



HACKette

NEWSLETTER OF APPLE/MACINTOSH USERS' GROUP OF HAMILTON VOL. 25 NO. 5 JANUARY 2007

The next meeting is on:

Wednesday
January 10, 2007
in Dundas
6:30 P.M.

Our guest will be

**Doug
McBean**
artistic
photographer

**HAPPY
NEW
YEAR**

NEXT EXECUTIVE
MEETING...
January 15, 2007
at Creative Technology

This newsletter was
produced using
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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In December we welcomed Colin Smith from Adobe Systems. Colin showed off the new Adobe Sound Booth and how it can clean up jet sound to reveal a person talking in the back ground. Remember, Big Brother is watching, or listening. We also saw a comparison between a G4 PowerBook and a new MacBook Pro running Adobe PhotoShop. The result, the MacBook Pro smoked the G4. At the time Colin thought that this would be the most significant MacWorld ever. He might be right, the keynote has been extended to two hours from the normal 1 to 1 1/2 hours. I was hoping to be there this year but it just is not working out. Next year I will be there for sure.



Now for something new and exciting. As the owner of Creative Technology, I believe in advertising to generate awareness of the Mac as well as the store. As the president of HACK and working on a limited budget it is difficult to get the word out that there is a Mac user group in the area. Caroline has done a great job of getting ads for us in the local papers, but I felt their was more that we could do. So, I have decided to combine the store and HACK and get some ads on the radio. If you tune to Y108 you will hear the ads for the store as well as the ads promoting the two user groups I am in. Hopefully this will build our numbers and give us an even more dynamic club. To date I have had two people asking about the club.

This month we are having one of our newest members, Doug MacBean presenting what he does with Photoshop. Doug is a professional photographer and artist. You can preview his work at www.dougmacbean.com

I think there will be lots to talk about this Wednesday with all the new and updated products from MacWorld. I will try to have the full keynote on video so we can have a look at some of the announcements.

See you all this Wednesday
Dave

TAMING THAT WIDGET THING...

By Chita Hunter

I like Widgets. My jury is still deliberating though on the way Widgets are designed to interact with me and the computer. I sigh deeply every time I accidentally click on the desktop while using a Widget and watch that Widget go flying off, like I just startled it. I wish I were able to retrieve the Widget with Command-Tab, as I can with all other open apps. That's just the nature of the Widget. But with the Mac, it's all about how you want to work. The application Amnesty Single, places a Widget more in line with how I want to work.



Amnesty Singles

Amnesty Singles grants the ability to work with Widgets the way you work with stand-alone applications. Using drag and drop ease and your choice of settings, Amnesty Singles gives you the option to 'externally' use a Widget or to build an independent copy of the Widget.

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The Apple Macintosh User Group of Hamilton is a non-profit organization that meets informally at 6:30 PM, the second Wednesday of each month at the Marlatt Family Center, 195 King St. W., Dundas.

This group is made up of users of the Apple Macintosh family of personal computers, whose interests range from word processing to publishing, music, and games to formal presentations, art to accounting and often times . . . more. Our main purpose is to provide a forum for questions, solutions and inspiration for everyday computing.

For more information about the user group, please attend the next Club meeting, contact a member of the executive, or visit our web site.

EXECUTIVE

Visit our Web Site at
www.hamiltonmacintosh.com

President

David Walton 905-627-7355
dave@thewaltons.ca

Past President

Jim Auty 905-528-0969
jauty1@cogeco.ca

Vice President

Lorimer Ruddy 905-631-5894
lruddy@sympatico.ca

Secretary

Graham Worthington
905-648-5461

wag@cogeco.ca

Treasurer

Alan Adams 905-388-9276
wfc@mountaincable.net

Membership

Programming

CCUG Representative

Alan Adams 905-388-9276
wfc@mountaincable.net

Publicity

Caroline Fehr 905-547-2421
carof@sympatico.ca

Newsletter Editor

Ralf Gmell 905-627-1425
rsgmell@cogeco.ca

Web Master

Don Nicklin 905-776-1476
don@creativetechnology.ca

Members-at-Large

Michael Scanlan
harbourclub@sympatico.ca
905 465-2896

Tony Baguley
tbaguley@mac.com

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business card size, black &
white only. Custom or display
work will be quoted.

Presenters are allowed 1 free
business card size insertion

Submissions for Next Issue

January 25, 2006

IMPORTING MUSIC INTO ITUNES

By Ed@Smalldog.com

Previously I wrote about stripping DRM off of music purchased on the iTunes store. Many readers wrote in asking about the best file format and file size for importing music into iTunes. Some people were concerned about a loss of audio quality when a song purchased from iTunes is burned to CD, and re-imported into iTunes as an MP3 or ACC file. Other people were curious about the sound quality of a song imported into iTunes from a CD, versus the sound quality of a song downloaded from iTunes.

I decided to do a test, by importing the same song into iTunes in several different audio formats. I purchased the song from the iTunes Store, burned it to CD, and re-imported into my iTunes library as different bit-rate MP3s and AAC files. I also imported the song off a CD as different bit-rate MP3 and AAC files. I also experimented with Apple Lossless files. I listened to the song with the same volume settings, though a pair of professional Sony MDR-7509HD Studio headphones.

