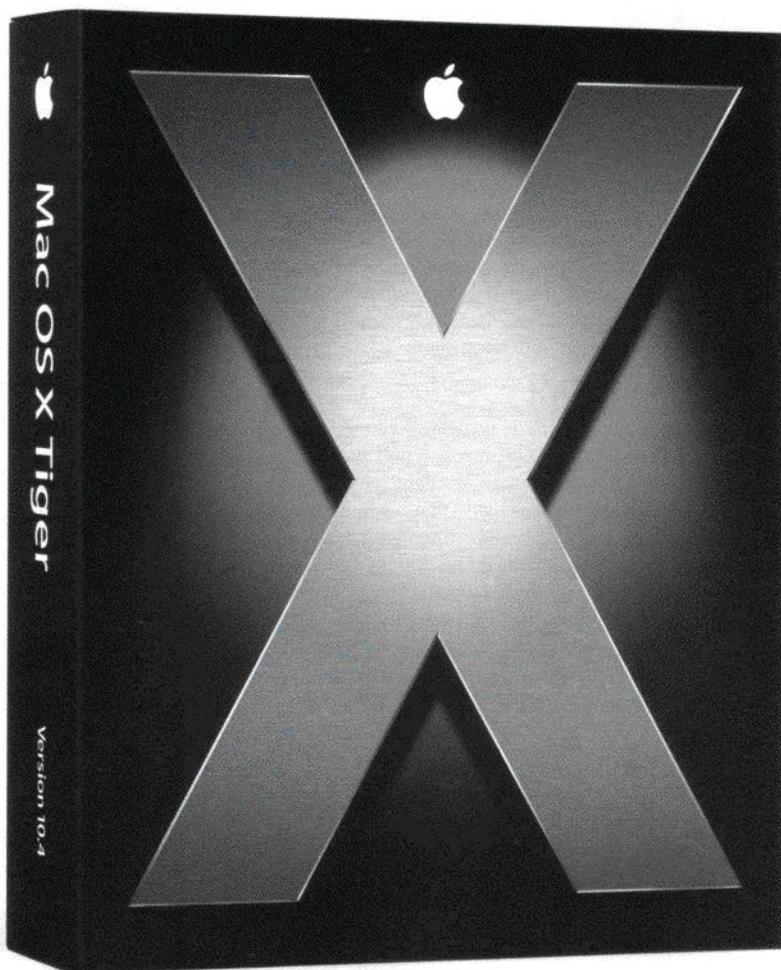


# Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger

Does Tiger really roar or is it just a kitten? We put Tiger through its paces to find out if it can live up to all the hype and hysteria



With the Apple hype machine revving its engine so loudly you'd think something as unlikely as an actual software advert might emerge from everyone's favourite computer firm, Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger has finally leapt into action. The latest – and most expensive – version of OS X has been 18 months in development, with gangs of software developers labouring night and day to come up with reasons why people should buy Macs instead of Windows. Have they succeeded? Yes, but not in the way you might have thought.

Tiger's predecessor, Panther – OS X 10.3 – was a most impressive upgrade that finally brought a modern feature set to the Mac OS, while preserving its performance and usability. There was still room for improvement, but these were minor niggles. So Tiger has a tough act to follow.

The usual way to get people to upgrade is to provide them with a whole host of new features. Tiger supposedly has 200 new features, but most of them are of the 'blink and you'll miss them' variety ('Get support for UNIX-style symlinks on Windows SMB Shared Servers' anyone?) or are aspects of the same feature: Spotlight – Tiger's new metadata search system, is responsible for at least ten feature list entries. So in reality, there are a few really big additions and a few additional changes here and there that make life a little easier. But 200? Not even Steve Jobs' reality distortion field can really justify that.

Anyone expecting an iLife-style innovation in Tiger to justify an upgrade will be sorely disappointed. There's only one big new application and that's Automator – which for most people is eminently useless. For creative pros that need to link together lots of applications into a workflow, Automator will be useful one day. But until more third-party apps are supported, Photoshop Actions will be the mainstay for most.

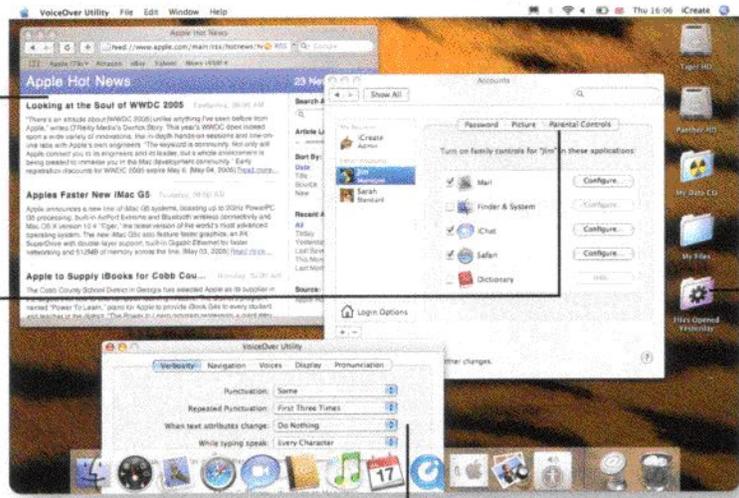
## Spotlight in the, er, spotlight

Spotlight, while technically not an application, is the bigger selling point for Tiger. The ability to find anything you want instantly, in no matter what document, contact, calendar event or image? That's got to be good, right? Well, it is when it works.

## A whistle-stop tour of Tiger's new features

**Read all about it**  
**RSS feeds in Safari**  
 Safari gets the most improvements in Tiger and support for RSS feeds will quickly change the way you read news.

**Keep an eye on the kids**  
**Parental controls for your apps**  
 You can now decide whom your kids are allowed to talk to and where they are allowed to go on the Internet with system-wide parental controls.



**Hearing voices**  
**VoiceOver Utility**  
 Tiger's VoiceOver Utility is the end result of a major accessibility revamp, making it far easier for the visually impaired to use their Macs.

**Work smarter**  
**Search results in a folder**  
 Create a Smart Folder to store frequent searches on your Desktop. All the files you want – in just one place.

While our relatively unencumbered test iBook G3, iMac G4 and Power Mac G5 all got on perfectly happily with Spotlight, returning results as soon as we started typing, our file-laden PowerBook G4 had a hate-hate relationship from the beginning, with Spotlight's initial indexing session crashing it or making it unusable for the first few hours after installation. It took us some hacking with Tiger's excellent command line tools to get rid of Spotlight's database and make it re-index the hard drive before we were getting those instant results, with Smart Folders (more on them later) often taking 30 seconds or longer to fill up with even one file in earlier attempts. We happily await bug fixes in future updates, because this will be a killer feature when it works across the board.

Otherwise, most of the useful new features are enhancements to existing applications. Almost everything in Tiger has had some plastic surgery, usually for the better. Mail does look like it's been sitting next to the fire, although the death of the drawer can only be welcome.

Safari hasn't had an extreme makeover, but it does have some long-hoped-for features, such as support for RSS feeds, PDF viewing and private browsing, all done with the usual Apple style, but without bringing the Safari feature set up to the same kind of level as Firefox's, say. It does feel a lot faster, though, which can only be a good thing.

### Fancy folders

The Finder now has two new kinds of folders – Smart and Burn. The former are like saved search results that update themselves dynamically as you make changes to files and folder. They're highly useful, once you've re-thought your ingrained work habits to come up with good ways of using them. The latter, which allow you to store files you want to burn to disc without having to copy them to the blank media, is only really a very minor enhancement.

Rounding up the headline features, iChat's four-way video conferencing could be useful for anyone whose friends all have iSights and dual-processor G4s or better. Parental controls will no doubt make the Tiger-equipped Mac the darling of the *Daily Mail* and paranoid IT managers. But the headline list is pretty short.

As with Panther, the biggest reasons for upgrading to Tiger can't easily be put into a features list. Firstly, Tiger is a lot faster than Panther, particularly on G5s where its complete rewrite to support 64-bit computing really wipes the floor with Panther's anemic implementation. But every program runs and performs better, whether you have a G3, G4 or G5. Those with newer, more powerful graphics cards will really get the most out of them with Tiger, and that's even though one of the most powerful new features of Tiger – Quartz 2D Extreme – isn't turned on by default! Expect skyrocketing performance beyond all expectations in a future Tiger update when they finally get the bugs out of it.

### Core values

Secondly, probably all of Apple's efforts have gone into polishing Tiger's engine. Any developer looking through the tech list of new features in Tiger practically has a religious experience when he or she realises just how many insanely great things they can include in their Mac programs with little or no effort because they're now built into Tiger. The Core set of toolboxes – Core Image, Core Video, Core Audio and Core Data – for example, stomp all over the opposition in terms of features, with Core Image alone providing practically a complete set of Photoshop filters to anyone who just fancies writing a word processor, say.

For the end-user, therefore, our message is this; wait, but you will be excited. Upgrade now if you'd like to give your Mac a speed boost or Spotlight looks too good to miss out on. But as soon as the first set of bug fixes come out and applications arrive to take advantage of Tiger's exciting new features, buy, buy, buy!

## Three reasons to upgrade to Tiger

**1** Spotlight provides near instantaneous search facilities for all kinds of files. In addition to searching by filename, it can search the contents of documents and 'metadata' – information such as document author.



**2** Dashboard is a handy set of tools available at the touch of a button, including a calculator, a calendar and your Address Book, plus plenty of former Sherlock channels. You can download new tools from a dedicated Apple website.



**3** Mac syncing has been expanded to cover Keychains and Mail features, such as rules. Developers are being given the opportunity to make their applications able to sync with .Mac, so expect more options soon.



## Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger

URL: [www.apple.com/uk/macosx](http://www.apple.com/uk/macosx)  
 SRP: £88.99 (single licence), £139 (family pack of five licences)

**What's good:** It's speedy, it's got lots and lots of great things for developers, and Spotlight and Dashboard are really useful

**What's bad:** Everything really exciting is under the hood and invisible to users; some applications need updating for full compatibility

**Overall 81%**