KICKING the TIRES

by Frank Petrie, MaMUGs, Technology Specialist

Product: Panther: The First 100 Days
Company: Apple Computer, Inc.
Price: (US) $119.00
Requirements:
Test Rig: iBook G4/933/640 MB RAM
Review Date: 02 February 2004

There were some significant workflow changes with the release of the black cat, among them, mainly the new Finder. So, I thought it would be interesting, as it didn't take that long to develop new habits for the beta, to look back and see how I was adapting to some of the bigger changes in Panther.

As it is an election year, I thought that I would tip my chapeau to E. B. White and judge Panther the way he has judged presidents over time by their first 100 days of performance.

The Good

Apple has made installation about as 'no brainer' as it can be. The only choice that you have to make really is the kind of install you want. And that would be 'Install and Archive.' Even though you have backed up your hard drive (AND YOU HAVE!!!), better safe than sorry.

Apple advertised that Panther had 2,451,982 changes in it (or some such number). Some you see, some you don't and some play hide and seek.

New Mail New Finder Fast User Switching

New versions of Finder, Safari, Mail, Address Book, iCal and more iChat AV

There are new forms of Easter Eggs built into Panther. For instance, open your Address Book, pick an entry and click the Edit button. Now go to one of the phone number fields and type in 10 digits with no breaks or punctuation. Now hit Tab and look at the number. The parenthesis and dash have been added for you; the computer took care of the formatting.

Sweet. I personally think that's more valuable then a hidden picture of One Infinite Loop.

I've started to learn the three biggest changes and incorporate them into my workflow, but it's going to take a little more time. First is the Command−Tab function that brings up all currently running apps. I had developed a habit of using that keystroke combination to toggle between app and I'm quite comfortable with the Dock, so it's going to take me some time . Of course, if you

operate solely from the keyboard, I imagine that this feature is indispensable.

Second would be Expose. I'm a GUI person (in a nice way, of course) and I found reaching for the F keys for these functions a bit awkward. But hey! You can go into Exposé's preferences and kill the keys and use Hot Corners! Seeing as I don't use the Screen Saver function, this has worked out great. I use it constantly.

Without a doubt, the biggest change is the Finder. And I don't know how it has affected you but it has sped up my workflow immeasurably. For example; I download a .dmg of some new app and StuffIt decompresses it and it shows up in my Finder as a mounted volume. I read the Read Me files and then simply drag the new app to the Applications folder in the second pane, then go back to the first pane and click the arrow next to the .dmg file and unmount the disk. All in one window! I love it!

The Bad

My experience is that Mail has become more buggy than Fort Myers in summertime. I don't know why but in Jaguar I was able to manage three separate accounts with minimal trouble. But in Panther, I'm constantly having to fidget with it. Not happy.

The Ugly

Nada (unless you're not a fan of the brushed aluminum look).

The Close

Panther is another huge step in the evolution of Apple's modern operating system. And with such large steps being incorporated faster and faster, problems are a realistic expectation. Was Jaguar this problematic. Did Jaguar have as many huge new features Not nearly.

All-in-all, I'm quite impressed with Panther, even with the hiccups. If you're still using OS 9 for other than for a specific piece of software, it's time to step up.

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