themselves and were invited to join us at the next meeting. Paul emphasized the benefits of being a paid up member to the club, such as the CompUSA Discount Program.

Apple News: Rich Kovars discussed recent news from Apple regarding the Intel Mac products. Also discussed were some of the many rumors circulating around Apple’s 30th Anniversary coming up April 1. Thanks very much Rich.

Problems and Discussions: We try to provide an interactive session during every meeting for members, and guests too, to ask questions about any problems they might have with any Apple computer or software product. There are usually several knowledgeable people available at every meeting to help answer your questions. Here are some of the problems discussed at the last meeting:

- G4 Laptop problems
- Quicken backup problems
- Desktop picture problem
- Quicken scheduling problem

Remember, whenever you have a hardware or software problem with your Apple computer, a good place to start looking for information is the Links and Resources page on the ApplePower home page.

Old Business:
No old business was discussed.

New Business:
No new business was presented.

Demo:
Rick Branscomb gave an informative and active demo on iWeb, the newest member of the iLife package. He developed a SNAC web page as he demonstrated how to use the iWeb program. The resulting web page is posted on the SNAC .Mac account. Thanks Rick for showing us how to use iWeb.

Bye - Till next month...

Coming Events For 2006/2007

SNAC's Main Meetings is held at the Nashua Public Library, 2 Court Street, Nashua, NH. Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of each month at 7PM.

SNAC Meeting Schedule

January 31, 2006
February 28, 2006
March 28, 2006
April 25, 2006
May 30, 2006
June 27, 2006
July 25, 2006
August 29, 2006
September 26, 2006
October 31, 2006
November 28, 2006
December 26, 2006

Newsletter Article Deadline

January 20, 2006
February 17, 2006
March 17, 2006
April 14, 2006
May 19, 2006
June 16, 2006
July 14, 2006
August 18, 2006
September 15, 2006
October 20, 2006
November 17, 2006
December 15, 2006

Help SNAC Grow!

Bring in a Friend and Neighbor to the meeting!!!
Some Examples of How RSS Simplifies Peoples' Lives

I asked some technology consultants to explain how RSS brings value to peoples' lives. Curtis Brown at MissionMovers.org, in Seattle, is a strong believer in RSS. He explains, “RSS has invaded every part of our life, but we just don't know it. RSS is an information delivery method that gives added convenience to both senders and receivers of the information.”

As an example, RSS feeds can be used by a nonprofit organization to distribute different kinds of information to different people. One RSS feed could be the organization's calendar of events or classes. Another could be a call for volunteers. A third feed might be information for funders. The more feeds an organization offers, the more narrowly tailored the information delivered to people served by that organization or supporting that organization.

Here are some other examples of RSS feeds. A used car dealer can have an RSS feed that details newly arrived used cars. A public library could have an RSS feed of newly purchased books. A police department can have separate RSS feeds for different neighborhoods, giving up-to-date information on safety concerns in each neighborhood. Curtis Brown explains that information received in an RSS feed can be filtered by keyword and colorized in text. So you have control over the RSS feed. You decide the ways in which that stream of information is going to serve your needs.

Curtis explains that RSS feeds become immensely useful when people work collaboratively in a wiki. (A wiki is a web page that different people can edit.) Changes to the web page can be monitored via an RSS feed. This allows anyone participating in the wiki to have a clear idea of who is adding the most value to the wiki. RSS allows for better monitoring and gives added transparency to the collaborative process.

Curtis goes on to explain that there are two kinds of RSS feeds -- static feeds and dynamic feeds. A static feed might be sports scores or the feed from a single blog. A dynamic feed is a stream of information where there is searching going on to pull out specific pieces of information to add to the stream.

It's also possible to combine several RSS feeds into a single new feed. One web site that let's you do that is rssmix.com. Why would you want to do that? Suppose you live in a metropolitan area with several different library systems spanning several counties. Each library system provides an RSS feed of the events happening within their library system. You'd like to keep track of library events in multiple counties. rssmix.com would let you combine RSS feeds in that way.

Another RSS enthusiast, Bruce Roy, in Sydney, Australia explains - “I have found the RSS facility in The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding (TNG) very useful for the family tree site. It enables people interested in following the family tree to get information about changes to the tree without having to check the website's “What's New?” or wade through the data.”

