

# Real People Reviews

by Daniel M. East



Macworld Expo San Francisco 2004

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While the results almost never live up to extremely high expectations, the recent Macworld Expo at The Moscone Center in San Francisco, California offered what may be enough for some while leaving others feeling less than satisfied. For my money, and I assure you that it was, I was very pleased by Apple's foresightedness and emphasis on fun for consumers. The potential of the announcements made by Steve Jobs may not be realized by Apple's current devotees; however, the new products show that the company knows its audience, both today's and tomorrow's.

There really was something for both ends of the Mac-user spectrum. On the business end, Apple released the long-awaited G5 Xserve and Xserve RAID configurations with a number of key updates and provisions. I hope that these great boxes will make their way to not only businesses and homes that need a great server (with a lot of bang for the buck), but also ISPs, web and e-mail hosting companies and FTP applications. The design is nothing shy of brilliant. Front positioned cooling ports are reminiscent of the "free flow" exhaust systems from a classic car which easily marry sleek, hi-tech designs that are slim enough for a 1U rack space. What's "under the hood" is no less impressive offering up to 2Ghz of dual G5 power and up to eight gigabytes (that's 8 Gb) of RAM. It doesn't stop there either, so check this one out. Even if you don't know anything about servers. For more information on this hot new item, check out this link:

<http://www.apple.com/xserve/>

On the consumer side, I believe Apple's releases were appropriate and timely. As the market share held by Apple Computer slowly creeps up on "the other guys," my feeling is that it is important to look to the future. Many current Mac loyalists are just that -- loyal -- and their numbers are growing. With that growth comes change and my hope is that current Mac users will be open to these changes (and system requirements, really) as the company continues to set the standards for the industry instead of meeting them. I remember hearing Steve Jobs say something a few years ago at one of his keynote addresses to this effect: Apple is not trying to make the most competitive products, Apple is, first, trying to make the best products possible. With these new products, they may just have accomplished both.

With Apple's next version of the now status-symbol status iPod, the company has found a way to bring the big numbers of end users (relatively) to the platform. Is this a roundabout way into the Mac-neighborhood? You bet, but it works and people are finally finding their way to Apple and the Mac OS. Further adding to the attraction, nearly anyone who's ever had a melody on their minds and a song in their hearts will just LOVE GarageBand. This fun and easy little gem may seem like Soundtrack Junior or Logic Lite -- and it is. Apple doesn't just buy up technology to let it sit on a shelf (if you look at the history). It is really put to good use here and singer/songwriter John Mayer was on hand to show off one of Apple's many new musical faces. This newest of their applications will only further the iLife addiction that keeps everything Macintosh fun for nearly any level of experience while tapping into the "dream factor" for those of nearly any age.

While all of the iLife updates are wonderful and respond to Apple's marketing, feedback and development, these apps are no longer free unless you get them with the purchase of a new Mac. Should you wish to purchase these updates, you'll really want better than a 600 Mhz G4 and lots of RAM for GarageBand/733Mhz G4 for iDVD 4, and have a mere \$49.00 - a small price to pay and just enough incentive, they hope, to get those stragglers in line for some new iMacs, PowerMac G5s, iBooks, PowerBooks. These products even spur the third party developers and manufacturers market. Be sure to check out this link to see all of the updates to the iLife apps, including some really hot new iDVD themes, iPhoto speed and ease and integration that makes them all you may ever need (or have time for) on your families' Mac(s). It is very important to bear in mind the minimum system requirements for these goodies.

<http://www.apple.com/ilife/>

Other notable items were many and included some incredible new hardware and software. First on my list for "coolness factor" is SlimDevice's SqueezeBox. A rubber-coated home stereo system addition that makes your iTunes a virtual jukebox (I told you that the other companies would love the new iLife stuff). SB uses WiFi or Ethernet with the company's software to put your music on your home audio system. While you'll want to up your sample rate when importing your CDs to achieve best results, this is one cool product.

Second on my list for "CF" is Kaidan's incredible new Piximation that uses your FireWire input device (and even an iSight -- again, integration) to capture a series of still images to create incredible QTVR images in real time. Jim Anders and his crew have done it again with this awesome product.

On the "new and cool" side, say hello to You Software. With a big ol' booth and slick smiley logo, it doesn't stop there. You can sync OSX info with "You Synchronize" and access nearly anything on your Mac with "You Control" which places custom modules on everything from iTunes to your address book. Are we seeing a trend here?

On the update front, you do not want to miss Roxio's soon-to-be-released version of Toast with Jam. The demo was impressive (even after my 12/03 review of the current version) and well thought out. Clearly, Roxio is running with this ball and raising the bar for anyone with a good burner product.

I big tip of the hat to all of the Mac-friendly radio that is also evidence of the growth of the audience. Author/Mac expert, Deb Shadovitz and relative newcomers (with hugely experienced air-staff) "Inside Mac Radio" made their presence known with "The Party for The People" that welcomed anyone attending MWE with a badge. This was not your average Expo party with both a full house (not a simple task at The Renaissance Parc55 lounge) and stunning, gratuitous prizes every half hour via a fun trivia contest. As Shadovitz,

herself, said, "Macworld Expo is all about the parties. If you have never been to one, this is your chance to see what it's all about." This was clearly my favorite event of the trip and it was a pleasure to see people like Andy Inhatko, Other World Computing's Larry O'Connor, MacXprts' Nicole Hoffman, IMR's Scott Sheppard, Shadovitz and others. I hope to see this trend continue so that the "poser quotient" is reduced. Everyone should be a part of some of these great events offered at MWE that bring the community together.

The bottom line is that Apple has a bottom line. Getting their products to an ever growing and hopefully larger audience is the goal and I believe that they have done it again. A few months ago, I heard Chris Breen call the iPod "Apple's transition drug," referring -- in a good way -- to the process by which preteen kids start with cigarettes and progress to harder and harder addictions. These new products are the ecstasy (pun intended) that will get you showing off your skills and bringing the "computer widows" closer to their husbands once they take a crack at this stuff. Its fun. Literally anyone can do it. This is not your father's Macintosh (and I can't believe we can say that now...those who get the reference know what I mean).

Do I sound like an ad for Apple? I hope so. I believe that Macworld Expo showcased some great additions to the Mac families -- and the extended families as well. I would accept that compliment...

For more information, visit: <http://www.apple.com>

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