

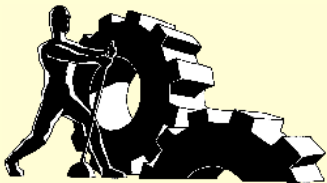
Take Control

of Buying a Mac

by Adam C. Engst

Table of Contents (3.0)

Read Me First.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Mac Buying Quick Start	5
Decide When to Buy.....	6
Figure Out Which Mac to Buy	18
Choose Where to Buy.....	47
Determine What Else to Buy.....	60
Move to a New Mac.....	64
Deal with Your Old Mac.....	81
About This Book	94
Copyright and Fine Print	97



\$10

Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of Buying a Mac*, version 3.0, published in September 2008 by TidBITS Publishing Inc. This book was written by Adam C. Engst and edited by Caroline Rose.

Buying a Mac is a serious decision, but with expert advice from Take Control publisher Adam Engst, you can be sure that you're buying the right Mac for your needs, at the right time, and for the right price.

Copyright © 2008, Adam C. Engst. All rights reserved.

If you have the ebook version of this title, please note that if you want to share it with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would a physical book: “lend” it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a new copy to read it more carefully or to keep it for reference. You can [Click here](#) to give your friend a discount coupon. Discounted [classroom and Mac user group copies](#) are also available.

UPDATES

We may offer free minor updates to this book. To read any available new information, click the Check for Updates link on the [cover](#). On the resulting Web page, you can also sign up to be notified about major updates via email. If you own only the print version of the book or have some other version where the Check for Updates link doesn't work, contact us at tc-comments@tidbits.com to obtain the PDF.


BASICS

In reading this book, you may get stuck if you don't know certain basic facts about Mac OS X or if you don't understand Take Control syntax for things like working with menus or finding items in the Finder. Please note the following:

- **Path syntax:** This book occasionally uses a *path* to show the location of a file or folder in your file system. Path text is formatted

differently from regular type. For example, Leopard stores most utilities, such as Terminal, in the Utilities folder. The path to Terminal is: [/Applications/Utilities/Terminal](#).

The slash at the beginning of the path tells you to start from the root level of the disk. You will also encounter paths that begin with `~` (tilde), which is a shortcut for the user's home directory. For example, if a person with the user name `joe` wants to install fonts that only he can access, he would install the fonts in his [~/Library/Fonts](#) folder, which is just another way of writing [/Users/joe/Library/Fonts](#).

- **Menus:** Where I describe choosing a command from a menu in the menu bar, I use an abbreviated description. For example, the abbreviated description for the menu command to connect to a server from the Finder is “Go > Connect to Server.”
- **Finding preferences:** I sometimes refer to settings in System Preferences that you may want to adjust. To open System Preferences, click its icon in the Dock or choose System Preferences from the  menu. When the System Preferences window opens, click the icon of the pane whose settings you want to adjust. I refer to these panes using an abbreviated notation such as “the Network preference pane.”

WHAT'S NEW IN VERSION 3.0

I changed many things in this version, including:

- Recast the book to cover the new Intel-based Mac models—especially the MacBook Air—and updated numerous details throughout to account for Apple's product line changes
- Added information about [Direct Hard Drive Installation](#) (p. 73) in [Transfer Files Manually](#) (p. 71).
- Added information about disposing of old Macs via Apple's recycling program or Freecycle. See [Dispose of Your Old Mac](#) (p. 85)
- Updated product prices, specifications, and URLs throughout to bring them up to date

Introduction

Computers are expensive. We keep hearing that prices are always dropping, but if you look at the cost of a full Macintosh system, it hasn't changed much over the years. Of course, you get a lot more for your money now than you did in the past, but one way or another you'll probably be spending somewhere between \$1,000 and \$3,000 on a new Mac. That makes a Mac one of the most expensive items you're likely to buy in any given year, so you'll want to make sure you choose the right model and buy at the right time.

Lending weight to the decision is the fact that you have to live with the Mac you buy for some years. So, although the industry moves rapidly, you'll want to make sure your new Mac can handle whatever you think you might throw at in the future until you want to (or can afford to) upgrade again. Obviously, your needs determine how often you upgrade; graphics professionals might upgrade frequently to take advantage of every speed boost, whereas a family with average email and Web needs might wait 3 to 5 years between new Macs.

Buying a Mac is a big decision, and that's where this book will help. I've bought 11 desktop and 9 laptop Macs in the years I've been working on the Mac, and I've also helped innumerable friends, relatives, and *TidBITS* readers pick what to buy and when to buy it. There is no single answer here—everyone's needs are different—but the process I lay out in this book will help eliminate the uncertainty and stress of choosing which Mac will best fit your needs and when you should cough up your money. And remember, sometimes the answer is not to buy a new Mac yet but rather to wait a little longer (perhaps upgrading your existing Mac); there's no shame in that.

Although I've aimed most of this book at the individual Macintosh purchaser, most of the advice applies to small businesses as well—just think about your business's needs instead of individual needs when deciding which Mac to buy and when to buy it. If you're working at a large organization, I'm sure there will be plenty of useful information for you here as well, but you'll have other considerations (in terms of bulk purchases, budgetary schedules, and so on) that I don't cover.