One other advantage of RSS is that it lets you tune out mainstream media and tune into alternative media and personal media. If you find the CBS Evening News a touch thin in how it covers the news, with RSS you have an alternative source of news where news stories don't need to be squeezed into 45 second slots.

Another RSS enthusiast, Winsthrop Morgan, in the Washington DC-area had this to add:

“Regarding your request for examples of how RSS brings benefits into peoples' lives, I highly recommend you consider including Join Together Online as a great Win-Win model.

Join Together Online (JTO) (http://www.jointogether.org) has long been a pioneer in using the Internet to support people working on substance abuse and gun violence issues. Every month, one million JTO web pages are viewed by over 350,000 people.

JTO uses RSS feeds to not only help their web presence spread, but also to provide vital to support state, municipal, and nonprofit drug treatment and prevention program managers and their audiences. While these programs' web masters might have a modest web presence, they lack the wherewithal to continuously produce new content, or even gather and republish it. Without new content, their audiences lack a reason to come back to their Web site. The JTO RSS service enormously increases both the return visit value of these sites and the presence of authoritative information in this highly charged information space.

To keep the RSS feeds fresh and riveting, JTO employs a small editorial staff who aggregates both online and offline news on substance abuse funding, policies, and more from authoritative sources. They edit this news down to its essential content, and then republish it via RSS, as well as to users of their site and subscribers to their e-mail news services.”

RSS Relieves Cluttered Email Inboxes

If you have traditionally received a lot of your information via email, RSS can provide some relief to your inbox. Would you like to follow a particular email list, but can't
stomach subscribing to one more email list? If that list is on Yahoogroups, you can follow the list via the list’s RSS feed. An excellent free tool for reading RSS feeds is Bloglines. (http://www.bloglines.com)

RSS feeds are almost always spam-free. The provider of the RSS feed doesn’t want you to unsubscribe from the feed -- so they treat you with respect.

Ben Sheldon, in Lowell, Massachusetts, passes along this RSS tip: “Google still only offers email news alerts, but this utility lets you use create an RSS feed out of any Google News search term. [http://www.justinpfister.com/gnewsfeed.cfm] I aggregate my name, my projects (DigitalBicycle, ServiceSpeak), and my street and city so that if something happens I should know about, I will.”

If you’re still with me, I’ll pass along a few small tips of my own. I use RSS, Bloglines and my Digg.com account to keep track of what Digg stories my friends are digging (i.e. voting for.) I just copy the RSS feed from the bottom left of http://digg.com/users/pshapiro/friends and then paste it into Add Feed in Bloglines.

Between Katie Couric and the 50 friends I have on Digg, which do you think provides the richer quality of information to me? Right. Just for kicks I subscribe to the Associated Press RSS feed, so I’m in the loop with whatever Katie knows.

I also use the free service at Squeet.com to send me an email whenever one of my friends submits a story to Digg.com, so they don’t have to let me know about their submissions. That email alert capability might well come to Digg sometime.

I use RSS to keep me posted on new items of interest to me that are posted to Del.icio.us. For example, if anyone submits an item to Del.icio.us with the tag digitalstorytelling, I find out about that really easily in my Bloglines account.

That puts me in touch with anyone doing digital storytelling anywhere on the planet. And I don’t even have to subscribe to another email list to be in touch with them. I like that.

Phil Shapiro

The author is a former president of Virginia Macintosh Users Group and formerly worked as the Washington DC Regional Coordinator for Community Technology Centers’ Network, an international network of more than 1000 organizations bringing technology and technology training to underserved communities.

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Examining The Concept Of Digital Image Noise

Written by Bill Davies

For a number of months I’ve been wanting to further explore the concept of “noise” in digital photographs, and as I just received a press release (and ten-day demo license) for a new noise removal product, I took that as a sign that I should finally try to clarify my own understanding of what “noise” is, and try to explain it to others. The picture below is divided vertically down the middle of the
picture. You should be able to see that the left side of the photo is a lot less grainy than the right side. This image represented the best results I got, and I did this with Neat Image, described in more detail below. Thus this article is more about the concept of “noise” than it is about a product recommendation. I do discuss the two products I tried, and I formed some quick opinions, but my experiences with those products was based on how much I could accomplish using them in “dummy” mode without reading the documentation.

So let’s start with how this all started. About a year ago I bought an ultra-compact new digital camera (a Panasonic DMC-FX7) and started using it more than my three-year-old Olympus C-2100 because it could fit in my jeans pocket and I could easily take it anywhere. The mini camera remains very convenient, but I noticed that some pictures, especially indoor pictures with no flash, were a lot more grainy than indoor pictures I had taken with the Olympus. And so began my quest to understand the concept of “noise” more clearly, as I had assumed that going from 2.1 megapixels to 5.0 megapixels meant that, by default, the images would have more detail and more sharpness. Not so.

Here’s the technical definition of what’s going on, courtesy of dpreview.com:

“Each pixel in a camera sensor contains one or more light sensitive photodiodes which convert the incoming light (photons) into an electrical signal which is processed into the color value of the pixel in the final image. If the same pixel would be exposed several times by the same amount of light, the resulting color values would not be identical but have small statistical variations, called “noise”. Even without incoming light, the electrical activity of the sensor itself will generate some signal, the equivalent of the background hiss of audio equipment which is switched on without playing any music. This additional signal is “noisy” because it varies per pixel (and over time) and increases with the temperature, and will add to the overall image noise. It is called the “noise floor”. The output of a pixel has to be larger than the noise floor in order to be significant (i.e. to be distinguishable from noise).”

I think, without professing to be an expert in the subject, that by moving to a smaller camera, I moved to a smaller digital sensor inside the camera. That seems to be borne out by this further explanation at dpreview.com:

“Noise in digital images is most visible in uniform surfaces (such as blue skies and shadows) as monochromatic grain, similar to film grain (luminance noise) and/or as colored waves (color noise). As mentioned earlier, noise increases with temperature. It also increases with sensitivity, especially the color noise in digital compact cameras (example D below). Noise also increases as pixel size decreases, which is why digital compact cameras generate much noisier images than digital SLRs. Professional grade cameras with higher quality components and more powerful processors that allow for more advanced noise removal algorithms display virtually no noise, especially at lower sensitivities. Noise is typically more visible in the red and blue channels than in the green channel. This is why the unmagnified red channel crops in the examples below are better at illustrating the differences in noise levels.”

So by moving to a smaller camera with more megapixels and a smaller CMOS sensor, I was pretty much asking to have more noise in my pictures because I was cramming more (smaller) pixels on a smaller surface. Subsequent research has taught me that Panasonic cameras suffer from this more than other brands. The funny thing is that we really don’t see this additional noise in our pictures that are taken in bright sunlight, but it does seem to show up with indoor, non-flash pictures. And the reason for that is that when you use the camera in “idiot” mode, as we frequently do, the camera can change its ISO (light sensitivity) so a well-lit picture may be taken at ISO 50, whereas an indoor shot where the camera is struggling for light may be taken at ISO 400. And noise increases as the ISO increases.

So that’s the scientific definition of noise. How do you know if you have it? I decided to find one of my grainy remodel photos and try to illustrate the point. So we’re going to be looking at a picture of sheetrock. The noise-removal utilities suggest that when analyzing a photo for noise removal, the software should be trained on a uniform section of the photo containing no important details. So in my case, I selected a section of the ceiling that had no important details.

I took the test image and ran it through two different products, described below.