According to Wikipedia, "Bitrate" represents the amount of information, or detail, that is stored per unit of time in a recording. In very general terms, the higher the bitrate of an audio recording, the better it sounds. Music on a CD isn't usually referred to having a bitrate, but I think the bitrate of a CD would work out to 1410 kbps. Compare this to a 128 kbps AAC file purchased from the iTunes Store. The reason a song purchased from iTunes sounds great is because the AAC file is cleverly compressed.

The most common audio compression formats used on the Mac are AAC and MP3. As I wrote last week, I used to always import files as MP3 files. MP3 plays back on millions (maybe billions) of devices, and provides reasonable-to-excellent sounding audio tracks in fairly small files. ACC is a newer, much more sophisticated audio compression scheme. It does not play back on as many devices as MP3s, but this is quickly changing. Almost all new so-called MP3 players also play ACC files, and it is used by Dolby and other audio

companies for digital audio surround-sound. MP3 and ACC use "lossy" compressions - every time you convert an MP3 to an ACC, or ACC to a smaller ACC, etc, information will be lost. It's like taking frozen, concentrated orange juice, reconstituting it with water, then concentrating and freezing it again. There is a loss of quality. When I wrote that I convert iTunes Store purchases to MP3, some readers were surprised - they figured I was further reducing the quality of my purchased music. However, I've not experienced that issue, even with careful listening. (More on that below.)

Apple also offers the Apple Lossless format. This format preserves CD quality, at half the size of a CD (about 350 MB.) It's not practical to import all CDs as Apple Lossless files - they would take up too much hard drive space. I use this format selectively, depending on what I am importing.

I should note that because of this testing, my strategies for importing music into iTunes have changed!

I purchase my absolutely favorite music on CD, and then import it into iTunes as Apple Lossless files. I rarely use the Apple Lossless format, though - this is only for those much-listened to ultimate CDs. Later, I can re-import the Lossless files as a smaller 256 kbps AAC file as needed.

99% of the music I purchase on CD will be imported as 256 kbps AAC files. To my ears, a 256 kbps AAC file is virtually indistinguishable from an Apple Lossless file - which is itself virtually indistinguishable from a CD track. Frankly, I doubt if I could tell them all apart

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Creative Technology
Burlington's newest Apple dealer invites
all HACK members to our convenient location
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in a blind test. For me, a 256 kbps AAC file is the best total balance between sound quality and file size. If you have extremely limited storage space, you can use the slightly smaller 192 kbps AAC file size, which also sounds great.

Songs purchased from iTunes are 128 kbps AAC files. I burn these songs to CD and re-import them to strip out the DRM. Now, I have always done this as high bit-rate MP3 files. However, in my testing, I consistently heard differences between the MP3 file and the AAC file. AAC was superior. From now on, I am going to import the music I buy from the iTunes Store as 192 MBPS AAC files. I won't actually get a better sounding file by re-importing the track at a higher bit-rate. My goal is to simply avoid compressing the audio file any more than it already has been.

About the iTunes Store tracks: I think they sound very good. They do not sound quite as good as music imported at a high bit-rate from a CD, and they don't sound as good as listening to the CD itself. In a tightly controlled environment, or with superior headphones, a subtle difference can be heard. The vast majority of the time, differences will never be noticed. I was actually very surprised how well the iTunes Store songs held up to comparison.

In short, I am not going to use MP3s anymore. My computer is now fast enough that I can always quickly convert AAC to MP3 if I ever need to do that. Yes, it's a "lossy" conversion - but it should work great in a pinch.

So, here is where I mutter under my breath. For years I have imported music as MP3s, so I could play back the tunes almost anywhere. But AAC is absolutely superior to MP3. Some weekend I will be re-importing all my CDs as 256 kbps AAC files. I have a lot of old junk in my iTunes library, anyway.

I downloaded a trial version of Amnesty Singles to give it test run. After launching it, I located the Widget I wanted to convert: /Library/Widgets folder, then dragged the Widget onto the Amnesty Singles application window. Because it was the trial version, my only choice in Application Settings was to create an External Widget with dependency on the original Widget. To make the independent apps you need a registered copy of Amnesty Singles.

From there, select Build. The Save As dialogue box that appears next gives the choices to save to a desired location, Reveal the new Widget application in the Finder, and to Launch and test the new Widget application. The process then created an app that runs just like the original Widget does. But, there's no dependency on selecting F keys, no darkening of my screen and clicking the ominous plus sign. I can place the app anywhere I want, the Applications folder, desktop, even in the dock. There's no running away if I accidentally click on the desktop while using it. And I can Command-Tab to the app at any time. Happy Camper.

The price for Amnesty Singles is really reasonable. Just \$10. Thanks to Mesa Dynamics for this little gem.

http://www.mesadynamics.com/amnesty_singles.htm

THE YEAR'S BEST [actual] HEADLINES

Crack Found on Governor's Daughter
 Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
 Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
 Is There a Ring of Debris around Uranus?
 Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over
 Miners Refuse to Work after Death
 Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant
 War Dims Hope for Peace
 If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile
 Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures
 Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide
 Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
 Man Struck By Lightning: Faces Battery Charge
 New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group
 Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft
 Kids Make Nutritious Snacks
 Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half
 Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors

And the winner is...

Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead