

Easy backup

Skype IM

Services menu

test pages

Mac help

Handy tips and readers' questions answered.
If you have a problem or tip to share email us at machelp@idg.co.uk

By Rob Buckley

Speed up Dashboard

tip

If you've been using Dashboard for a while, you'll probably have noticed that it takes a long time to start up. Dashboard uses a cache to speed up its day-to-day operations, but loading this cache, which might contain older widgets and data you no longer use, will slow it down initially.

If Dashboard no longer cuts a dash, go to your Library folder and look for the Caches folder. Inside is a folder called DashboardClient. Simply throw the contents of this folder in the Trash and when you reboot – or log out and then back in again – and launch Dashboard for the first time, Dashboard should start up a whole lot quicker.

How can I back up?

Q

After 12 years of using Macs, my Mac contains subfolders with DTP, WP, database, spreadsheet, and graphics documents. In Mac OS 9 and earlier it was easy to back up data. I used the File Synchronisation control panel which was simplicity itself and let me update my work in seconds on a daily basis or restore from disk after a crash. There seems to be nothing for OS X, except iSync for .Mac accounts (I don't want one), or software like SuperDuper! and CarbonCopyCloner, which are designed to back up entire systems. Or is there something in OS X that I have missed?

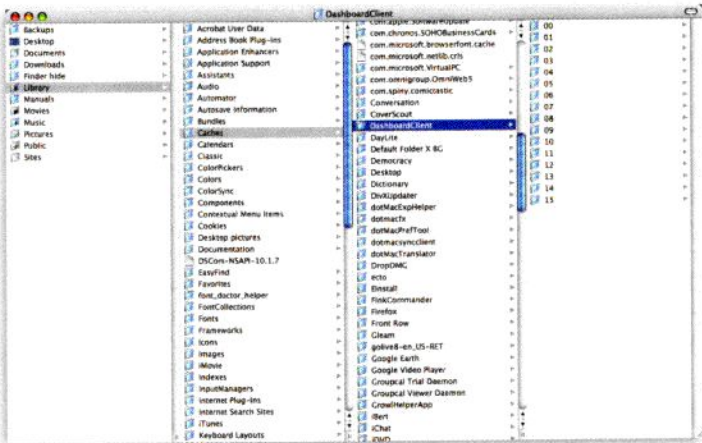
Chris Rigby

A

The loss of File Synchronisation in the transition from OS 9 to OS X is one of the most painful things Mac owners have had to endure over the years. The fact that Apple never got round to replacing it is even more upsetting.

There are some alternatives, though, both free and paid-for. If you can cope with Unix, the 'rsync' command line tool is handy for backups. Apple's Backup (www.apple.com/1/solutions/backup.html) is easy to use and can back up 100MB if you don't have a .Mac account. PsyncX (<http://psyncx.sourceforge.net/>) is free and does more, but isn't quite as simple to use. Déjà Vu (<http://propagandaprod.com/dejavu.html>) costs \$24.95 (£12) but is a very nice way to back up data, both manually and on a schedule.

If you want to synchronise data too, that'll cost



Clear the cache
Clearing out Dashboard's cache can speed up the app's launch times

you a little more for a reliable piece of software. The best one we know of is You Synchronize (<http://mac.softpedia.com/get/System-Utilities/You-Synchronize.shtml>), which costs \$49.95 (£25), but there's also the \$40 (£20) FoldersSynchronizer3 (www.softube.com/products/flsy/pp.html).

However, if you can hold off until the launch of Leopard (Mac OS X 10.5), due in early 2007, that will include Time Machine, a built-in backup facility.

Edit Safari's web archives

tip

Safari's ability to save web pages as web archives is a great boon for anyone who needs to have a permanent record of a website, complete with graphics, movies and so on. Unfortunately, Safari uses a proprietary scheme for its web archive file format. If you want to edit that page later on, you won't be able to do so easily, since Safari can't edit web pages by itself.

There are a few workarounds for this. Safari WebDevAdditions (free, www.laslo.com.pl/webdev/) adds a whole load of features to Safari, and also lets you edit a web page using the 'Set page editable' option under the View menu.

The TextEdit application that comes with OS X can edit web archives. Select the web archive and choose Open with... from the actions pull-down, contextual menu or File menu and use TextEdit instead of Safari. TextEdit isn't a great HTML editor, though, so you won't get brilliant results from many pages.