The first product I tried was AKVIS Noise Buster 1.1. Noise Buster is a plug-in. It requires an image processing program that supports plug-ins. AKVIS Noise Buster is compatible with Adobe Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, Jasc paint Shop pro, etc. The software runs on Microsoft Windows 98/ME/2000/XP/NT and on Mac OS X 10.3, PowerPC G3 and above. AKVIS Noise Buster sells for $49.00 US. One license key allows activating the software on two computers, for example, on a desktop and on a laptop. AKVIS Alchemy Bundle (a bundle of 6 photo correction and restoration plug-ins, including Noise Buster) sells for $270.00 USD, saving you $150.00 USD over buying each plug-in separately. A trial ten-day license code is available. Examples are available here. The user interface of Noise Buster is presented here:
The second was product I tried was Neat Image 3.11. Several of the photo web sites I frequent always rave about Neat Image, but I had never found the need to try it. Neat Image is a filter designed to reduce visible noise and grain in photographic images produced by digital cameras and scanners. Neat Image is indispensable in low-light (indoors, night, astro) and high-speed (sport, action) photography. Neat Image for Windows comes as both a plug-in and a standalone application, but it appears that Neat Image for Macintosh comes as either a free “demo” plug-in or in “Pro” mode with full functionality enabled. (The Demo plug-in is limited by size of image area that can be processed: it only processes a part of the input image if the image is larger than 1024x1024 pixels. The Pro plug-in is not limited in this respect.) Neat Image sells for $49.90 and can be installed on two computers, but only used on one at a time. Examples are available here. The user interface of Neat Image is presented here: (See figure on the next page - ed)

After trying both Noise Buster and Neat Image, I decided that if I were going to choose, I’d probably choose Neat Image for several reasons. First, the vendor supplies a variety of “noise profiles” for common cameras, so you can download optimized filters that are pre-set to know how to handle images from your specific camera. Second, Neat Image correctly recognized that I was using a dual-processor machine and completed filtering the image five to six times faster than Noise Buster. I did all my tests with Photoshop CS2 on my iMac Core Duo. Photoshop CS2 is not yet updated for Intel Macs and runs in emulation mode, yet Neat Image knew I had a dual core processor, and Noise Buster did not. I’ve got to give them points for that. Third, and perhaps most important, I stumbled through each product without reading the manual, and the photo I processed with Neat Image showed noticeable improvement, whereas I had a hard time discerning that the photo I processed with Noise Buster was any different than the original. I suspect I could have accomplished better results with Noise Buster if I had the patience to try to understand some of the sliders and settings. If you compare the two user interfaces, I have to say that Noise Buster actually is less intimidating, but by the same token, running it in “dummy” mode did not yield measurable improvement in the image. Perhaps the moral of the story is that if you’re going to use a noise reduction product, you may want to allocate time to read the instructions. I felt that I would be functional much sooner with Neat Image because I could easily just download the filter that matched my camera and let the thing run. The photo at the top of the article shows my results with Neat Image.

Hopefully you’ll have something better than sheetrock pictures to use when you do your testing!
Mac 911

Solutions to your most vexing Mac problems

By Christopher Breen

Delete incorrect Mail addresses I’ve entered some incorrect addresses when addressing new e-mail messages in Apple’s Mail. Now when I create a new message and enter the first couple of letters of an address, these unwanted addresses appear. Since they haven’t been entered on a card in Address Book, I can’t find them to delete them. How can I rid myself of these bad e-mail addresses?--Helen Pressel

When you create an e-mail message and type the address in Mail, the program puts the address—whether right or wrong—in its cache. To remove cached addresses in the version of Mail that shipped with OS X 10.2.8, select Window: Address History, select the incorrect address in the resulting Address History window, and click on Remove From History.

In Tiger’s version of Mail, go to Window: Previous Recipient and do the same. The command's name is different, but it works in a similar way. In the Panther and Tiger versions of Mail, you can remove these addresses by allowing Mail to automatically complete the incorrect entry, control-clicking on the address, and then selecting Remove Address from the contextual menu (see “Boot Bad Addresses”).

Raise the dead drive
I installed the Tiger (OS X 10.4.3) update, and now my Power Mac G5 can mount DVD movies but refuses to play them. What’s wrong?--Via the Internet

If you’ve been using your Mac for longer than the life span of a moderately hearty butterfly, you’ve heard that after installing an OS upgrade—say from OS X 10.4.1 to OS X 10.4.2—you should immediately dash to Apple’s Disk Utility (/Applications/Utilities), select your startup drive from the list of drives at the left of the Disk Utility window, and click on Repair Permissions to put any errant file permissions back in line. I’ve found doing so to be an absolute necessity for this particular update.
After I installed the update on my brand-new 20-inch iMac G5, the SuperDrive refused to read a perfectly legitimate software CD. Spin enthusiastically, it would, but mount, it would not. When I repaired the Mac's permissions, a slew of out-of-whack ones appeared in Disk Utility's main window. With these fixed, the drive worked as it was supposed to.

I’m aware that a new update may be out by the time you read this. Regardless, this advice applies from now until Apple says there’s a better way. Repair permissions after every update.

Save your receipts!
I can’t use Apple’s Disk Utility to repair permissions on my 500MHz Titanium PowerBook G4. When I try, I see an error that reads “No valid packages.” What’s going on?--Ayrton Camargo

You can’t repair permissions if you’ve moved the BaseSystem.pkg file in your Mac’s /Library/Receipts folder. Regrettably, there’s a notion floating around the Web that it’s perfectly okay to toss the contents of this Receipts folder to free up space. But if you misplace this particular file, which was created when you installed OS X, you encounter this error.

Each package, or .pkg file, in your Receipts folder contains a bill of materials, or .bom file, that keeps track of permissions for the items installed from that package. Disk Utility uses that information to compare the permissions of files on your hard drive with the permissions listed in these .bom files.

If a receipt (and its accompanying .bom file) is missing, Disk Utility can’t verify the permissions at all. In most cases, this isn’t a huge problem. Disk Utility goes on about its business because it’s unaware of the missing receipt. But it becomes a big problem if the BaseSystem.pkg file is missing, because Disk Utility relies on this particular package to do its job.

The solution to the problem is to put the BaseSystem.pkg file back in the Receipts folder. If you’ve intentionally removed and deleted it, either pull a copy of the file from a backup you’ve created or find a Mac buddy who’s running your PowerBook’s version of Mac OS, grab a copy of this file from his or her computer, and plunk it into the Receipts folder on your Mac.

If you’re buddyless, you can put things right by performing an Archive & Install installation of Mac OS.

Resurrect Sherlock
My copy of Sherlock appears to be dead, and I don’t know how to get it up and running again. It worked well under previous versions of OS X but broke when I installed OS X 10.4.--Louise Wazbinski

This behavior could be seen as a fairly broad hint that Sherlock’s days are numbered, because most of its capabilities are duplicated by Tiger’s Dashboard widgets. (Hold those angry cards and letters, please— I’m not saying that widgets are better than Sherlock; I’m saying only that the writing is on the wall.)

But that doesn’t mean I can’t help you. You simply need to clear Sherlock’s virtual throat and allow it to start fresh. Dig through your user folder and toss the following folders and files into the Trash:

> /your user folder/Library/Caches/Sherlock/

> /your user folder/Library/Preferences/Sherlock/

> /your user folder/Library/Preferences/com.apple.Sherlock.plist

Dot not I used Panic’s news reader, Unison, to download a folder full of files. I can’t find that folder anywhere on my hard drive, and Spotlight can’t find any of the files. Yet when I click on the Show File icon in Unison’s Downloads window, the file appears in the group folder that contains it. Where is everything?--Bill Phillips

This quirk from an earlier version of Unison has now been addressed. If you used a utility such as Marcel Bresink’s free TinkerTool to make your Mac’s invisible files visible, you’d find your folder right where it should be—inside the group folder (alt.binaries.sounds, for example) where Unison stores its downloads.

The problem is that the file or folder’s name probably begins with a period (.). You see, the Finder won’t allow you to create a file or folder with a name beginning with a period, but it’s possible to download one. Unfortunately, that’s the naming convention for special items reserved for the system’s use. OS X makes all such items invisible so you can’t mess with them by accident.

The trick to making the folder visible is changing its name, but the Finder may prevent you from doing so in the normal way—highlighting the name in the Finder and removing the period. Instead, select the folder’s name, press Command-I to bring up the Info window, and rename the folder by typing in the Info window’s Name & Extension text field.

Change the subject
A friend sends me tons of funny e-mails, but they all have the subject heading “Humor.” I save the ones I like in a folder, but I can’t tell them apart. If I could change the subject heading, reviewing the items in this folder would be a lot easier.--Jim Ross
The most effective solution would be to contact the sender and ask him or her to create a subject heading that reflects the contents of each message. But I imagine you would have contacted Dear Abby instead of Mac 911 if you wanted the social solution to your problem. To avoid what could be an awkward e-mail exchange, try this instead.

Launch Mail, hold down the Command and option keys, and click on the transparent button in the upper right corner of the window to produce the sheet that lets you customize the toolbar. Drag the Redirect icon to the toolbar.

When you receive a joke that you like, click on the Redirect button. In the message window that appears, enter your name in the To field and type in a subject heading that more accurately describes the yuckfest within. Send the message to yourself.

To more easily file the message when you receive it, add a made-up word to the subject that will help you filter the message with a rule. For example, you could use the fake word Laff in the subject line—"Laff: Chicken Crosses Road." Click on the plus-sign (+) button at the bottom of Mail's Mailboxes pane and create a new mailbox named Laffs. Now choose Mail: Preferences, click on the Rules tab, click on Add Rule, and create the following rule: If Subject Contains Laff, Move Message To Mailbox Laffs (see “Get the Joke”).

If you’d rather not e-mail yourself, go ahead and click on Redirect, enter any e-mail address you like, change the subject, and then click on Save As Draft. Mail will move the message to its Drafts folder; then you can move it to another folder.

Shrink slide shows for TV
Tip of the month: You can make beautiful slide shows in iPhoto. But when you try to burn them to DVD to watch on a TV, you’ll find that 10 to 20 percent of the image area disappears. Here’s how to create a slide show that fits, with Apple’s iLife ’05 ($79) and QuickTime Pro ($30).

Start by creating a slide show in iPhoto and choosing Share: Send To DVD. Quit iDVD. Open the slide show (it’s in /your user folder/Movies) in QuickTime Player Pro. Choose Window: Show Movie Properties, and make a note of the slide show’s length.

Using an image editor, create a black image and save it as a 640-by-480 JPEG file. Launch iMovie, create a new project, and drag the black JPEG image into the Clips area. Drag the black image into iMovie’s timeline and then double-click on it. In the Duration field of the Clip Info window that appears, enter the duration of your slide show and click on Set. Choose File: Share and, in the resulting pane, click on the QuickTime tab. Choose Full Quality from the Compress Movie For pop-up menu, and click on Share.

Double-click on the black movie file to open it in QuickTime Player. Locate your slide-show movie, and open it in QuickTime Player as well. Click here to download the QuickTime Player scripts. Install the script collection, using the instructions with the file. Return to QuickTime Player and choose AppleScript: QuickTime Player Scripts: Edit: Merge Movie 1 Into Movie 2. This merges the contents of both movies into one movie.

Choose Window: Show Movie Properties. You’ll see two video tracks. Select Video Track 1 (which should be in the DV/DVCPRO - NTSC format), deselect the Preserve Aspect Ratio option, and enter 640 and 480 into the Scaled Size fields. Enable the High Quality option.

Now select Video Track 2 (in MPEG-4 Video format). Enter 544 and 408 in the Scaled Size fields and 48 and 36 in the Offset fields. Doing this centers the images in the black background field. Enable the High Quality option here, too. Save the file and import it into iDVD. The entire picture will now fit on the TV screen (see “Shrink to Fit”).—Carl Sunshine

Rigging a safety net Cool as your Mac may be, without the data you so carefully create and manipulate on it, it’s little more than a pretty box. To help keep your data intact, I’d like to recommend a few items that any good office (home, mobile, or otherwise) should have.

? Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) A UPS can help protect your data by standing in the way of power fluctuations and providing battery backup should power fail completely. You can buy a UPS from companies such as APC, Belkin, and Tripp-Lite. Most cost between $70 and $150, although you can find them for as little as $35 or as much as $500.

When seeking a UPS, look at its load capacity, measured in volt amps. An iMac or a laptop will get along fine with a 350VA UPS. If you have a Power Mac G5, look for a 1,000VA model. Also see that it supports Automatic Voltage Regulation (AVR)—a feature you won’t find on the less expensive models. This helps ensure that the UPS reacts quickly to changes in power, providing your Mac with a steady stream of the right power.

? Hard Drive and Backup Software You’ve heard the “some day your drive will die, and without a backup, you’re meat” lecture time and again, so I won’t repeat it here. But if you really want to protect your data, get an external hard drive and backup software that can copy your data on a schedule. (See our most recent review of
external FireWire drives.) You can find 300GB FireWire hard drives for less than $250. And you needn’t spend a fortune on backup software. Some hard drives ship with EMC Dantz’s Retrospect Express). Shirt Pocket’s $20 SuperDuper) does a great job for little money. And if you’re a .Mac subscriber, you get Apple’s Backup 3 for free.

? USB Key Drive If you can’t back up on a schedule, drop a couple of dozen dollars to purchase a USB key drive from a company such as SanDisk. Plug it in whenever you’re working on a hot project and make copies of your five most important documents. If you carry the drive on your keychain or around your neck, you’ll have the documents whenever you need them. This is also a good way to protect files you’re changing quickly. A backup that fires off once a day might not be enough to save the right version.

Meeting Location Update:

Just a reminder that this month we will be back in our usual meeting room in the NPL Theater downstairs at the Nashua Public Library.

Vendor Offers for March 2006:
The latest vendor offers and discounts available exclusively to Apple User Group members can be found on the Applepower home page under Download Files. The document is called “VendorOffers_MAR06.pdf”. A password is required to access the vendor offers site. The new password is effective until May 15, 2006. Check with a SNAC club officer for details. Here is the link to the Apple User Group Advisory Board Vendor Offers web page:

http://homepage.mac.com/ugab/offers/vendorcodes.htm

Apple MUG Store:
In case you haven’t visited recently, you may want to check out the Apple Mac User Group Store, also known as the Apple MUG Store. This User Group Store carries a varied assortment of new and reconditioned Apple hardware and software products, usually at a good discount over normal retail prices. I saved over $100 on an open box 30 GB iPod last year brand new with full warranty. The items in the MUG store change from time to time so it’s a good idea to check back once in a while. The MUG store is available to anyone who is a member of any Apple User Group. A username and password is required to get into the store. Ask any SNAC club officer for the keys to the store.

http://www.applemugstore.com/

ApplePower Website News

In response to problems some of our members were having getting the newsletter in a timely manner from our website, there is now a direct link to the current month’s issue right on the home page, http://homepage.mac.com/applepower/.

Archived back issues and other clubs’ newsletters are still accessible by going through the “Download Files” link from the homepage.

Links to other user groups web site/newsletters are also being added.

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Rambling on Tim Adams

For the past several years, this newsletter has published on the back page of most issues, an item called SNAC Helpnet. This listing, of members and in some cases former members, are people that have offered their support in different areas, should other members need help.

While this item isn’t going away any time soon, it has for the past year or so been replaced by an even better method of people helping people - our very own mailing list.

While the mailing list has been around for several years, it wasn’t as well used as it has been recently. We’ve had questions about internet radio, to helping people with DSL connection problems and helping people with questions about the program Mail.

If you don’t know what list I am talking about, take your browser over to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/applepower-nh/ and join us.

After you have joined the group, you to will be able to join in to the discussions, ask your questions, and recieve the advice that many of us have already benifited from.
Can’t quite get your finger on the problem?  
Try the Helpnet!

-<< SNAC HELPNET >>-

How it Works:  
To you who wish to help others:  
On a piece of blank paper, enter this information about yourself: Name; Phone Number; Interest. CHANGE AND DATE YOUR INFORMATION WHEN NECESSARY. We will periodically print the updated complete listing of everyone on the NET supplying the information. Then, be prepared to supply HELP to other SNAC members who see what your specialties are.

If you want help, phone the person(s) whose specialty matches your problem.

**NAME**  **PHONE NO.**  **INTERESTS & SPECIALTIES**

- Tim Adams  603-595-9522  Pagemaker, Quicken, InDesign, Dreamweaver, Acrobat, OS X
- Bill Bryant  603 882-7338  Appleworks and Quicken
- Rick Branscomb  603 424-1433  Webpages, HTML, Adobe PageMill, Adobe GoLive, Netscape Composer, AppleWorks, Educational Software
- Jayson Lee  603 579-0339  Photoshop/Freehand/Illustrator/GoLive/Flash
- Paul Bendeck  603-672-0084  Installing and configuring MacOSX and applications, hardware upgrades, AppleWorks, iTunes, iPhoto

**Volunteers Needed**