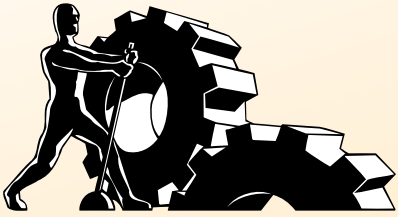


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TextExpander

Michael E. Cohen



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Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of TextExpander*, version 1.0, published in June 2011 by TidBITS Publishing Inc. This book was written by Michael E. Cohen and edited by Tonya Engst.

This book covers how you can use Smile's TextExpander 3 text-substitution utility to make your writing, programming, and editing far more efficient and enjoyable.

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Updates and More

You can access extras related to this book on the Web (use the link in [Ebook Extras](#), near the end of the book; it's available only to purchasers). On the ebook's Take Control Extras page, you can:

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Basics

Here are a few “rules of the road” that will help you read this book:

- **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 that creates a new snippet in TextExpander is “File > New Snippet.”
- **Contextual menus:** *Contextual* menus appear when you Control-click various elements on a Macintosh screen, including Dock items and files in Finder windows. To describe opening a contextual menu, I usually I tell you to Control-click an item on the screen. If your mouse offers a right-click option, or if you use a trackpad or other means of opening a contextual menu, you should feel free to use the method you prefer.
- **Finding System Preferences:** I sometimes refer to settings in System Preferences. To open System Preferences, click its icon in the Dock or choose System Preferences from the Apple  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.”
- **Finding TextExpander’s preferences:** I often refer to TextExpander preferences that you may want to adjust. Don’t confuse the TextExpander preferences with the system-wide settings found in System Preferences. To access TextExpander’s preferences, when the application is showing its menu bar, choose TextExpander > Preferences. You can also click the Preferences icon in the TextExpander window’s default toolbar.

If you have hidden TextExpander’s menu bar (and, yes, that’s one of TextExpander’s preferences) choose TextExpander Preferences from the TextExpander menu bar icon  (see [Know Your Interfaces](#) for more about the menu bar icon).

- **Path syntax:** This book occasionally uses a *path* to show the location of a file or folder. For example, TextExpander stores its setting backups in your Home folder’s Library folder, inside the TextExpander folder in the Application Support folder. The path to that location is: `~/Library/Application Support/TextExpander`.

The ~ (tilde) at the beginning of the path tells you to start from your Home folder. For example, if you log in to your Mac with the user name `betty` then `~/Library/Application Support/TextExpander` is just another way of writing `/Users/betty/Library/Application Support/TextExpander`.

Introduction

I tend to drive a vanilla Mac these days. Although I've had serious flirtations with numerous tools and utilities over the years that would change the look, feel, and behavior of my Mac, for the past decade I've tried to keep my Mac reasonably add-on free. I've done this in large part because I make a good portion of my living advising new or unsophisticated users about how to get things done with their Macs, and I want to be sure that what I see on my Mac matches up with what they see (or should see) on theirs.

So, when I was asked to write a book about TextExpander, a utility that lurks behind the scenes, watching what you write and changing some of it on the fly, I figured that I would install it, put it through its paces, learn its secrets (both on my own and with the generous help of the Smile folk who made the product and the various Take Control authors who use it), and then, when the book was done, disable it and get back to my vanilla Mac world for the good of my soul and for the benefit of my clients.

However, the book is now done (except for this Introduction) and I... I don't want to let TextExpander go: it's too useful, too powerful—too addictive.

I revel in how it fixes so many of my own idiosyncratic typos with a satisfying “pop”! I delight in how it can fetch the URL of a Web page I have open and insert it magically with just a few quick keystrokes into an email message that I'm composing! I smile (or ☺) every time I realize that I won't ever again have to open and search through the Character Viewer whenever I need to type a ⌘ or a ⌥ or a ☒!

Although I still believe in the virtues of an add-on free Mac, I am no longer as orthodox in my beliefs. I am convinced that even with TextExpander installed I can still serve those people that I've helped in the past, that TextExpander's convenience and power won't distance me from their world.

And if I'm wrong, well, I don't want to be right. I'm not going to give it up. I ♥ TextExpander, and I'm proud!