Lastly, if you prefer the power of a proper web-page editor, there's always WebArchive Folderizer (free,

<http://homepage.mac.com/gweston/download.html>). Just drag the web archive onto WebArchive Folderizer and it'll be decompressed and separated into its constituent files. You'll probably need to re-edit links to make it work properly, but the HTML will be otherwise intact.

Playing with cards

Q

I will be living in a camper van for a while and need to use the internet for research and email. I'm told I should buy a laptop and plug in a Vodafone Connect Data Card. But I'm also told that the new 13-inch MacBook Pro (or any new Mac laptop) will not take the data card and the only Mac solution is to buy an old PowerBook (too big and will cost about £700-£1,000).

Is this true? If so is there any other solution to the problem other than buying a PC?

Alan Briscoe

A

The Vodafone 3G card is an old-style PCMCIA card and it's true that only the larger PowerBooks had PCMCIA slots: the MacBook Pros have ExpressCard/34 slots and MacBooks don't have any slots. This does mean that you can't use Vodafone's data card with any MacBook or MacBook Pro, but don't worry, there are alternatives.

Vodafone has just launched a 3G USB modem (www.vodafone.co.uk/mobileconnect) that costs from £45, depending on the package you've chosen. Alternatively, if you have a 3G-capable mobile phone that features

Continues page 112

Bluetooth, you can use the phone's internet connection to surf the web from your laptop. Scripts, settings and instructions for a variety of mobile phone models and network providers are available at www.taniwha.org.uk/.

Play internet videos with QuickTime

tip QuickTime is a great video framework, but for internet video, it can leave a lot to be desired. Sure you can download QuickTime components, such as DivX, ffdmep, et al, but you'll often find you need more components or that some components don't work with your Mac because they're OS 9 or PowerPC only. Alternative video players such as VLC (www.videolan.org) and MPlayer (<http://mplayerosx.sourceforge.net/>) seem to be able to do much more with less fuss.

But if you'd like to stick with QuickTime because you'll be able to use your videos in QuickTime compatible apps, why not give Perian (<http://trac.perian.org/wiki>) a try? It aims to be the Swiss army knife of QuickTime components and replaces 3ivx, DivX, XviD and FFusion to name but a few.

Fast but not fast enough

Q As we live in the Cumbrian fells our broadband service is not very fast. I've been trying to upgrade to OS X 10.4.7 via Apple Software Update but, after downloading about 10-12MB of the 39MB total file size, the download stops and I get the following message: "Server timed out code -1001".

When I try again, the download starts at the beginning again rather than carrying on where it stopped on the previous attempt and then the same problem arises, so I can never complete the download.

Roland Harries

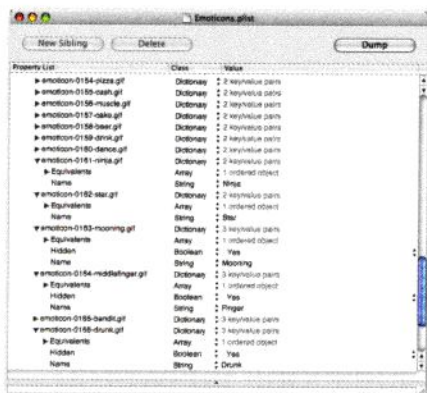
A Unfortunately, there are plenty of things that can cause this problem, including the speed of your broadband connection, your ISP, the equipment you're using to connect to the internet and a whole lot more. First, try downloading the updates directly from the Apple website (www.apple.com/support/downloads). If you're using a wireless connection with your router, try connecting to it using an Ethernet cable, since that should be faster and more reliable. Your last simple option is to switch off IPv6 in Network system preferences to see if that makes any difference.

There's also a possibility that something has been corrupted along the way, so try deleting the ".com.apple.SoftwareUpdate" folder in your Library's Caches folder and ".com.apple.SoftwareUpdate.plist" from its Preferences folder.

If that doesn't work, things get more complicated and will involve looking at the quality of network connections, checking ping times and so on, so it might be worth asking your ISP to investigate.