Mac Buying Quick Start

As with any major purchase, you must make a number of decisions before you can know that you're buying the right Mac at the right time. If you skip these decisions, you could end up paying far too much for a Mac that's about to become obsolete.

Decide when to buy:

- Start by analyzing whether you really need a new Mac. See [Determine Whether You Need a New Mac](#) (next page).
- Pick the best time of year or product cycle to buy. See [Pick the Best Time to Buy](#) (p. 8).

Figure out which Mac to buy:

- Consider whether a desktop Mac or a laptop makes more sense for you. See [Decide between a Desktop and a Laptop Mac](#) (p. 18).
- Narrow your choices within the desktop or laptop line. See [Pick the Right Model](#) (p. 21).
- Determine which options and add-ons you need (or want). See [Decide on the Right Options](#) (p. 29).

Choose where to buy your Mac:

- Decide whether to buy your Mac locally or online and whether to purchase directly from Apple, from an authorized reseller, or from an individual. See [Choose Where to Buy](#) (p. 47).

Determine what else to buy with your Mac:

- Decide if you can reuse old peripherals and software, or if not, what you should replace. See [Determine What Else to Buy](#) (p. 60).

Deal with your old Mac:

- Transfer your files from your old Mac to your new one; see [Move to a New Mac](#) (p. 64).
- Figure out if you want to dedicate your old Mac to a new task or pass it on to someone who can make good use of it. See [Deal with Your Old Mac](#) (p. 81).

Decide When to Buy

I find that deciding when to buy a new Mac is often the hardest part of the buying process. I'm constantly struggling with whether I really *need* a new Mac or just *want* one, and the way I was raised makes it difficult for me to justify spending a lot of money on things I only want. (For the ultimate in rationalizations, read "Broken CD Carrier Used as Justification for Purchase of New G5" at <http://www.crazyapplerumors.com/?p=524>; it's a hilarious article from the Crazy Apple Rumors Site.)

To judge from the many plaintive email requests I've received over the years asking whether it's a good time to buy a particular Mac model, I'm not the only one who finds timing a large purchase hard. Luckily, with some relevant data and self-analysis, you can make a better decision.

DETERMINE WHETHER YOU NEED A NEW MAC

Self-analysis comes first. If you're wealthy enough to drop a few grand whenever the mood strikes you, buy a new Mac whenever you feel like it (and make sure your previous computer goes to a good home; see [Deal with Your Old Mac](#), later).

For us working stiffs, it's important to separate *need* from *want* so we spend money only when it will actually make a difference. If you can answer at least one of the following questions in the affirmative, you probably need a new Mac, and you need it now.

- Are you wasting noticeable amounts of time because your current Mac performs your tasks too slowly?
- Do you need to use new hardware or software (including a new version of Mac OS X) that isn't compatible with or doesn't run acceptably on your current Mac?

Table 1: Macintosh Product Announcements by Month*

(bold text indicates a major update)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
January		Mac mini , PowerBook G4	MacBook Pro, iMac (Intel)		MacBook Air , Mac Pro
February			Mac mini (Intel)		MacBook, MacBook Pro
March					
April	PowerBook G4, iBook G4	Power Mac G5	MacBook Pro	Mac Pro	iMac
May		iMac G5	MacBook	MacBook	
June	Power Mac G5			MacBook Pro	
July		iBook G4			
August	iMac G5		Mac Pro	iMac , Mac mini	
September		Mac mini	iMac, Mac mini		
October	iBook G4, Power Mac G5	Power Mac G5 , iMac G5, PowerBook G4	MacBook Pro		
November			MacBook	MacBook, MacBook Pro	
December					

* Click Check for Updates on the [cover](#) to check for an updated version of this table that includes product releases after September 2008.

Figure Out Which Mac to Buy

Determining when to buy your new Mac is hard; now it's time for the fun part of picking which Mac makes the most sense for you. There are three aspects to the decision: choosing between a desktop and a laptop Mac, picking the right model within the type you choose, and selecting the appropriate configuration and expansion options.

Even if you decide not to buy from Apple's online store (read [Choose Where to Buy](#), later), I recommend using it to figure out what to buy. As you'd expect, Apple provides a clean and understandable interface for picking options and comparing pricing between different models and configurations. Start your shopping at <http://store.apple.com/>.

DECIDE BETWEEN A DESKTOP AND A LAPTOP MAC

Many people make this decision instantly, without trouble. Perhaps it's obvious that you need a laptop to fit your lifestyle, or you want one to supplement the desktop Mac you already have at home or work. On the other hand, perhaps your employer provides you with a Windows laptop that you carry whenever you travel, in which case a desktop Mac might be just the ticket. And of course, you might be able to make a good argument for needing both a desktop and a laptop Mac!

But let's assume that you're not entirely sure whether you need a desktop or a laptop Mac. **Table 2**, next page, provides a worksheet you can complete to help determine which sort of Mac makes the most sense for you. Give yourself one point for each question to which you can answer yes, and then add up the points in each column.

Choose Where to Buy

You've decided that this is the time to buy, and you know exactly what you want. But where should you buy your Mac? You have a number of options:

- From a local independent Apple dealer
- From a local Apple Store
- From a computer superstore
- From an Internet or catalog Macintosh reseller
- From Apple's online store
- From an individual

There is no right answer to the question of where you should buy your Mac. It depends on all sorts of variables, such as where you live, how important support is to you, and whether the Mac you want is readily available. But if you consider the pros and cons of each venue, you should be able to determine where you're most comfortable purchasing.

The first task is to decide if you'd rather buy from a local store in person or order from a Web site. After that, you must choose between buying from Apple directly or from a reseller. Let's look at the pros and cons of each choice, and then at what's involved in buying a used Mac from an individual.

LOCAL INDEPENDENT APPLE DEALER

For many people, buying from a local independent Apple dealer isn't possible, since there aren't many local stores that sell Macs any more. But if you do have a local dealer, it's worth contacting them to see if they can earn your business. The pros of buying locally include:

- **Better service:** You can't beat the level of service you'll receive from a good independent Apple dealer. In large part that's due to your getting to know the employees and, equally important, their

Determine What Else to Buy

Buying a new Mac often also requires that you purchase other items—peripherals or software—to go with it. This book isn't the place to offer a full-fledged buyer's guide, but I want to offer a few thoughts about different possible purchases.

NEW SOFTWARE

If you're buying your first Mac, you need software to go with it. Apple bundles iLife and Mac OS X with every Mac, along with various other pieces of software, so it's worth seeing what you get before you buy anything else new.

Some people buying new Macs are upgrading from much older Macs, which may also involve buying new software. Although Mac OS 8.6 and Mac OS 9 software often worked in the Classic environment in Mac OS X, Classic doesn't work either on Intel-based Macs or in Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard. So there's essentially no point in holding on to old software if you can possibly purchase a replacement.

If you're buying a new Mac to supplement one that you already own, you may need to buy additional copies of some of your existing software. Software license agreements vary considerably, but sensible license agreements allow you to install the software on more than one Mac as long as it's in use on only one computer at a time. That situation is most common, of course, when you have both a desktop and a laptop Mac. Other license agreements aren't so reasonable, and network-aware programs (like clients for the backup program Retrospect) may require that you purchase an additional license for your new Mac.

Tip: I won't tell you it's OK to install multiple copies of a program in defiance of an unreasonable license agreement, but I will say that the chances of the company's lawyers noticing are very low.

Move to a New Mac

So, you've done it: you've bought a new Mac and ripped open the packaging, and it's sitting next to your old Mac. How do you transfer your digital life over to the new system, including your files, settings in System Preferences, and applications you've installed?

Luckily, Apple makes this task easy with modern Macs, thanks to the combination of FireWire Target Disk Mode and the Setup Assistant, although you can also opt for the more laborious manual method of moving your files across. But don't jump right in to transferring files, since you'll want to spend some time cleaning up your old Mac first.

To be able to transfer files easily in most situations, you'll need a FireWire cable that can connect the two Macs. If your old Mac doesn't have a FireWire port, you can purchase a FireWire PCI card (for a Power Mac) or a PC card (for a PowerBook), or see [Transfer Files Manually](#). It's probably not worth buying a FireWire card purely to migrate from a Mac that predates FireWire.

Although this isn't true of any other new Macs as of this writing, the MacBook Air lacks a FireWire port, so if you're moving from an older Mac to a MacBook Air, you must use another connection method, such as wired or wireless Ethernet. I talk more about that ahead, in [Ethernet, Not FireWire, for MacBook Air Migrations](#).

Note: If you're moving to a new Mac from a PC running Windows, note that Scott Knaster's [Take Control of Switching to the Mac](#) has lots of useful information about how to perform that process.

CLEAN UP YOUR OLD MAC

Although it's hard to resist moving files to your new Mac instantly so that you can start using it right away, I strongly encourage you to take a few minutes first and clean up the files on your old Mac so that you don't waste transfer time and space on the new Mac. Plus, it's a good

Deal with Your Old Mac

So, you've bought your new Mac and moved all your files over; congratulations! I hope you're enjoying it. But what will you do with your old Mac? It comes down to keeping it or disposing of it, preferably in a way that ensures that it remain in use as long as possible.

KEEP YOUR OLD MAC

I may not buy used Macs, but that's not because I think older Macs are useless. Far from it! I love old Macs, but I keep mine in use as long as possible. The trick is to think of something your old Mac can do that makes keeping it worthwhile. Here are a few ideas.

Kitchen Mac

In the early days of computing, computer companies always talked about how people would keep and consult recipes on the computer. That turned out to be one of the great myths of all time; although some people did go to the effort of typing in all their recipes or buying recipe software, most computers aren't anywhere near the kitchen, so printing each recipe is a necessity.

Even computers that do live in the kitchen aren't close enough to display recipes, since few people dare expose an expensive computer to the spills and splatters of a normal kitchen. But it turns out that the real reason to have a modern computer in the kitchen has almost nothing to do with recipes.

For many of us, our computers act as calendars and phonebooks, not to mention our dictionaries and encyclopedias, and it's for that reason that Tonya and I have long dedicated an older laptop (currently a white iBook) to our kitchen. Along with the standard software like Safari, our kitchen Mac runs Now Software's Now Up-to-Date & Contact (<http://www.nowsoftware.com/>), a calendaring and contact management program that enables us to share data among all our computers. That way we can see if we're available for dinner next

weekend when a friend calls at night, look up a relative's phone number when planning a trip, and even do the trip planning itself on the Web, all without going to our offices.

Stereo Component

For several years, our kitchen Mac wasn't actually near the kitchen in our house, because its location was dictated by proximity to our stereo. That's because we've encoded all our audio CDs to MP3 format, and we play our music from the iBook straight through our stereo. However, with Apple's release of the AirPort Express Base Station and the AirTunes music streaming technology in iTunes, we were able to relocate our kitchen Mac closer to the kitchen! For more details about playing music through an AirPort Express to a stereo, see Glenn Fleishman's *Take Control of Your 802.11n AirPort Extreme Network*.

Using our stereo's amplifier and good speakers gives us excellent sound from the iBook, and being able to play music via playlists in iTunes is fabulous for playing a collection of randomized soft jazz and classical music for a dinner party, for instance.

Home and Internet Server

Once you have more than one Mac, they can communicate with one another through wired or wireless networks. You can extend the useful life of an old Mac by turning it into a server, a machine that stays on all the time and provides services to other Macs on the network or even other computers on the Internet. The possibilities include:

- **Shared files:** If you have files that you and someone else using another computer in your home or office need to access, you can store them on the file server and use the Mac OS's personal file sharing to make them accessible. Consider sharing MP3 files (for use in iTunes) and photos (for use in iPhoto); for detailed instructions, read about sharing digital media files in *Take Control of Sharing Files in Leopard* or *Take Control of Sharing Files in Tiger*.
- **Backup server:** Using the Retrospect software from EMC, you can attach a single backup device to a server and have Retrospect back up changed files over your network using its client software. <http://www.emcinsignia.com/products/smb/retroformac/>

Of course, the modern way to back up is via Apple's Time Machine, but for that to be possible, your backup server must be running Leopard, which works only on Macs with a PowerPC G4 processor running at 867 MHz or faster, a PowerPC G5 processor, or an Intel processor. Unless you're upgrading from a relatively recent Mac, installing Leopard and using it as a backup server with Time Machine may not be possible. See Joe Kissell's [Take Control of Easy Backups in Leopard](#) for more information.

Another cool method of using an older Mac as a backup server is with CrashPlan Pro, from Code 42. What sets CrashPlan Pro apart is that you can use it to back up not just your Macs but also the Macs of friends, relatives, or colleagues over the Internet. Visit <http://www.crashplan.com/> for more information, and be sure to read Joe Kissell's discussion of how CrashPlan Pro fits into a backup strategy, in [Take Control of Mac OS X Backups](#).

- **Shared calendar and contacts:** You can run software like the aforementioned Now Up-to-Date & Contact on your server, enabling multiple Macs to share the same calendar and contacts, which Tonya and I find essential in our busy lives.
- **Personal Web server:** If you have an always-on Internet connection, you can use the personal Web sharing software built into the Mac OS to serve your Web site. It's helpful to have a static IP address that never changes if you're running a Web server, though you can use dynamic DNS software to work around a lack of a static IP address. David E. Smith's Dynamic DNS page gives more information and providers (<http://www.technopagan.org/dynamic/>).

***ISP rules:** Some ISPs don't let you run servers on your Internet connection. Of these, some merely write the ban into your service agreement, whereas others actually block outgoing traffic from your server.*

- **Mail server:** If you're unhappy with the way your ISP handles email, consider running your own mail server. It's a bit more involved than other suggestions here, and I don't recommend it if you have a dynamic IP address, but with some effort you can set up potentially better spam filtering, turn on IMAP access, and make it easier to send mail while you're traveling. To get started using the Postfix server that's built into Mac OS X, check out MailServe (for

Leopard) or Bernard Teo's Postfix Enabler (for Panther and Tiger).
<http://www.cutedgesystems.com/software/MailServeForLeopard/>
<http://www.cutedgesystems.com/software/PostfixEnabler/>

Picture Frame

For many of us, photos are all digital now, so why not display them somewhere other than on your office Mac? An older laptop makes a great picture frame, particularly if it can run Mac OS X, because then you can display pictures via Mac OS X's screen saver, which pans and zooms around your images. Even in Mac OS 9, there are plenty of photo slideshow applications.

Also check out Envision, a program from Open Door Networks (<http://www.opendoor.com/envision/>). This Internet-savvy software goes to a site you specify, looks at all the links, finds the images, and downloads and displays those that meet your criteria (so you can view only good pictures, not the little navigation graphics that exist on most Web sites). It's a good way to extend the content on your picture frame beyond the photos you've taken. Envision comes with a number of suggested sites for viewing, including the excellent Astronomy Picture of the Day, which displays gorgeous images from NASA (<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>).

Home Controller

This is perhaps a more involved project than the others, but if you combine your Mac with the X10 home automation controllers and special Macintosh software like Sand Hill Engineering's XTension (<http://www.shed.com/>), Perceptive Automation's Indigo (<http://www.perceptiveautomation.com/indigo/>), or Always Thinking's Thinking Home (<http://www.alwaysthinking.com/>), you can have your Mac automatically turn lights on and off, control your sprinkler system, and more. In a previous home, I used a similar system connected to our elderly PowerBook Duo 230 to turn on some lights when it got dark and then turn off the lights at 11 PM. It also monitored rainfall, graphed indoor and outdoor temperature, and performed occasional practical jokes.

DISPOSE OF YOUR OLD MAC

Perhaps none of the ideas I just discussed caught your interest. That's fine, and there's no shame in selling or giving away your old Mac. Here are some options.

Hand It Down

The most common method of disposing of an old Mac is to give it to a friend or relative who has no computer at all or whose computer is so old that your Mac would be a significant upgrade.

- **Pro:** You receive the good feeling of knowing the person you're helping with your gift.
- **Con:** You're likely signing yourself up for a lifetime (the Mac's lifetime, that is) of personal tech support.

Donate It to Charity

If you can't think of anyone you know personally who could benefit from receiving your old Mac, consider donating it to a school, nursing home, job training program, or other worthy charity.

- **Pro:** You get the satisfaction of both knowing that you're supporting a worthy charity in a useful way and being able to deduct the value of the computer from your income tax (at least in the United States—and make sure you get a receipt so that you have proof of the donation for the IRS).
- **Con:** None that I know of, other than a slightly more complicated tax return.

Warning! *Be sure to keep good records of any charitable donations to registered not-for-profit organizations, and if you're at all concerned about your donation, consult an accountant. This isn't accounting advice, but if you bought the Mac for a business and depreciated it or expensed it out entirely, you no longer have a basis on which to declare a donated value: the government already gave you back the tax you paid on the dollars used to purchase it. Consult an accountant for details.*

Give It Away via Freecycle

You may find yourself with an old Mac that you can't seem to get rid of, mostly because it's too old for friends, family, or charitable organizations. But that doesn't mean it's too old for everyone; the trick is to find the person for whom even an ancient computer is still useful.

The easiest way to do this is via Freecycle, a large collection of location-based mailing lists on which people offer items to others for free. To get started with Freecycle, visit <http://www.freecycle.org/> and search for your area. Once you've found the closest Freecycle mailing list, sign up to receive introductory information and postings from others, and after you have a feel for how it works, submit your own posting.

I recommend being entirely up front about the age and limitations of the computer you're trying to give away, and be sure to mention all the things (cables, software, and so on) that you plan to include with it. You'll likely receive email from more than one person who wants your old Mac, but don't reply immediately. Wait a day or so, and then pick the person who you think will be the easiest to deal with or who might need the Mac the most. Then reply to your chosen recipient, setting up a time and place for handing over your old computer.

I've used Freecycle on a number of occasions to dispose of elderly Macs and other computer equipment, and in each case the recipients were happy to receive them. With one particularly old Mac, a Performa 6400, I included about 20 educational and game CDs that were state-of-the-art in the mid-1990s. The fact that these titles are no longer available and may not be as graphically impressive as modern equivalents didn't bother the 4-year-old for whom the Mac was destined.

- **Pros:** You get the satisfaction of knowing that your old Mac has gone to someone who will truly appreciate it. Plus, by keeping your Mac in use, you're keeping it out of a landfill.
- **Cons:** It's extra work to subscribe to a Freecycle list if you aren't otherwise interested, and it can take some back and forth to arrange a pickup with your chosen recipient.

Sell It Locally

I'm not a wheeler-dealer, so I've always been leery of selling used goods locally, but it's a long-standing practice.

- **Pros:** You may be able to sell your Mac for a higher price than on eBay or another auction site, where there will be many other competing sellers with similar products. You may also prefer to avoid the uncertainty of dealing with an online buyer and the hassle of shipping the Mac.
- **Cons:** You must interact with random members of your community, which can be unsettling if you're concerned about personal security (since you've just advertised that you own expensive electronics). Also, if something goes wrong with the Mac, whether or not it's your fault, you may find yourself having to deal with the problem after the sale.

Sell It on eBay or Another Auction Site

There's no question that eBay and other online auction sites have revolutionized the practice of selling used goods online.

- **Pros:** The process of listing and selling goods on eBay is well documented, and it offers a huge community of interested buyers. For goods that are in some way unusual, the eventual prices often seem ludicrously high.
- **Cons:** If many other people are selling similar products, you may end up earning less than you'd like. Despite eBay's ratings system, there's always some uncertainty with selling to an unknown buyer. And although the buyer usually pays shipping costs, you must still go to the effort of listing your Mac for sale and shipping it.

eBay Advice

Take Control author Glenn Fleishman, who has more experience with eBay than I do, offered this advice about selling on eBay:

Many scammers are targeting laptop sales by creating fake but highly legitimate-looking cashier's checks or money orders that banks initially process but that come back later as unpayable. Combined with this scam, some buyers will ask if they can send you a check for, say, \$2,000 more than the auction amount and have you send that money to someone else they owe money to. They then send a fake cashier's check, which you deposit, and they urge you to send the money and goods immediately. If you fall for this scam, you're out not only the computer but your cash, too.

Avoid these scams in one of these ways:

- *Use PayPal and ship only to PayPal-verified addresses.*
- *Use a valid escrow service allied with eBay. (At the moment, eBay has approved only Escrow.com for domestic U.S. transactions; another scam involves fake escrow services, so be vigilant.)*
- *Insist that any check, cashier's check, or money order clear fully, even if that requires a 2-week wait before you would ship the product.*

Yikes! It's a scary world out there! Also be sure to check out the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's advice on shopping online (<http://www.ftc.gov/onlineshopping/>).

Recycle Your Old Mac

If your Mac is totally dead or you have no other way to get rid of it, for goodness sake don't just toss it in the garbage (older computers contain toxic metals and chemicals). Instead, you can take advantage of Apple's recycling program, which offers free recycling of your old Mac (or other computer) and monitor when you purchase a new Mac from Apple, either from an Apple retail store or from Apple's online store. Once your purchase is complete, you'll be offered the opportunity to recycle your old computer and monitor for free. Learn more at <http://www.apple.com/environment/recycling/program/>.

If you want to recycle old equipment beyond what's covered by Apple's free take-back program, Apple has an Electronic Recycling Program that will accept any electronic equipment for \$30 per box, including shipping. Learn more about what you need to do at <http://www.recycleapc.com/apple/>.

Warning! *If you do decide to recycle a functional Mac, there's no point in cleaning it up, but be sure to delete all data from the hard disk by reformatting it with Disk Utility (Mac OS X), Drive Setup (Mac OS 9), or some other utility.*

PREP YOUR OLD MAC FOR ITS NEW LIFE

No matter what you choose to do with your old Mac, you can take a few basic actions to prepare it for what comes next. Obviously, the details depend somewhat on whether you or someone else will be using it, but you won't go wrong if you perform the following tasks.

Back Up Data Again?

I presume that by this point you've already moved all your important data to your new Mac. Nevertheless, I encourage you to make sure you have at least one additional copy of all the important files on your old Mac, because reformatting the hard disk is an aspect of preparing your old Mac for a new life. Once you reformat, all those files won't be accessible any more, so now is the time to make sure you have appropriate backups that you can read in the future if necessary.

Clean it Up

Thanks to static charges on their screens and cooling fans constantly sucking air through the body of the machine, computers attract huge amounts of dust. Keyboards and mice also collect dirt and grime, often to the point where they don't work quite right. Follow these steps to spruce up your old Mac:

1. Shut the Mac down, and unplug it and the monitor from the wall. If it's a laptop, also remove the battery.
2. With a damp cloth, wipe down the entire outside of the Mac, including the screen. You can use plain water or, even better, a special cleaner made for this purpose (like iKlear from KlearScreen; visit

<http://www.klearscreen.com/iKlear.aspx> for details). Don't use a general-purpose glass cleaner like Windex, because ammonia can strip anti-glare coatings on LCDs! Plus, you don't want to spray anything on a screen, to prevent liquid from getting inside the case.

3. Use a damp cloth to clean the surface of the keyboard and mouse as well, but if the grime (darn those finger oils!) is too ingrained, try soaking a corner of a cloth in rubbing alcohol and using that to remove the crud.
4. If your Mac's mouse has a ball and rollers, open it up and use a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol to clean them.
5. With a can of compressed air (readily available at office supply stores and electronics stores like Radio Shack), clean in between the keys on the keyboard.
6. If the Mac opens relatively easily (as do all the Power Macs and Mac Pros, unlike other models), open it and use compressed air to clean dust from the motherboard and around the power supply's fan. Don't close the Mac just yet; move on to the next section.

Add or Remove Hardware

If you've added RAM, another hard drive, a PCI card, or some other internally installed hardware option to your Mac, now is the time to decide if you want to leave well enough alone or attempt to modify the internal configuration.

I recommend leaving extra RAM installed. It's useful where it is, and you're unlikely to be able to use it in another Mac (since RAM is highly specific).

Similarly, it's probably worth leaving a second hard drive installed unless it's particularly large and you know that it will work in your new Mac. Make sure the connector types are the same, since the Power Mac G5 and Mac Pro use Serial ATA (SATA) connectors, which isn't true of older Macs.

Give the Gift of Backups

If you're giving the Mac to a friend or relative for whom you'll be providing tech support, consider creating a backup solution that relies on the second internal hard drive. If the Mac can run Leopard, the second drive is perfect for Time Machine backups. If the Mac is too old for Leopard, you can use a backup program like Carbon Copy Cloner (<http://www.bombich.com/software/cccl.html>) to set up a system that automatically backs up the Mac to the second drive on a regular schedule. Think of the backup as reducing the amount of tech support you'll have to provide.

If you've installed a second video card and the Mac will be going to someone who will use only a single monitor, you might as well pull the video card (although it may be worth trying to convince them of the utility of a double-monitor setup).

For any other specialized PCI cards (for adding USB and FireWire or providing audio input capabilities), you'll have to make case-by-case decisions.

Reformat the Hard Disk and Reinstall Mac OS

After making sure the old Mac's hardware is set up the way you want it, your next task is to reformat the hard disk and reinstall the Mac OS, along with any bundled software that came with it. It's difficult to give specific instructions here because different Macs have shipped with radically different installation discs over time. For instructions covering a wide variety of possible situations, see the Apple Knowledge Base article at <http://support.apple.com/kb/HT1561>.

In general, you'll follow these steps:

1. Find the installation disc or discs that contain the version of the Mac OS that came with the old Mac. The disc's name will likely contain the words "Install" or "Software Restore."
2. Insert the first installation disc into the Mac's optical drive and then reboot the Mac, making sure to hold down the C key after the restart so that the Mac boots from the installation disc. If the disc isn't bootable, you must boot the Mac from another volume first.

3. If the installation disc uses Mac OS X, the installer runs automatically. Once you can access the menu bar, choose Disk Utility from the Installer (Panther) or Utilities (Tiger and Leopard) menu.
4. In Disk Utility, select the hard disk from the list on the left, click the Erase tab, click the Options (Panther) or Security Options (Tiger and Leopard) button, select the option to zero out all data by writing zeros across all the data once, and erase the disk.

Tip: This step of zeroing out all the data isn't necessary if you're certain that you have *no* sensitive data (such as financial records or confidential business information) on your hard disk. However, zeroing out the disk is a good idea in general because it ensures that no future owner will be able to resurrect sensitive data.

5. Quit Disk Utility to return to the installer, and continue with the rest of the process of installing Mac OS X and the applications that came with the Mac.
6. If the installation CD uses Mac OS 9, first use Drive Setup (which is likely in a Utilities folder on the CD) to erase your hard disk. To zero out all data, choose Functions > Initialization Options, and in the Initialization Options dialog, select Zero All Data before proceeding to initialize the hard disk. Then use the installer to reinstall Mac OS 9 and all the bundled applications.

This step may require switching to a Software Restore CD or DVD; for instructions, see the Apple Knowledge Base article mentioned earlier.

7. If you're giving the Mac to a stranger, you're done (thus ensuring that they get Apple's out-of-the-box experience).
8. If the Mac is going to someone you know, it might be nice to configure it for basic Internet access and run Software Update to download the latest updates to the operating system and to Apple's bundled applications. Then perform any basic configuration or software installations that are appropriate. Of course, your Internet configuration may not match that of the Mac's eventual recipient, so the recipient may have to do some reconfiguration.

Warning! *If you have to enter a password to access the Internet, make sure you delete it when you're done with Software Update.*

Gather the Original Manuals and Accessories

Once you've restored the Mac to a pristine internal state, it's time to gather up the original manuals, CDs or DVDs, and accessories. I try to keep these items together to make them easier to find later. If you're selling a Mac, it's best to provide the buyer with everything it came with initially—and it's not as though keeping a manual to an older Macintosh will do you any good.

Package It in the Original Box

Lastly, if possible, repackage the Mac in its original box. Of course, if you haven't saved it, or if you succumbed to the temptation to use it for something else, you won't be able to do this, but the original packaging is the best way to transport a Mac to its new home. The new owner will appreciate receiving the original box for the same reason (if they ever need to move it around or ship it somewhere for repair).

About This Book

Thank you for purchasing this Take Control book. We hope you find it both useful and enjoyable to read. We welcome your comments at tc-comments@tidbits.com. Keep reading in this section to learn more about the author, the Take Control series, and the publisher.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adam C. Engst is the publisher of *TidBITS*, one of the oldest and most respected Internet-based newsletters, distributed weekly to many thousands of readers. He has written numerous technical books, including the best-selling *Internet Starter Kit* series, and many magazine articles (thanks to Contributing Editor positions at *MacUser*, *MacWEEK*, and *Macworld*).

Adam's innovations include the creation of the first advertising program to support an Internet publication (in 1992), the first flat-rate accounts for graphical Internet access (in 1993, with Northwest Nexus for *Internet Starter Kit for Macintosh*), and the Take Control ebook series. In addition, he has collaborated on several Internet educational videos and has appeared on a variety of internationally broadcast television and radio programs.

Adam's indefatigable support of the Macintosh community and commitment to helping individuals has resulted in numerous awards and recognition at the highest levels. In the annual MDJ Power 25 survey of industry insiders from 2000 through 2006, he ranked in the top five most influential people in the Macintosh industry, and he was named one of *MacDirectory's* top ten visionaries. And how many industry figures can boast of being turned into an action figure?

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Tonya for keeping Take Control fun as we work on it together. How lucky can I be to have a wife who not only is understanding of what I do but also makes everything I do better?

Next, thanks to Caroline Rose, whose editing on this book was absolutely top-notch. We professional authors can sometimes feel as though we know writing better than our editors, but I not only couldn't argue with Caroline's changes, I didn't want to, because they universally improved the book.

A tip of the mouse to Glenn Fleishman, Joe Kissell, Dan Frakes, Chris Pepper, Jeff Porten, Karen Anderson, Keith Dawson, Michael Cohen, Matt Deatherage, and Lynda Fudold for their excellent comments, and to John Vink for Migration Assistant. Also, thanks to the Take Control authors for your support in general. You're an amazing group, and Take Control wouldn't exist without you.

SHAMELESS PLUG

If you liked this book, you'll undoubtedly like Adam's other works:

TidBITS

Along with its award-winning Macintosh commentary and editorial, you can also learn about new Mac releases and other Apple hardware and software from *TidBITS* at <http://www.tidbits.com/>.

Take Control of Your Wi-Fi Security

Written with Glenn Fleishman, this book looks in detail at the sometimes scary world of wireless networking. The book shows you how to evaluate your risk, lock down your network, and protect your computers from viruses and attacks. You'll even learn how to perform a detailed security audit on your wireless network.

iPhoto '08: Visual QuickStart Guide

Available as both an ebook and a print book, this guide explains how to get started with iPhoto '08 quickly and easily, using illustrated step-by-step instructions rather than lengthy explanations.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Publishers Adam and Tonya Engst have been creating Macintosh-related content since they started the online newsletter *TidBITS*, in 1990. In *TidBITS*, you can find the latest Macintosh news, plus read reviews, opinions, and more (<http://www.tidbits.com/>).

Adam and Tonya are known in the Mac world as writers, editors, and speakers. They are also parents to Tristan, who thinks ebooks about clipper ships and castles would be cool.

TidBITS
Mac news for the rest of us



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Take Control logo: Jeff Tolbert

Editor: Caroline Rose

Editor in Chief: Tonya Engst

Publisher and Master of Grep Automation: Adam Engst

Copyright and Fine Print

Take Control of Buying a Mac

ISBN: 978-0-975950-36-4

Copyright © 2008, Adam C. Engst. All rights reserved.

TidBITS Publishing Inc.

50 Hickory Road

Ithaca, NY 14850 USA

<http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/>

Take Control electronic books help readers regain a measure of control in an oftentimes out-of-control universe. Take Control ebooks also streamline the publication process so that information about quickly changing technical topics can be published while it's still relevant and accurate.

This electronic book doesn't use copy protection because copy protection makes life harder for everyone. So we ask a favor of our readers. If you want to share your copy of this ebook with a friend, please do so as you would a physical book, meaning that if your friend uses it regularly, he or she should buy a copy. Your support makes it possible for future Take Control ebooks to hit the Internet long before you'd find the same information in a printed book. Plus, if you buy the ebook, you're entitled to any free updates that become available.

Although the author and TidBITS Publishing Inc. have made a reasonable effort to ensure the accuracy of the information herein, they assume no responsibility for errors or omissions. The information in this ebook is distributed "As Is," without warranty of any kind. Neither TidBITS Publishing Inc. nor the author shall be liable to any person or entity for any special, indirect, incidental, or consequential damages, including without limitation lost revenues or lost profits, that may result (or that are alleged to result) from the use of these materials. In other words, use this information at your own risk.

Many of the designations used to distinguish products and services are claimed as trademarks or service marks. Any trademarks, service marks, product names, or named features that appear in this title are assumed to be the property of their respective owners. All product names and services are used in an editorial fashion only, with no intention of infringement of the trademark. No such use, or the use of any trade name, is meant to convey endorsement or other affiliation with this title.

This title is an independent publication and has not been authorized, sponsored, or otherwise approved by Apple Inc. Because of the nature of this title, it uses terms that are trademarks or registered trademarks of Apple Inc.; to view a complete list of the trademarks and the registered trademarks of Apple Inc., you can visit <http://www.apple.com/legal/trademark/appletmlist.html>.

Featured Titles

Now that you've seen this book, you know that Take Control books have an easy-to-read layout, clickable links if you read online, and real-world info that puts you in control. Click any book title below or [visit our Web catalog](#) to add to your Take Control collection!

Take Control of Switching to the Mac (Scott Knaster): If you're coming to the Mac from Windows, you'll want to check out Scott's expert advice for a seamless transition. \$10.

Take Control of Maintaining Your Mac (Joe Kissell): Find a commonsense approach to avoiding problems and ensuring that your Mac runs at peak performance. \$10.

Take Control of Running Windows on a Mac (Joe Kissell): With Intel-based Macs, it has become possible to run Windows software on a Mac, and with Joe's advice, it's easy! \$10.

Take Control of Apple Mail in Leopard (Joe Kissell): Go under the hood with the new (and old) features in Apple Mail 3. Joe gets you going and helps you get the most out of Mail. \$10.

Take Control of iWeb '08 (Steve Sande): Learn how to work effectively and creatively in iWeb. Among many topics covered, this ebook does look at iWeb's podcasting-related options. \$10.

Take Control of Easy Backups in Leopard (Joe Kissell): Devise a rock-solid backup strategy so you can restore quickly and completely, no matter what the catastrophe. \$10.

Take Control of Your 802.11n AirPort Extreme Network (Glenn Fleishman): Make your AirPort network fly—get help with buying the best gear, set up, security, and more. \$10.

Take Control of Your Wi-Fi Security (Engst & Fleishman): Learn how to keep intruders out of your wireless network and protect your sensitive communications! \$10.