TextExpander Quick Start

This Quick Start guide offers an overview of what you'll learn in this book.

If you have never used TextExpander, I suggest that you [Meet TextExpander](#). After that, explore how to [Create and Use Complex Snippets](#). Those two chapters should give you a sense of what TextExpander is and what it can do; after that, feel free to read around as your fancy dictates.

If you have used TextExpander before, you might benefit from reviewing [Customize Group Settings](#) and [Set Expansion Options](#), and be sure to read [Don't Forget These Fine Features!](#), ahead a page or so. If you're an advanced user, you may find that [Script with Snippets](#) can take you even further than you have gone before.

For all readers, I strongly suggest that you learn how to [Back Up Your Snippets Automatically](#).

Preliminary steps:

- For tips on downloading and installing TextExpander, see [Get TextExpander](#).
- If you're switching to TextExpander from another text-expansion utility, consult [Add a Group from a File](#).
- To get an overview of TextExpander's two interfaces and start building your first, simple "snippet," read [Meet TextExpander](#).

Broaden your horizons:

- To learn about the wide variety of snippets you can make, and to discover what they can do, read [Create and Use Complex Snippets](#).
- To keep your screen uncluttered while having ready access to TextExpander, read [Manage the Menu Bar](#) and [Use Hotkeys](#).
- For ways to control when snippets expand, see [Customize Group Settings](#) and [Set Expansion Options](#).
- See how to expand your snippet collection when you [Save, Add, and Import Groups](#).

Get organized:

- Corral and catalog your snippet collection; read [Make Groups and Arrange Them](#) and [Organize a Group's Contents](#).
- Don't get lost in a big snippet collection; read [Find Your Snippets](#).

Cover your assets:

- To protect your snippet collection, see [Back Up Your Snippets Automatically](#).
- Don't keep all your snippets in one basket; read [Share and Sync Snippets](#) to see how you can have them in two (or more) places at once.

Flex your scripting muscles:

- Drive other applications from a snippet when you [Script with AppleScript](#).
- Find out how to [Script with the Shell](#) to harness the power of Unix.

Go mobile:

- If you have an iPod touch, iPhone, or iPad, visit [Appendix A: Use TextExpander touch](#) to see how you can use your snippet collection on the run.


Don't Forget These Fine Features!

TextExpander has many useful features that even experienced users sometimes overlook. The following are among my favorites:

- ◆ **Suggest matching abbreviation:** Use this hotkey-only command to get at that almost-but-not-quite remembered snippet, even when you can recall only part of its label, content, or abbreviation. See [Use Hotkeys](#).
- ◆ **Enable/Disable Expansion:** You can make TextExpander ignore your abbreviations temporarily; it's another one of the choices you have when you [Use Hotkeys](#).
- ◆ **Predefined groups:** Smile provides a collection of snippet groups that are really useful, including the compendious TidBITS Auto Correct dictionary and a collection aimed at people who write HTML and CSS, among several others. Check these groups out in [Add a Predefined Group](#).
- ◆ **Auto-capitalization options:** TextExpander can automatically capitalize sentences, and eliminate the common double-capital typo. See [Set Auto-capitalization Options](#).
- ◆ **Adapt to Case of Abbreviation:** A snippet can be capitalized when you want it, and be lower-case when you want it. Read [Assign an Abbreviation](#).
- ◆ **Expand after All but Letters & Numbers:** This group setting lets snippets expand after both whitespace and punctuation; if you've ever wanted a snippet to expand after a parenthesis or a quotation mark but not in the middle of a word, this setting is for you. See [Customize Group Settings](#).
- ◆ **Edit Last Expanded Snippet:** Especially if you use TextExpander snippets to reply to customer queries, you may find that your snippets often need updating as products, policies, and services change, or when you find a better way of explaining something. If you've just inserted a snippet that needs an edit, you can quickly make the change through the [Edit Last Expanded Snippet](#) command.

Meet TextExpander

The idea behind TextExpander is simple: it substitutes something that you type (usually something short) with something else (usually longer and more complicated) in almost any situation where you can enter text. Although I'll present a simple example in this chapter, TextExpander substitutions can be complex and extraordinarily helpful: they can include formatted text, images, the current date or time, fields where *you* fill in information on the fly, the clipboard contents, and more. They can even move the insertion point.

Like many utilities that are designed to work in conjunction with other applications, TextExpander has two separate faces that it presents to the world: a normal Mac interface—complete with menu bar, windows, and Dock icon—and a menu bar icon  that offers most TextExpander functions in a single menu. In this chapter, you'll read about how to purchase TextExpander, plus find a look at both of TextExpander's faces and an introductory walkthrough of how to create and use a TextExpander snippet.

Get TextExpander

It should come as no surprise that you'll get the most value from this book if you have a copy of TextExpander installed on your Mac. You can obtain Smile's TextExpander either from their Web site (<http://smilesoftware.com/TextExpander/>) or from the Mac App store (<http://itunes.apple.com/app/textexpander-for-mac/id405274824>). The price is the same from either location.

You can also purchase a Family Pack or Office Pack license from Smile should you need to install TextExpander on multiple machines that are used by more than one person; you can find details about the Family Pack and Office Pack in the TextExpander FAQ at <http://smilesoftware.com/TextExpander/faq.html>.

If you just want to try TextExpander, you can obtain a free trial version from Smile's site (the Mac App Store currently doesn't allow developers to provide time-limited free trial software).

Create and Use Complex Snippets

TextExpander’s capability to substitute a simple text string on the fly for something that you type is well-worth the price of admission. But TextExpander snippets can contain more than just simple text, and they can do some pretty cool things.

You can create snippets that include formatted text and images. Moreover, using TextExpander macros, you can make snippets that include clipboard content, move your cursor, and type special keys like Escape and Tab. You can even create snippets that perform date and time math, combine several snippets into one, and generate fill-in forms.

“Complex,” however, does not mean “hard”—complex snippets are easy to create and easy to use.

And the uses, as you might imagine, are plentiful.

Add Formatting and Pictures

As you saw in [Learn the Types of Snippet Content](#) a few pages back, one of the four types of snippet content is Formatted Text, Pictures. When you choose this content type from the pop-up menu above the snippet Content box (refer back to [Figure 4](#)), the Formatting pop-up menu beneath the Content box is enabled ([Figure 5](#)) and the snippet Content box becomes ready to accept images.

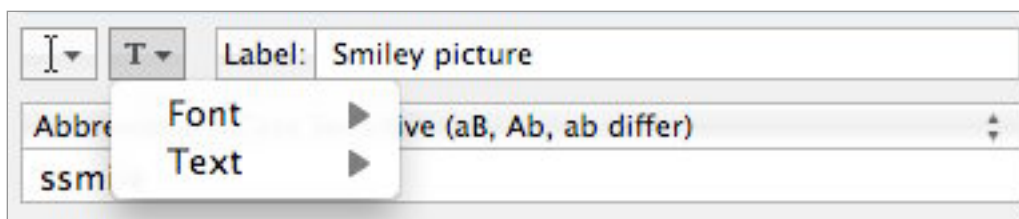


Figure 5: The Formatting pop-up menu is available when you create a Formatted Text, Pictures snippet.

Organize Your Snippets


The more you use TextExpander, the more ways you figure out to use it—and *that* usually leads to the creation of more snippets.

The small assortment of snippets that came with TextExpander by default are easy to remember, but sooner or later (sooner if you import some of the standard snippet collections that are available—you'll find out about *those* in [Save, Add, and Import Groups](#)), you may find that you have dozens, or hundreds, or even thousands of snippets, and that your memory isn't up to the task.

Isn't it a lucky coincidence that TextExpander has features that help you organize your snippets?

In this chapter, I explain how to manage your snippets by group, and how to customize certain snippet settings that apply by group.

Make Groups and Arrange Them

In TextExpander, snippets are organized into groups, which appear as folders in the Groups list at the left of the TextExpander window; the same groups also appear in the menu bar  menu, where they are listed in the same order as they appear in the TextExpander window.

Each group can contain an arbitrary number of snippets, from none to many thousands. To show or hide the snippets contained in a group, click the group icon's triangle in the Groups list.

When you first install TextExpander, all of your snippets appear in a single group in the TextExpander window: TextExpander Snippets. This is fine when you can count the number of snippets you have on your fingers, but when you reach the point where you have to take off your shoes and use your toes to count them, you may start to wish for more groups so you could divide your snippets among them.

Find Your Snippets

It is the nature of snippet collections to grow larger and larger, and it is the nature of the human brain to lose track of what's contained in large collections of stuff: this is why no one really knows what's in the attic/basement/sock drawer/garage/cabinet under the sink in the guest bathroom.

TextExpander, however, can offer you several kinds of assistance to help you quickly track down the snippet you want, even if you have managed to spawn thousands of the critters.

Browse Your Snippets

It almost goes without saying, but the TextExpander window itself is a good place to start when you want to find a particular snippet and see what it contains. **Figure 15** shows the TextExpander window with one of the snippet groups toggled open to reveal its contents.

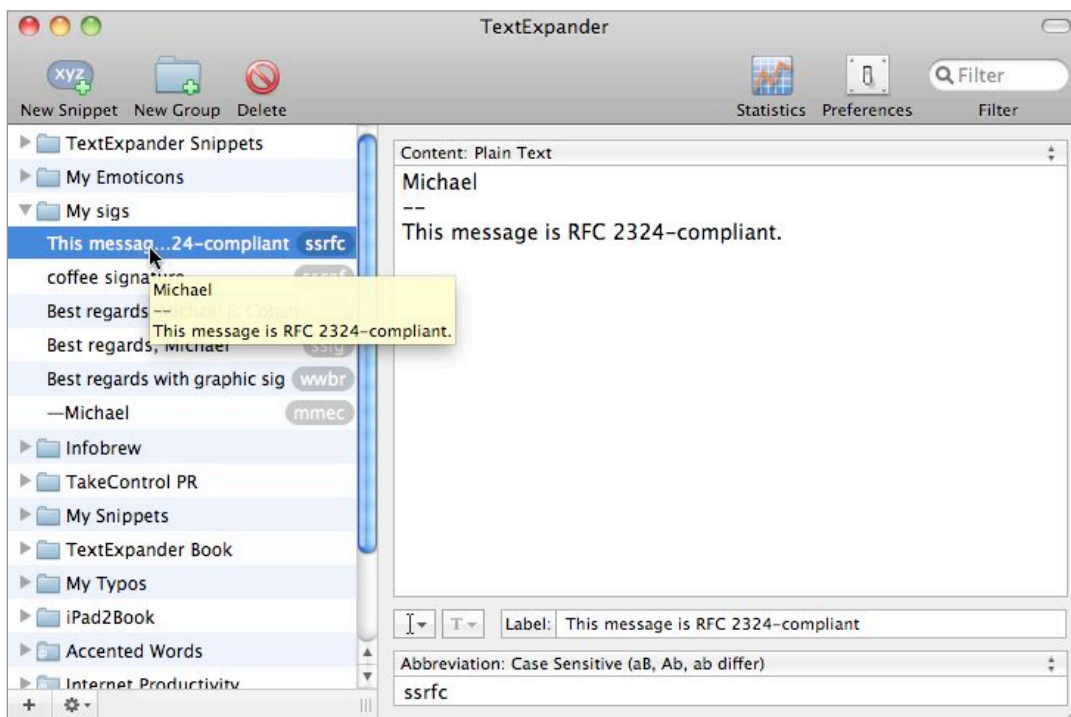


Figure 15: Browse your snippets in the TextExpander window with the arrow keys on your keyboard.

Set Text Expander Options

In the best of all possible worlds envisioned by [Dr. Pangloss](#), all software would be so perfectly designed that every program would satisfy every user without any need for modification or customization. In our less than Panglossian world, however, different people have different needs, expectations, and tastes. That's why almost every Mac application has a Preferences command on the application's menu.

With TextExpander's preferences you can, among other things, adjust the application's appearance, its text expansion and correction behavior, and whether it backs up your snippets automatically.

Manage the Menu Bar


Unlike most applications that are right in your face as you use them, TextExpander does its job behind the scenes while you're working with another application. Although there are times when you want to interact directly with TextExpander (and much of this book describes how, when, and why you do), usually when you're using TextExpander you don't need to see it—and probably don't *want* to see it.

As an ordinary Mac application, TextExpander by default shows its icon in the Dock when it's running and appears in the list of running applications when you Command-Tab between them.


However, it doesn't have to behave that way:

1. Choose TextExpander > Preferences (Command-;).
2. In the window that appears, click Appearance in the toolbar (**Figure 19**).

Create Snippets as You Go


You've seen how to use the normal TextExpander application interface, complete with Dock icon and menu bar, and you've seen how to use the TextExpander  menu interface, which offers most of TextExpander's features and capabilities from a single icon menu.

With Mac OS X services and TextExpander hotkeys, however, you don't even need to clutter your menu bar or Dock with TextExpander icons if you don't want them: you can get much of the TextExpander functionality you need right from your keyboard.

This chapter tells you how to set up Mac OS X services to enable the snippet creation and editing commands on the TextExpander  menu, it explains how those commands work, and it shows you how to set up hotkeys so you can use those commands—and others—without reaching for your mouse or trackpad at all.

Set Up Your Services

Pardon me while I make a brief excursion into Mac OS X geekery. Trust me, I'll be brief, and you don't have to understand why you need to do what I'm going to tell you what to do in this short section. In fact, you can skip the next paragraph of background information if it makes your head spin: just follow the steps that follow it, and all will be well.

TextExpander's  menu provides commands you can choose to create new snippets, including Create Snippet from Selection. This command creates a snippet from the text that you have selected in another application, such as a phrase you have selected in a word processor, or a passage you have selected on a Web page. TextExpander uses a Mac OS X system service to communicate between the application in which you have selected the text and TextExpander's snippet creation feature. TextExpander installs this system service the first time you run TextExpander. However, before you can use the Create Snippet from Selection command, you must enable the service; while TextExpander can install the service, it can't enable it on its own.

Share and Sync Snippets

Some of us can remember a time when it was a radical idea to imagine that an ordinary person could own a computer. Now, though, many people not only own one computer, but several; for example, a desktop computer, a notebook computer, and maybe even a few others (your author blushing admits to having four fully operational computers of various vintages around his home as well as a few other retired machines stashed in his Vault of Antiquity).

If you own or use multiple computers, and you employ TextExpander regularly on them, you might find it useful to have your snippet collection available on all of those machines. If so, read this chapter.

Export Your Snippets

You saw earlier, in [Save a Copy of a Group](#), how easy it is to save a file containing a snippet group. Although there's no equally easy way to save your entire snippet collection, you can certainly save the most important snippet groups to put on another of your machines—especially if you have a relatively small number of important snippet groups.

Getting your snippet groups into TextExpander on a different Mac is also simple, and it is described in [Add a Group from a File](#) and in [Add a Group from a URL](#). If you have access to a file server or a Web server that your computers can access, saving the groups that you need from one computer and adding them to another is certainly a viable way to spread your snippets around among your machines.

However, keep in mind the following caveats:

- Snippet groups that you add from URLs cannot be modified unless you duplicate the group, and groups added from files can be modified only if you import them as local copies.
- Any changes that you make to the snippets on one machine won't appear on any of the other machines, so unless you make changes

Script with Snippets

Your snippets don't have to come from another planet or be bitten by a radioactive spider to acquire super powers. If you know how to write AppleScripts or Unix shell scripts, you can harness the power of those technologies in your snippets.

TextExpander provides both AppleScript snippets and Shell Script snippets. You just have to provide the code.

Script with AppleScript

AppleScript has been a part of the Macintosh experience since the days of System 7 (System 7.1.1 to be precise). AppleScript allows you to automate a number of tasks that would otherwise require the manipulation of menus, buttons, and other elements of the Mac's graphical user interface.

If you know how to use AppleScript, you can leverage its power with TextExpander: put a script into a snippet and then invoke the script by typing the snippet's abbreviation.

Here are the steps to follow for creating an AppleScript snippet:

1. In TextExpander, create a new snippet.
2. Click the Content pop-up menu above the snippet Content box and choose AppleScript.
3. Type or paste your AppleScript code into the Content box.
4. Assign the snippet an abbreviation and, optionally, a label.

Figure 31 depicts a short, but useful, AppleScript snippet. It assumes that Safari is open and has a Web page showing. When the snippet's abbreviation is typed, the script fetches the URL of the page shown in the frontmost Safari window and replaces the abbreviation with that URL. (Note that a more robust script would do some error-checking; for example, the script as given fails if Safari isn't open or has no window visible.)

Appendix A: Use TextExpander touch

When you hit the road armed with your iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad, you don't have to leave TextExpander behind. An iOS app from Smile, [TextExpander touch](#), is available from the iTunes App Store for \$4.99. The app provides much of the capability of the Mac application, but with its features tailored for the iOS fingertip environment.

Naturally, the app can't do everything that the Mac version can do: just as an iOS device doesn't replicate all the capabilities of a traditional computer, the iOS version of TextExpander doesn't replicate all the capabilities of its Mac sibling. If, however, you have some must-have snippets that you want to employ when typing on iOS device, TextExpander touch can fill the bill.

This appendix provides a brief look at how to get snippets to and from your iOS device, and it describes how and when you can use TextExpander within the more restrictive confines of the iOS environment.

Exchange Snippets with Your Mac

You have probably put a lot of time, ingenuity, and energy into creating your TextExpander snippet collection. Happily, you don't have to go to all of that trouble again with TextExpander touch on your iOS device: you can share snippet groups between your Mac and your iOS device over a local area wireless network.

The first thing you need to do is to configure TextExpander on your Mac to allow such sharing:

1. Open TextExpander's Preferences, and click Sync on the toolbar.
2. Select Share Snippets on Local Networks with Other Devices (iPhone, iPod, iPad), as shown in **Figure 33**.

Learn More

You can learn more about TextExpander from Smile:

- **Smile’s TextExpander FAQ:** Worth consulting: <http://smilesoftware.com/TextExpander/faq.html>.
- **The Smile blog:** The entries in the TextExpander category are the ones you want: <http://blog.smilesoftware.com/category/textexpander/>.
- **Video tutorials:** Eight video tutorials showing TextExpander in action are available here: <http://smilesoftware.com/TextExpander/screencast/>.
- **Smile support:** Smile provides fast and friendly support. Mail your questions, feature suggestions, clever snippets, and other pointers to support@smilesoftware.com.

Good places to go to learn more about advanced snippet techniques (and get some pretty advanced snippets, too):

- **Hello, It’s Nice to Meet You:** The blog entries tagged “TextExpander” on Brett Terpstra’s site are cool and also very instructive: <http://brettterpstra.com/tag/textexpander/>.
- **And now it’s all this:** Dr. Drangs’s blog has a number of fascinating entries about shell script snippets and AppleScript snippets: <http://www.leancrew.com/all-this/tag/textexpander/>.

And another source for snippets:

- **TE-snippets:** Alex Poslavsky launched this snippet repository in March 2011 (shortly before this book was started), but it already has gained some interesting and useful entries: <http://te-snippets.com/>.

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About the Author



Michael E. Cohen has been using a Mac since the days when it came packaged inside an Apple Lisa and called itself Macintosh XL. Over the

years, he has taught English composition, worked as a programmer for NASA's Deep Space Network, helped develop the first commercial ebooks at the Voyager Company (no relation to NASA's Voyager, by the way), co-founded a major university's Humanities computing center, written a number of books, taught a number of people, and played with a lot of new technology.

He currently lives in Santa Monica, California, where he participates in the production of Take Control Books and *TidBITS* at the opposite end of the country from TidBITS Command Central.

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Special thanks to Tonya and Adam, who let me adjust this book's schedule so that I could fulfill an obligation that arose at the most inopportune time, and a second thank you to Tonya (this time wearing her editor's hat), who diligently works to make my books better than they have any right to be.

Shameless Plug

In addition to this book (buy two—buy a dozen!) you might also find these two books useful and entertaining:

- *Take Control of PDFpen 5*, by Michael E. Cohen: <http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/pdfpen-5>
- *The iPad 2 Project Book*, by Michael E. Cohen, Dennis R. Cohen, and Lisa L. Spangenberg: <http://www.peachpit.com/store/product.aspx?isbn=0321775708>

About the Publisher

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