Enable Skype emoticons

tip Skype isn't just for making internet phone calls. You can also use it for instant messaging. One of the most important requirements of instant messaging is a good set of emoticons, just to make sure your comments aren't read



Show your emotions Skype has a hidden set of emoticons that you can enable with a simple text editor or Property List Editor

the wrong way. Skype has a few built in, but it also has a secret set that you can activate if you'd like.

Select the Skype application in your Applications folder (make sure it's not running first), then choose Show Package Contents from the contextual menu or the actions pull-down menu. In the Contents folder that appears, look for Resources and inside that a folder called Emoticons. Look for "Animated Emoticons. SkypeEmoticonset" and choose Show Package Contents again. Look for a file called "Emoticons.plist", then open it in a text editor (or Property List Editor if you have OS X's developer tools installed). Look for the emoticons at the end of the file (they'll be under Root→Emoticons if you're using Property List Editor) that have the following lines or that have their Hidden key set to yes: <key>Hidden</key><true>.

To enable any of these emoticons in Skype, simply delete those lines from the file and save the file.

AppleWorks no longer works

Q Over the past six months, AppleWorks 6 has started to slow down. Something causes it to show the spinning ball every few data entries and

particularly when any program commands are entered. This slowdown has gradually become worse as the waits have got more frequent and the times have extended to the point where it is now taking about four times as long as it should do to deal with a document. This is very inconvenient.

I have uninstalled AppleWorks and reinstalled it. I have also increased the RAM from 256MB to 1.26GB. Neither of these has made no difference. The rest of the operations of the computer seem unaffected.

Harry Lahmers

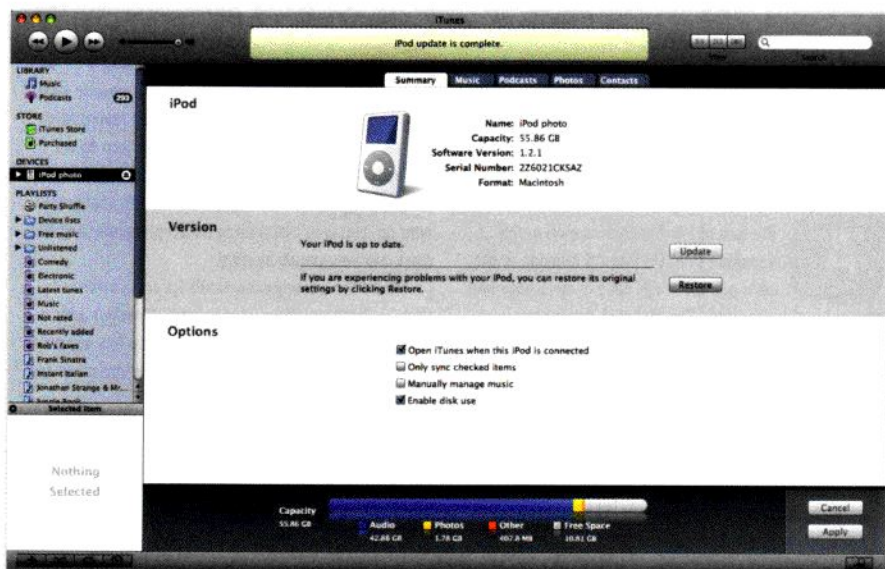
A There are a couple of usual suspects that can cause AppleWorks slows down: Recent Items and AppleWorks' autosave feature. AppleWorks has a bit of a bug that causes it to create an alias for every single file you've ever opened, irrespective of what your settings are. The simplest way to overcome this problem is to use AppleWorks Accelerator (free, www.groomsville.co.uk/sls/aa.htm), which will delete recent items according to your preferences.

Alternatively, quit AppleWorks and look in your Documents folder for a folder called AppleWorks User Data. Inside that is a folder called Starting Points and inside that a folder called Recent Items. Delete everything inside it and see if that helps.

If that doesn't work, autosave might be the cause of your problems. Either turn off autosave or look inside the AppleWorks User Data folder for a folder called AutoSave and delete its contents, too.

Better iPod views

tip Since the introduction of iTunes 7, we've had a new way to look at the files on an iPod: a bar graph that displays exactly how the iPod's space is being taken up. However, that's not always the information you need. Maybe you'd like a count of the songs, videos or photos you have or how long it would take to listen to or watch them all. Fortunately, Apple's already anticipated your needs and built the option into iTunes.



Choose a new view iTunes 7 can provide different views of your iPod's current contents

At your service



The Services menu is one of those bits of Mac OS X that's more useful in theory than in practice. You should be able to select something, go to the Services menu (or hit a key combination), which is cunningly hidden in the Applications menu, and a contextually useful operation should happen: maybe the service will open selected text in a web browser or an email message; or perhaps it'll add the contact details to your Skype address book. If an application offers services, provided you've installed it in your Applications folder, the service should magically appear.

But in practice, it doesn't quite work that way. Either the Services menu doesn't offer a service that you want or the program you're using is incompatible with Services. And if you have a hard drive full of Services-aware applications, you can't even find what you're looking for in the maze of services that various programs offer.

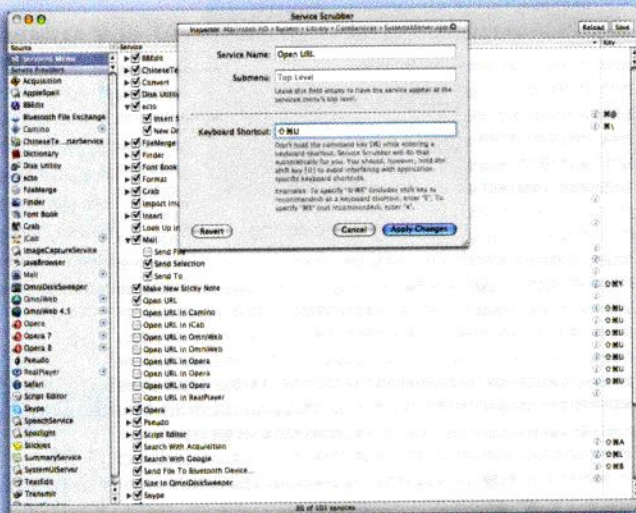
Fortunately, there are now a few ways to make Services more useful. First, you can find some standalone services that can do some pretty useful things. Devon Technologies has a range of free services you can download (www.devon-technologies.com/products/freeware/services.html) including AntiWordService, which allows you to open Word documents in any Cocoa application; PDF2RTFService, which does the same for PostScript, EPS and PDF documents; and WordService, which performs 37 different text operations, including case changing, word counts and line sorting. Just add them to the Services folder in the Library folder and they'll appear. HotService relocates the Services menu to the menu bar in Cocoa apps, making it easier to access.

There are a few other free services that are worth looking at as well. MappingService (<http://web.mac.com/rjsdev/Web/software/MappingService.html>), for example, lets you select an address in a services-compatible application and search for it in Google Maps or Zoomin. ICeCoffee (<http://web.sabi.net/nriley/software/>) will add the services menu to your contextual menu, making it even easier to access.

Keeping the Services menu in trim will also make it more

appealing. Service Scrubber (www.petermaurer.de/nasi.php?section=servicescrubber) can restructure the menu, change any number of services' keyboard shortcuts and disable particular services altogether. It's very easy to use: just tick checkboxes next to the item you want to enable or disable, and drag and drop to rearrange them. When you're done, click on save and Service Scrubber will do the rest.

If you can't find a service that does what you want, and there's just a hint of programmer in you, Bellhop (www.xendai.com/bellhop/index.html) might be of use. If you know Ruby, AppleScript, Python, Perl or F-Script and you have a Power Mac, Bellhop lets you write your own service that can be saved in the Services menu. It's not free and you have to register it after 30 days, but you can still use the AppleScript and Ruby plug-ins after the trial period has ended. It also includes a bundle of pre-written services.



Clean up Service Scrubber lets you take control of the Services menu

Bring up the iPod view in the Devices section, then click on the bar graph that has all the space information to get the alternative info. There are two other views you can get by clicking on the graph.

Some of my mail is missing

Q I have 'lost' all the email messages from my account except those received or sent in the last few days.

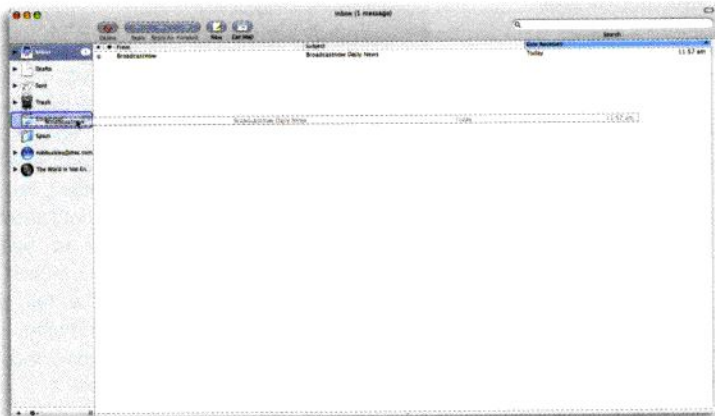
First of all, the emails were still listed but wouldn't open, and just the message about not being able to open and going to the server appeared.

When this happened I went to Mail Help and followed the instructions to update the operating system to the latest version and then rebuild each mailbox. However, rebuilding the mailboxes resulted in the removal of the list of emails from both the Inbox and the Sent folder (except for the recent ones) – a frightening step backwards.

I have tried looking for lost emails by Subject, Sender and by various bits of content but Spotlight has not yielded any results, so if they are still on the hard drive they seem to be well hidden.

Jacqueline Sherwin

A lost cause
Unless you copy mail to a mailbox, your messages might not be saved by Mail



Unfortunately, it sounds as if the messages were on the server, not on your hard drive. With certain kinds of accounts, if you haven't dragged your emails to an On My Mac mailbox, the messages aren't saved permanently and are kept only while they're on your server. It's probable that they've disappeared because your ISP had a clear out, or something similar. Some ISPs will get rid of your emails once your mailbox reaches a certain size or the messages a certain age. That's the reason the rebuilds aren't working and you're getting a message about connections to the server. If you're lucky, they might just be in another folder on your server: try using a webmail system to access your mail and see if it reveals any folders you might not be aware of.

Just in case it's something else though, go to your Library folder and look for a folder called Mail. Look in each of the folders in turn, starting with Mailboxes and look for folders ending in 'mbox'. Your messages, if they still exist, will be in there as separate 'emlx' files that you should be able to read and access in anything from Mail to a text editor. If they're not there, they're gone.

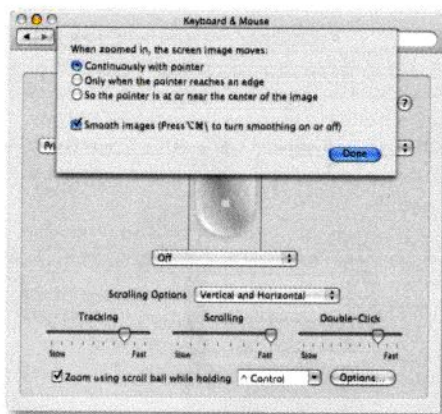
Zoom the screen with your mouse



If you have OS X 10.4.8 and a mouse with a scroll wheel or scroll ball, you can use it to zoom the screen. Open Keyboard & Mouse System Preferences and select the Mouse

Continues page 114

tab. At the bottom, there should be a checkbox named 'Zoom using scroll ball while holding' and then some options. Tick the box then choose which key you want to hold down to activate the feature – by default, it will be the Control key. Now, whenever you want to zoom into a part of the screen, hold down the key you've chosen and use the scroll wheel or scroll ball to zoom in and out of the screen. The zoom will be focused on wherever the mouse pointer is currently located.



On a scroll If you're having trouble seeing something on the screen, you can easily zoom in using your mouse

Where's the colour gone?

Q I have a colour-management problem. My Formac 2010 (three years old) suddenly seems to have jumped to a slightly brighter setting. All my photos which I've processed in Photoshop and iPhoto are now a bit washed out.

The easiest way to see the effect is in iPhoto; when I scroll rapidly through the library the pictures first come up at the "correct" brightness, and then almost instantly snap into the new setting. Changing the monitor calibration doesn't affect this fault (I have recently bought a Huey, and it makes no difference). Any ideas?

Jonathan Renouf

A It's clearly a colour-management problem of some sort, but exactly which sort?

The iPhoto issue seems to suggest that it's a ColorSync issue since the thumbnails appear fine – they're not colour-calibrated using ColorSync while scrolling – but as you stop scrolling, ColorSync is brought into play, and they become washed out. So go into System Preferences and find the Displays preference. Select the Color tab and see if the Display Profile chosen is the correct one for your monitor. If it

isn't, select the correct one. Or, if you haven't created a profile for your monitor, use the Calibrate... button to start the calibration process. You should be able to create a profile that gets rid of the washed-out look.

If you're using a third-party colour-management system, check to see if there have been any updates since you installed it, as it's possible that it may be incompatible with a system software update you might have applied recently. For further fun, check the colour-management settings in Photoshop to make sure the preferences aren't set to something strange.

Location, location

tip If you use network locations, you'll probably have wanted to be able to back them up or copy them to another laptop at some point. It's not immediately obvious how to do this, but it can be done. In the root of your hard drive, locate the main Library folder. Then look inside for Preferences and inside that for SystemConfiguration. You'll find a file called "preferences.plist" which records all your locations, so copy that onto something convenient. When you need to use it, just copy it over the existing file. If you go wireless, you should also back up the System.keychain that contains all the network passwords. You'll find that in the Library's Keychains folder.

MW

Turn your Mac into a web server

tip If you're a web developer, you'll often want to be able to test web pages on a production server before loading them onto the site proper. But paying for another hosting service, database, sub-domain and so on can be expensive, when all you want to do is test something. What better way to have almost unlimited testing capabilities than to serve data from your own Mac?

Turning your Mac into a web server is as simple as going to System Preferences→Sharing, and activating Personal Web Sharing. If you point your browser to <http://localhost>, your Mac will serve any web pages that you put in the Documents folder in your WebServer folder – you'll find that in the main Library folder. If you point it to <http://localhost/~user>, it will display the contents of the Sites folder in user's home directory.

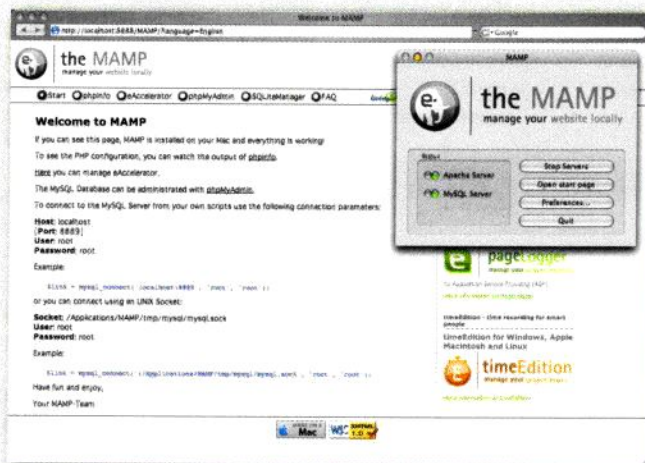
For more complicated web pages, you'll probably be using PHP and a MySQL database, at least. So you'll need to install PHP, MySQL, etc, onto the test server to be able to serve these pages correctly. There are three ways of doing this: a very hard way, a simple way and a very easy way.

The very hard way is to master Unix. With this route, to get MySQL, all you need to do is download the MySQL installer from www.mysql.com, follow the instructions and you'll have a working MySQL database in no time. PHP is a different matter. You'll need to install the developer tools that came

with OS X, download the source code of the PHP version you want to use (version 4 or 5) and compile it, remembering to include the switches to link it to all the useful libraries you've already installed, such as GD and MySQL. You can then change the Apache configuration directive file "/etc/httpd/httpd.conf" so that it uses the PHP module, then restart Apache. There's usually no quicker way to mess up a good web server than this route, so other ways are preferable unless you have very specific module requirements.

The simple way to get PHP up and running, complete with a load of useful extensions, is to download Mark Liyanage's pre-compiled PHP installation from www.entropych.com/software/macosx/php/ – you can grab his MySQL package at the same time. It's as simple as running a standard OS X installer. After that, just drag your files to be tested into /Library/WebServer/Documents and point your browser to <http://localhost/>.

Unbelievably, there's an even simpler option than that, which doesn't touch any of your system files and comes with its own Apache web server as well, so you don't have to mess with your existing version. It's called MAMP (Mac, Apache, MySQL, PHP) and is available from www.mamp.info/en/index.php. It's a hefty download, but all you have to do is drag and drop the MAMP folder to your Applications folder, launch it, and you'll have a full test server up and running. If you need to do more, there's MAMP Pro as well.



The easy option Turning your Mac into a fully fledged web server is as simple as running MAMP