TAKE CONTROL OF
LAUNCHBAR

COVERS
LAUNCHBAR 6!

by KIRK McELHEARN
$10

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Click here to buy the full 157-page "Take Control of LaunchBar" for only $10!
Welcome to Take Control of LaunchBar, version 1.1, published in September 2014 by TidBITS Publishing Inc. This book was written by Kirk McElhearn and edited by Tonya Engst.

LaunchBar 6 streamlines the way you access apps, open files, browse your file system, use the Web, copy and paste, insert text, access data from certain applications, run calculations, control iTunes, handle file management, control your Mac, and more. This book explains LaunchBar’s six superpowers and teaches you how to work faster and more efficiently on your Mac.

If you want to share this ebook with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would with a physical book: “lend” it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a copy for careful reading or reference.

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Sponsored by Objective Development
This book was sponsored by Objective Development. Deep thanks go to Norbert Heger, Johannes Tiefenbrunner, Manfred Linzner, and Christian Ludl who took the time to explain more features in LaunchBar than we’d previously imagined existed. (All four of the names in this paragraph were pasted in with amazing efficiency via LaunchBar’s ClipMerge!)

Updates and More
You can access extras related to this ebook on the Web (use the link in Ebook Extras near the end; it’s available only to purchasers). On the ebook’s Take Control Extras page, you can:

• Download any available new version of the ebook for free, or buy any subsequent edition at a discount.
• Download various formats, including PDF, EPUB, and Mobipocket. (Learn about reading on mobile devices on our Device Advice page.)

• Read the ebook’s blog. You may find new tips or information, links to author interviews, and update plans for the ebook.

If you bought this ebook from the Take Control Web site, it has been added to your account, where you can download it in other formats and access any future updates. However, if you bought this ebook elsewhere, you can add it to your account manually; see Ebook Extras.

Basics

If you need basic directions in order to understand what I mean when I talk about working with menus, copying, paths—or any other Mac 101 type topic—please read Read Me First: A Take Control Crash Course, available for free on the Web or in PDF, EPUB, or Mobipocket format.

This book uses a few conventions:

• **Arrow:** I often use the word “arrow” as a verb. I use it in place of saying “press the right-arrow key” or “press the down-arrow key,” saying instead, “arrow right,” or “arrow down.” The text is more elegant this way, I think.

• **Typing in LaunchBar:** I give many examples of letters you type to search in LaunchBar. In order to show that they are letters you type, I put them in capital letters, such as SAF, which you might type to launch Safari. You don’t need to type capitals, though; LaunchBar doesn’t distinguish between upper- and lowercase.

These terms come up over and over:

• **Invoke:** Once LaunchBar is launched on your computer, in order to display its bar—the small window that displays on your screen—you invoke it with a keyboard shortcut. The bar is where you work with LaunchBar. I explain this important aspect of LaunchBar in Invoke LaunchBar.
Index: LaunchBar knows a great deal about what’s stored on your Mac because it creates its own index of these items. I touch lightly on this concept in The Secret Sauce: The Adaptive Abbreviation Search Algorithm and look at it more fully in Control the Index.

Following the Links in This Book
All blue text in this book is hot, meaning you can click (or tap) it, just like a link on the Web. If you click a link to switch to a different part of the book, you can return quickly to where you were if your ebook reader offers a “back” feature. For example, if you use Preview on the Mac to read the PDF of this ebook, you can choose Go > Back or press Command-[.

What’s New in Version 1.1
To create version 1.1 of Take Control of LaunchBar, I’ve reworked the entire manuscript—and the screenshots—for LaunchBar 6.1. (LaunchBar 6 was released in June 2014; LaunchBar 6.1 was released in late August, and 6.1.1 was released just as this book was going to press.)

I’ve added topics about new features, including LaunchBar’s sixth superpower, Staging, which Objective Development added to LaunchBar 6.1. And, due to Take Control’s collaboration with Objective Development, the superpowers described in this book are now treated as superpowers in LaunchBar; see How Do You Use LaunchBar?.

A new chapter, What’s New in LaunchBar 6, helps you efficiently explore the new features.

Because LaunchBar 6 requires OS X 10.9 Mavericks or 10.10 Yosemite, I’ve removed a few references to older Mac apps that no longer work in Mavericks and later, such as Address Book.

Help with LaunchBar 5
For help with LaunchBar 5, you can refer to the previous version of this ebook—there’s no extra charge. Follow the “access extras” link in Ebook Extras, and look in the blog.
I’ve been using LaunchBar for nearly as long as it has been around on the Mac. It’s the first utility that I install on every new Mac; with LaunchBar installed, I can get on with everything else I need to do.

In my 2010 Macworld review, LaunchBar 5 became one of the few apps to which I’ve given the highest rating (5 mice). Previous Macworld reviewers (including Dan Frakes in 2005) have also given LaunchBar a 5-mouse rating. Jason Snell said, in his 5-mouse review of LaunchBar 4 in 2007, “When I use a Mac that doesn’t have LaunchBar running, I simply feel naked.” And Take Control publisher Adam Engst has happily admitted to being “utterly addicted” to LaunchBar since 2003, saying “LaunchBar has worked its way into my neurons, and I’m all the more productive because of it.”

What’s the big deal? Why does this software elicit such fervent praise? LaunchBar is all about saving time by keeping your hands on your keyboard, as you can see in the following scenarios.

Launching an application:

- **Without LaunchBar:** You switch to the Finder, click Applications in the Finder window sidebar, and then scroll to find the app’s icon. You then double-click that icon. You could, of course, have the icon in the Dock and do this with a single click, but if it’s an app you use infrequently, you might not want to clutter the Dock with it.

- **With LaunchBar:** You press Command-Space, type a few letters from the app’s name, and press Return.

Opening a file that you’ve edited recently in Pages:

- **Without LaunchBar:** You click the Pages icon in the Dock, and then navigate to the document from the Open dialog or choose File > Open Recent and select a file. Or you browse in the Finder for the document, potentially clicking through several folders before you find the icon and double-click it.
• **With LaunchBar:** You type PAG, and Pages appears in the bar. You press the right-arrow key to see recently used files, arrow down to find the one you want, and then press Return to open it.

In both cases, LaunchBar provides quick access to applications and files. What’s more, LaunchBar learns from the abbreviations you type, so rather than forcing you to use its conventions, it adopts yours. The more you use LaunchBar, the better it understands what you want.

If this was all LaunchBar could do, it would be a useful, yet limited application. The app’s name tells you that it can launch items, but LaunchBar does much more, as its slogan suggests: “1000+ Features, 1 Interface.” With the help of LaunchBar’s slim bar, you can attach files to new email messages, search your contacts, keep and access a clipboard history, insert snippets of canned text, run Terminal commands, and more—all from just the keyboard.

And LaunchBar has superpowers. It won’t give you the power to cloud men’s minds or scale tall buildings, but it will turn you into a Mac superhero. Anyone can master LaunchBar’s basic uses: launching applications, opening files, searching the Web, and more. But this book will teach you how to use the six LaunchBar superpowers so you can work far more efficiently on your Mac.

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**A Bit of History**

LaunchBar was developed by Norbert Heger for NEXTSTEP back in 1995, as a series of scripts to open applications or documents. The basic idea—typing an abbreviation to open an item, with LaunchBar learning from the abbreviations typed—was the linchpin of LaunchBar from the beginning. Objective Development released a public version of the program in 1996, and ported it to Mac OS X in 2001.

For more about LaunchBar’s history and world view, read the 2003 [interview with Norbert Heger](https://oreilly.com), on the O’Reilly Web site.

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**Tip:** For help with LaunchBar 5, you can refer to a previous version of this ebook—there’s no extra charge. Follow the “access extras” link in Ebook Extras, and look in the blog.
This book has a normal table of contents, so you can scan that to see what topics are covered and jump to any topic from there. However, you may find it helpful to approach the ebook not linearly, but based on your situation. Here are some ideas for avenues of approach to the content in this book.

**You want a quick summary:**
Download the cheat sheet. Put it on another device or in another window while you read this book, or print it out. You can also find the Cheat Sheet at the back of this book.

**You’re new to LaunchBar, or want to review the basics:**
- Start with Meet LaunchBar. This chapter introduces the LaunchBar interface and its superpowers, and walks you through a few preferences that you should configure right away.
- Get initiated with superpower #1 in Abbreviation Search.
- Next, see common uses of LaunchBar as you learn the remaining superpowers: Browsing, Sub-search, Send To, Instant Send, and Staging.
- Continue with the rest of the book, reading topics that interest you. Once you’ve gained some experience, read the last chapter, Customize LaunchBar, to fine-tune LaunchBar.

**You’re somewhat experienced with LaunchBar:**
- If you learned LaunchBar before version 6 came out in June 2014, read What’s New in LaunchBar 6.
- Find out how you use LaunchBar the most by checking your Usage Statistics in How Do You Use LaunchBar?.
- Read about superpowers #4, #5, and #6 in Send To, Instant Send, and Staging.
• Find out how to **Use Actions** to control your Mac, and how to **Use Services** to access the features of one app from within a different app.

• Learn how to copy and paste multiple items in **Save Time with Clipboard History**.

• Absolutely read **Customize LaunchBar**. Make sure the preferences are set the right way for you, and then **Control the Index** to ensure that LaunchBar can find what you’re looking for.

• Go further with **Do Amazing Things with Files and Folders**. Even experienced LaunchBar users may not know all the ways they can manipulate and act on items—especially when they are combined with LaunchBar’s new **Staging** feature.

• Consider learning how to do these tasks from the bar: **Browse and Search the Web**, **Access Emoji**, **Control iTunes**, **Work with Contacts, Calendars, and Reminders**, and **Calculate Quickly**. Consult the table of contents or the list at the end of **1,000 Things to Do** for more that you can do.
What’s New in LaunchBar 6

As you’d expect after the nearly 5-year run for LaunchBar 5, LaunchBar 6 is a major update, with lots of new features, refinements, and simplifications. However, unlike many apps that only get updated every few years, LaunchBar 6 won’t confuse existing users. Aside from the change in the display of the bar—and you can go back to previous bar if you wish—you’ll have no trouble using the app as you did before.

Here’s an overview of what’s new in LaunchBar 6.

Major interface changes:

• **A new bar:** The bar has grown in size, and, by default, it’s no longer pinned to the menu bar at the top of your screen. To learn about your bar customization options, read Adjust the Bar.

• **Themes:** LaunchBar now lets you Choose a Theme, giving you a half-dozen different ways of viewing the bar.

• **Colors:** The first item in the results list now has a blue or orange highlight. Blue means that you’ve initiated an abbreviation search and LaunchBar has found items in its entire index. And, if the next thing you do is another search, it will be an abbreviation search. Orange indicates that if you search, it will be a sub-search and thus apply to just the results list (see Notice the Blue Highlight).

• **Live search results:** LaunchBar offers live search results when you search certain Web sites—Google, Wikipedia, and DuckDuckGo (see Search with a Built-in Template).

• **Live feedback:** You’ll get live verification of what you’ve entered on the bar when you Create Calendar Events or Work with Reminders, and when you use the calculator (see Calculate Quickly).

New features:

• **Staging:** LaunchBar 6 has a sixth superpower, Staging. This lets you select multiple items in LaunchBar—even if those items are in different locations—and then act on them all together.
• **Usage statistics:** You can now view statistics of how you use LaunchBar: which superpower you use most, how often you invoke the bar, and the types of actions you perform. Learn about these usage statistics in *How Do You Use LaunchBar?*.

• **Tags:** LaunchBar now supports Finder tags, allowing you to *Work with Tags* in various ways, such as applying tags or staging all items marked with a certain tag.

• **Info Browsing:** You can now browse more information about items and their metadata. I discuss this in *Info Browsing*.

• **Calculator history:** Similar to clipboard history, LaunchBar now stores previous calculations you have made with its Calculator action. I look at this in *Access Calculator History*.

• **Text transformations:** You can perform a number of text transformations, such as capitalizing words, making them all lower case, and more, directly from the bar. See *Transform Text*.

• **Actions:** LaunchBar has new built-in actions and new capabilities for programmers who want to create actions. Read *Use Actions*.

• **Reminders:** You can *Work with Reminders* from Apple’s built-in Reminders app in a variety of ways.

**Indexing changes:**

• **Interface:** The LaunchBar Index window has been revamped, with groups in the sidebar for similar indexing categories. I look at the Index window in *Understand Indexing Rules*.

• **Rules:** There are a number of new indexing rules—Reminders, Emoji, Tags, Safari iCloud Tabs, LaunchBar Themes, and more. Learn about all the indexing rules in *Understand Indexing Rules*.

• **No more scheduling:** Indexing now occurs automatically, so there’s no need to set a schedule for indexing. I discuss all the finer points of working with the LaunchBar Index in *Control the Index*.

**Note:** A full LaunchBar 6 change list is on the *Release Notes* page.
Meet LaunchBar

In this chapter, I introduce you to LaunchBar, a powerful tool with a simple interface. You’ll learn how to install and invoke LaunchBar, and you’ll meet the bar, the interface you see in LaunchBar.

Next, you’ll learn the Six Superpowers of LaunchBar: abbreviation searching, browsing, and sub-searching, as well as Send To, Instant Send, and Staging. You’ll also get advice for how you can Tweak the Interface and Launch at Login.

Even if you’re a long-time LaunchBar user, you should read this chapter, as you will likely discover important features that you’ve overlooked—or that are new in LaunchBar 6. Really. All my editors have.

Install LaunchBar

If you haven’t already installed LaunchBar, you can get a copy from the Objective Development Web site. Download the .dmg file, double-click it to view a license agreement, and then mount the disk image’s volume. Drag the LaunchBar application to the alias of the Applications folder in the disk image window. LaunchBar is copied into your Applications folder.

After you launch LaunchBar, if you’re using the trial version, you can purchase the application by pressing the LaunchBar keyboard shortcut (to invoke the bar), hovering over right of the bar to click the gear wheel icon, and choosing License. Click Buy Now to be taken to a page on the Objective Development Web site where you can add a license to the cart and buy it.

Note: If you have LaunchBar 6, but you’re not sure if you have the latest version, press your LaunchBar keyboard shortcut, hover over the right side of the bar, click the gear wheel icon, and choose Check for Updates.
Launch LaunchBar

To launch LaunchBar, go to your Applications folder and double-click the LaunchBar icon. LaunchBar launches, its icon appears in your Dock, and LaunchBar displays its configuration wizard (Figure 1).

![Welcome to LaunchBar](image)

**Figure 1:** When you first launch LaunchBar, you’ll see its welcome screen. Click Next to go through some basic setup options.

This wizard walks you through some of the basic settings you should consider; click Next to move from screen to screen:

- Do you want to change the Spotlight keyboard shortcut or the LaunchBar shortcut? I explain how to handle this question in *Invoke LaunchBar*, next. Whatever you answer here, it is easy to change your mind later.

- Can LaunchBar access data in the Contacts, Calendars, and Reminders apps? Check the circle below any or all of the icons on this screen; this both grants LaunchBar access to your personal data and creates indexing rules so you can access this data from LaunchBar. Any that you don’t select now can be added to LaunchBar’s index later, if desired.
Work with Applications

In this chapter, I’ll tell you how to launch applications with abbreviation search, superpower #1, and explain how LaunchBar learns from your abbreviations to streamline app launching. I’ll also show you how to assign custom abbreviations to your apps.

Then, I’ll look at how you can access your applications’ data and files using the Six Superpowers that I discussed in the previous chapter. I’ll also discuss using LaunchBar for Switching Applications.

Abbreviation Search

The gateway method of using LaunchBar, and an example of its first and most important superpower, is abbreviation-searching to launch or switch to an application. In fact, I’ve found that this is the only way many faithful LaunchBar users use it—they figure they’ve gotten their money’s worth and fail to learn the thousand-or-so other features that LaunchBar offers. I’m sure that once you learn all of LaunchBar’s superpowers you’ll do much more than that!

Launching applications—and carrying out any other abbreviation search—can be broken down into the following steps:

1. Invoke the bar by pressing your LaunchBar keyboard shortcut (Figure 11, top). The icon and text in your bar may be different from what’s shown in the figure; you’ll see whatever you last selected in LaunchBar.

2. Type a few letters of the name of the application you want to launch. (For example, to launch Safari, try typing SAF.)

3. LaunchBar may guess exactly what you want to open, putting that item at the top of its results (Figure 11, bottom). If not, simply arrow down to the desired app.
4. When you’ve selected the item you want to access, press Return.

Your Mac opens or switches to the selected application.

**Tip:** If, when you type abbreviations, you hesitate between letters, LaunchBar may think that you’ve typed separate strings of letters—it deletes the first few letters you’ve typed, and then displays only the letters you type a bit later. (When this happens, letters appear and disappear at the right side of the bar.) If so, you may want to adjust LaunchBar’s Retype Delay setting (in the **General Preferences**) to get more thinking time when typing abbreviations.

Remember, in addition to finding applications, an abbreviation search can zero in on anything that LaunchBar indexes: files, contacts, iTunes songs, bookmarks, snippets, actions, services, and more. Another thing to keep in mind is that this ebook has a **Cheat Sheet**, which you can **download** in order to put it on a different device or open it in a separate window.
Browse and Search the Web

You can streamline your time spent on the Web by letting LaunchBar help you enter URLs quickly, open bookmarks, and access your browser history.

LaunchBar’s preset search templates make Web searching a breeze, whether you hunt with Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, or another search engine, or a within a specific site, like Amazon, eBay, or Wikipedia. And you can make your own custom search templates surprisingly easily.

Open Web Sites

Do you want to get to a Web site quickly? Without a helpful utility like LaunchBar, here’s what you do to visit a site:

1. Launch your Web browser, or switch to it by pressing Command-Tab, or by clicking its Dock icon.
2. Click in the address field, or press Command-L to highlight it.
3. Type a domain name, such as www.mcelhearn.com.
4. Press Return.

With LaunchBar, you can open the site much more quickly:

1. Invoke the bar.
2. Type . (period)
3. Type the domain name, such as mcelhearn.
4. Press Return.

Tip: To open the URL in a Web browser other than your default browser, press Tab after Step 3. This invokes the Send To feature, so you see a Tab ➔ character on the bar. Arrow down to select the browser you want to open the URL, then press Return.
There’s no need to switch to your Web browser first; you can activate LaunchBar no matter which application is frontmost. There’s no need to move your cursor into the browser’s address bar either. LaunchBar is designed so you can simply type a period to display the Open Location field. **Figure 24** shows what this looks like.

![Open Location](http://www..com/)

**Figure 24:** When you type a period, LaunchBar knows that you want to enter a domain name to open a Web site.

As you can see in the figure above, .com/ is highlighted; when you start typing, it remains highlighted, and the characters you type go between www. and .com. This makes entering a domain name very quick.

But .com/ is also highlighted because you may instead want to visit a URL that ends with a different top-level domain, such as .net, .org, .fr, or .de. In that case, just type a period after the domain’s name and then type the desired top-level domain.

For example, to visit www.archive.org:

1. Invoke the bar.
2. Type . (period).
3. Type archive.org

When you type the period in Step 3, LaunchBar deletes .com/ from the URL, and you can type whatever top-level domain you want.

**Tip:** Another way to switch to the Open Location field is to press Command-L when the bar is visible.

**Note:** LaunchBar switches to the Open Location field whenever you type a period (also known as a “dot character”). You can change this behavior as well as the default top-level domain that appears in the Open Location field, in LaunchBar’s [General Preferences](#).
Work with Text

You’ve seen how you can use LaunchBar to open applications, find files and act on them, perform Web searches, open Web pages, and more. LaunchBar also has a number of features that let you work with text.

In this chapter, you’ll learn how to access emoji from LaunchBar, Browse and Search Text Files, Type Less with Snippets, and Transform Text by changing its capitalization.

Access Emoji

You know what emoji are, right? Added to the Mac with 10.7 Lion, these little graphical characters are often used in instant messages and tweets. They can be faces, objects, or symbols, such as 🐱, 🌸, or ✨. LaunchBar makes it easy to access emoji, with an Emoji category and indexing rule.

To insert an emoji character:

1. Put the insertion point where you want the character to go.
2. Invoke the bar.
3. Type, say, EMJ.

   In the results list, you probably see both the Emoji category and Emoji indexing rule.

4. Select the category or rule, and arrow right to see the many available characters (Figure 27). You can arrow down the list, looking for characters you want to use, or, if you know all or part of the name of an emoji, type some of its letters to sub-search in the list. For example, when I wanted to find a cat face to use in the first paragraph of this section, I went into the Emoji indexing rule, then typed CAT to find a nice one.
Figure 27: Here’s the beginning of the list of emoji in LaunchBar.

5. Select the emoji that you want to use and press Return.

The character appears at the insertion point.

**Tip:** Use Staging to insert more than one emoji at once.

845 emoji are currently available; you might want to limit the list to emoji you use regularly. You can disable any that you don’t want to use in the LaunchBar Index, which I discuss in Control the Index (for specific directions, read Cull Items from Rules).
Save Time with Clipboard History

With LaunchBar’s Clipboard History feature, you can store and access dozens of copied items, so you can paste something even if it’s not the last thing that you copied. You can view your clipboard history at any time, and merge content with the current clipboard. In this chapter, I’ll show you how much time you can save with Clipboard History. You’ll never copy and paste in the same way again.

Power Up Your Clipboard

Much of what you do on your Mac involves multiple apps. You may browse the Web to do research, then write a document in a word processor or send an email message based on your findings. To move text and graphics from one app to another, you use the clipboard, a part of OS X that stores what you copy and lets you paste it elsewhere.

But the OS X clipboard holds only one item at a time. When you copy something new, it replaces whatever was previously in the clipboard. LaunchBar lets you power up your clipboard by storing everything you copy, so you can access something you copied a while ago, even after using the clipboard in the meantime.

When Clipboard History is on—it’s enabled by default—LaunchBar adds each item you copy it to its LIFO (last in, first out) clipboard history stack. This means that the last item you copy becomes the top item in a stack, and previous items each move down one space. Think of it like a deck of cards. If you deal cards into a pile, each one is the top card only briefly—except for the last card dealt. Because the last card dealt was last in, it stays on top; if you remove a card from the pile, you remove the last card dealt, the top card. The card that was the last one in becomes the first out. And, with that card removed, the card that was dealt second-from-last now moves to the top of the pile.
When you paste an item using LaunchBar’s clipboard history, it remains at—or moves to—the top of the stack, though you can paste an item and remove it from the stack, using the Paste and Remove from History shortcut, which is Command-Option-Control-K.

**Note:** You can change many Clipboard History preferences, including the Paste and Remove from History shortcut, in LaunchBar’s Clipboard History Preferences, which I discuss later.

---

**Access Clipboard History**

Let me show you how clipboard history works. You copy items on your Mac in the normal fashion, but to paste anything other than the last item copied, you view your clipboard history. To do this, simply press Command-Option-\ (backslash).

**Tip:** If you have trouble remembering that shortcut, you can redefine it in the Clipboard History preferences to something like Control-V. Or invoke the bar and abbreviation-search for something like CLIP.

You see something like **Figure 32**.

**Figure 32:** In LaunchBar’s clipboard history, a right-hand bubble tells you the application that the item was copied from.
LaunchBar helps you keep in touch and remember what you need to do by giving you rapid access to contact data, providing you with a way to send email easily, and letting you create calendar events quickly. It also simplifies setting reminders.

Let’s channel our inner organizer and get to work!

**Note:** If LaunchBar acts as though it hasn’t indexed contacts, calendars, or reminders, that could be because the corresponding rule is not enabled. See Add Rules.

---

**Work with Contacts**

Your Mac stores your contacts and their information in the Contacts app, and LaunchBar indexes the “cards” from Contacts to provide access to just about all their details.

**Search for Contacts**

You can abbreviation-search for a contact by invoking the bar and then typing a name. You can search by name, company, or job title—or even nickname, if you’ve entered one. Contact searches are smart; you can type the first couple of letters of someone’s first and last names to find them, in either order. For example, to look up my contact card, I could type KMC or MCK.

Another way to look for contacts is by browsing or sub-searching. Invoke the bar, type, for example, CON to bring up the Contacts app, and then press the Space bar or right-arrow key. Depending on which key you’ve pressed, you see slightly different things (Figure 34 and Figure 35).

Click here to buy the full 157-page “Take Control of LaunchBar” for only $10!
**Figure 34:** Press the Space bar and you see items like contact groups, individual contacts, job titles, and email addresses.

**Figure 35:** Arrow right to see contact-related categories.
Calculate Quickly

Say you need to make a quick calculation. You might want to calculate sales tax, VAT, or a foreign currency conversion; or perhaps compute a percentage, area, or volume. You can use Apple’s Calculator app, or any of a number of third-party apps, but if all you need is a single calculation, LaunchBar can save you the time of opening another app or fumbling around on your desk for a physical calculator.

In this chapter, I’ll tell you how to use LaunchBar to perform simple—and complex—calculations in a jiffy.

Invoke the Calculator

LaunchBar’s calculator is designed for simple calculations, when you just need a quick result, but it can also carry out complex calculations. You can invoke the LaunchBar calculator in one of several ways. The method you use depends on which you feel most comfortable with:

• **Use the Calculator keyboard shortcut:** This is a direct shortcut—press it to open LaunchBar’s calculator field without first invoking the bar. If you use LaunchBar’s calculator often, this method saves a few keystrokes.

  To see what your shortcut is, or to change it, open LaunchBar’s preferences and click Calculator. The shortcut appears in the Keyboard Shortcut field. To change the shortcut, select the Keyboard Shortcut checkbox, click in the shortcut field, and type your own shortcut. (The default keyboard shortcut is the ⌘ key that exists on some full-size Mac keyboards. If your keyboard has the key, it will be located just above the 7 key on the number pad. If not, redefine it to something you’ll remember.)

• **Type an abbreviation:** You can type an abbreviation, such as CALC, after invoking the bar. However, if you plan to also use Apple’s Calculator app, or some other calculator app, you may
want to assign a specific abbreviation to that other app, so the one you use to invoke LaunchBar’s calculator doesn’t interfere.

- **Type Command-=:** If you type Command-= after invoking the bar, this brings up the Calculator field. You may find typing Command-= quicker than using an abbreviation.

- **Just start typing numbers:** When the bar is invoked, if you type at least two digits, or one digit and an operator, LaunchBar will switch to its calculator. You can de-activate this behavior: invoke the bar, hover over the right of the bar to click the gear wheel 🎉 icon, choose Preferences, click Calculator, and then de-select “Switch to Calculator when typing digits.”

- **Paste numbers when the bar is invoked:** With the bar invoked, if you paste a calculation (such as 2 + 2), or a series of numbers, LaunchBar will switch to the calculator. However, you may not want this behavior; you can change it in LaunchBar’s Calculator preference pane. De-select “Switch to Calculator when pasting a numeric expression.”

---

**Using Instant Send to Instant Calculate**

Type an equation into a text editor, such as 1024 * 1024. Select the equation and invoke the bar, holding the keyboard shortcut to fire up Instant Send. LaunchBar sees the calculation and solves it instantly, displaying it in big type with no more interaction from you.

This technique is also helpful for checking calculations in a document.
Control iTunes

So far, I’ve concentrated on using LaunchBar to access apps; open files; and carry out special functions, like browsing the Web and performing calculations. But, LaunchBar also has built-in categories and actions that help you control iTunes from the keyboard.

And, LaunchBar has a number of special indexing rules that let you access your iTunes library by artist, album, genre, playlist, and more. You can also control iTunes while playing music, using LaunchBar to pause, play, skip tracks, and change volume. And, you can even Quickly Search the iTunes Store, right from the bar.

Browse Your iTunes Library

LaunchBar lets you browse your iTunes music library from top to bottom, inside and out. Start by invoking the bar, then type, say, IT, and find iTunes. Arrow right to see a list of categories (Figure 41).

![Best Of Lists](image)

**Figure 41:** LaunchBar shows your iTunes music library in categories.
You can browse to investigate any of these categories.

A Best Of list is a sort of smart playlist based on star ratings that you’ve assigned in iTunes. LaunchBar creates these lists by artist, composer, and genre. The default setting uses a 4-star rating as a minimum, but you can change this, if you wish, in the Options pane of the iTunes indexing rule. (See Control the Index.) Think of Best Of lists as a way to access dozens, even hundreds, of smart playlists showing the highest-rated music by all the artists, composers, and genres in your music library. It would take days to create all these playlists in iTunes!

**Note:** The sub-search keyboard shortcuts for iTunes are a bit different than usual, because pressing the Space bar opens a search field (see Quickly Search the iTunes Store, a few pages ahead). To sub-search within iTunes, press either the right-arrow key or Option-Space.

The other categories include the playlists in your iTunes library; all the artists, composers, and genres; and all the songs, as well as a couple of specific categories, such as Identically Named Albums and Identically Named Songs.

As usual, browsing and sub-searching are your friends. You can browse any category and select an item to start playing it. Or, type a few letters to home in on the item you’re looking for.

Each time you go down a level, LaunchBar may present more top-level categories. So, if you select a genre, you see, at the top of the results, Best Of Genre, if there are any adequately rated songs, and then entries for playlists, albums, artists, and composers. If there are no items for one of these, such as in Figure 42, where there are no playlists in my Keyboard genre, you won’t see an entry.
Do Amazing Things with Files and Folders

In this chapter, you’ll learn how to combine LaunchBar’s superpowers with other features to do even more amazing things with files and folders. I’ll show you how to select files and folders to act on them, how to move and rename items, how to navigate your Mac’s file system from the bar, and much more. I won’t pretend that you’ll never use the Finder again, but LaunchBar and the Finder together make for a formidable combination.

Select Files and Folders

Before you can do anything with an item in LaunchBar, you must select it. As you’ve seen throughout this book, once you’ve invoked LaunchBar, you can select an item using any of the first three superpowers: Abbreviation Search, Browsing, or Sub-search. As you learn LaunchBar, you may initially feel most comfortable sticking with those methods, so feel free to use them as you explore this chapter.

And, you can stage a group of items with Staging, superpower #6. If you need to work with certain files en masse—whether that’s applying Finder tags, opening them, copying them to another folder, or anything else that LaunchBar can do to them—be sure to add them to the staging area so that you can act on them as a group with LaunchBar.

Tip: If you’re feeling fuzzy about the superpowers—and all that LaunchBar can do—get a copy of the Cheat Sheet and keep it handy as you read this chapter.
To put one or more files or folders on the bar from the Finder, do one of the following:

- **Instant-send the usual way:** Select the item; then press and hold your LaunchBar keyboard shortcut until the bar appears. This is Instant Send, LaunchBar’s fifth superpower, and it’s my favorite because it’s faster than a speeding bullet.

- **Instant-send with modifier tap:** For an even quicker instant-send, select the item and press your Instant Send modifier-tap shortcut, which is set in the Keyboard Shortcuts Preferences.

- **Drag and drop:** Drop the item on the LaunchBar icon in the Dock, if the icon is visible (this is a great method if you like the immediacy of drag and drop). Read More about Drag and Drop, a page or so ahead, to learn interesting and unexpected aspects of this feature.

- **Copy and paste:** Copy the item. Invoke the bar. Paste the item by pressing Command-Shift-V (this is great for new LaunchBar users because it draws on the familiar concept of copy and paste).

- **Keyboard shortcut:** Select the item. Invoke the bar. Issue the Get Finder Selection command by pressing Command-G.

In each case, the item is sent to LaunchBar and an orange icon appears on the bar to indicate that LaunchBar is primed for you to select a target action, application, or other item (Figure 45).

![My File.rtf - ~/Desktop](image)

*Figure 45:* This figure shows a file selected in the bar with the orange icon to the right.

You have a few basic options at this point:

- Send the item to some other LaunchBar target.

- Click the item’s icon or filename in the bar to open the Action menu and apply a command from that menu (see the sidebar Using the Action Menu, later in this chapter).
You’ve seen many of the amazing things that LaunchBar can do with applications, files, and folders, as well as with your calendar, contacts, iTunes library, and more. But LaunchBar has yet another trick up its sleeve. You can use LaunchBar to trigger actions and services, and integrate LaunchBar into workflows that you’ve created with Apple’s Automator.

In this chapter, I’ll show you how LaunchBar can stretch its reach beyond your files and applications to control your Mac and interface with OS X and with other applications.

First, Some Terminology

In this chapter, I cover three types of items: actions, services, and workflows. To start, it’s important to explain what these three items are, and how they differ:

• Actions offer a cornucopia of interesting ways to control your Mac efficiently using LaunchBar. These actions, which enable you to tag a file, sleep your Mac, make a screenshot, and much more, are part of LaunchBar, created for you by LaunchBar’s developers (Flip ahead to Use Actions for more information.)

Anyone can use LaunchBar’s built-in actions, and you can add your own by creating AppleScripts, shell scripts, or Unix executables.

Note: LaunchBar 6 adds features that let you create even more powerful actions. The creation of these actions is beyond the scope of this book, but I give you a taste of what they can do, and how you can write them, as well as point you to some resources, in Creating LaunchBar Actions.
• **Services** are an aspect of OS X that enables one application to offer its features inside other apps, via the Services menu or by Control-clicking a file in the Finder. Some services are built into OS X, and others come from applications you install—or you can make your own in Apple’s free Automator app; see the next bullet item. If you’d like to work with services through LaunchBar, read Use Services.

• **Workflows** are step-based automated routines that you create with Automator, an app included in OS X. For example, an Automator workflow that my publisher has created copies Take Control ebook files to particular folders, creates Zip archives and renames them, uploads the archives to multiple Internet servers, and more. You can save these routines as workflows that must be run manually, services that are available in any app, and even stand-alone applications. (Making workflows is beyond the scope of this book, but see the [Mac OS X Automation](#) site for help.)

---

**Use Actions**

Some LaunchBar actions are designed to activate certain features of OS X and its included applications. For example, the Empty Trash action clears your Trash and the Get Mail action tells Mail to check for new email. You can use actions to Log out of your user account, Quit all applications, or Restart your Mac.

Other actions help you to save time by “instant-sending” a file or text to another app (see Instant Send, earlier). For example, you can select a photo in the Finder, invoke the bar and keep your keyboard shortcut pressed until the bar appears with the orange arrow at the right, and then choose the Add to iPhoto action to add that image to your iPhoto library. Or, select a URL in any text, instant-send it to LaunchBar, and choose the Add to Safari Reading List action to save it for future reading.
Part of what makes LaunchBar so powerful is its customizable index. Refining the index is part of what helps you get the most out of LaunchBar. In addition, LaunchBar has a number of preferences and settings that you can use to bend the application to your will.

In this chapter, I’ll first look at LaunchBar’s preferences. Then, I’ll help you Control the Index.

Set LaunchBar Preferences

LaunchBar has a number of preferences that let you choose how you want the app to act, and which features you want available.

To access LaunchBar’s preferences, invoke the bar and then press Command-, (that’s Command-Comma). Alternatively, hover over the right of the bar, click the gear wheel icon, and choose Preferences. Click a button in the toolbar (Figure 55) to access that preference pane.

Figure 55: To open a LaunchBar preference pane, click its button in the toolbar. In a few cases, the name of the preference pane is longer than the shortened name that appears here. For example, the Shortcuts button opens the Keyboard Shortcuts pane.

I won’t discuss every preference, but I’ll explain the most important ones. You’ll find that many of the preferences are self-explanatory.
General Preferences

LaunchBar’s general preferences (Figure 56) govern some basic options, such as whether the app speaks or plays sounds, and whether it shows you indexing progress.

![General Preferences](image)

**Figure 56:** LaunchBar’s General preferences.

Especially interesting settings are these:

- **Retype Delay:** Retype Delay tells LaunchBar how long to wait when you type before assuming that you’ve started typing a new abbreviation. For example, if you type AB, CD (don’t type the comma, just pause where the comma is), a short Retype Delay
Cheat Sheet

Want a bigger image? Something to print out? Download the sheet.

TAKE CONTROL OF LAUNCHBAR
THE CHEAT SHEET

LaunchBar’s Six Superpowers
Master LaunchBar’s superpowers and control your Mac from the keyboard with superhuman speed. Invoke the bar, type a few characters, and the world is your oyster. Remember, LaunchBar learns from the abbreviations you type to adapt to how you think.

1: Abbreviation Search
- To find an app or document, invoke the bar and type a few letters. Try SAF for Safari or AM for Activity Monitor. If the right item isn’t at the top, arrow down to select it. Press Return.
- To search the Web, type GOO for the Google search template, press the Space bar, type your query, and press Return.
- To find a contact’s card, type a few letters of the person’s name, like RWE for Ralph Waldo Emerson, or WSH for William Shakespeare. Press the Space bar for the contact’s details.
- Search on ACT for built-in actions, CLIP for things you’ve copied, TAG for Finder tags, and SNIP for snippets.

2: Browsing
Got a browse icon in the results list? Arrow right to navigate deeper into a folder, see recent documents for an app, access actions or clipboard history, see file metadata, or insert snippets.

3: Sub-search
Too many items in a results list when browsing? Type an abbreviation to sub-search just that list. The first item in the results list is orange when you can sub-search.

4: Send To
Put an item on the bar. Press Tab and then browse or sub-search to, for example, see a list of apps that can work with it or actions you can take on it, such as opening a PDF in Adobe Reader rather than Preview, adding a tag, or moving a file to a new location.

5: Instant Send
Want an even faster way to put a file in the Finder or text in an app on the bar? Select it, press the shortcut that invokes LaunchBar, and hold until the bar appears, with the item already selected. Then abbreviation-search to open it in another app, send it to Google, or look it up in Dictionary.

6: Staging
Select an item in the results list. Press Comma. The item is staged. Select another item in the results list and press Comma again to stage it too. Add as many items as you like and then act on them all at once: press Tab to start a Send To or choose a command from the Actions menu.

And Much More...
- Set LaunchBar’s scope by modifying its index: invoke the bar and press Command-Option-I.
- Doing the same things repeatedly? Access recent LaunchBar searches by invoking the bar and pressing Command-B.
- To jog your memory, look at the Actions menu. Put something on the bar and then click the icon or text at the left. The Actions menu for a folder is shown below.

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Kirk McElhearn is a Senior Contributor to Macworld, where he is The iTunes Guy, and he contributes to TidBITS and other publications. Kirk has written and co-written more than twenty books about using Macs and their software, including Take Control of Scrivener 2 and Take Control of iTunes 11: The FAQ.

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I wrote the latest version of this book in Nisus Writer Pro using a Mac Pro (2013) with a 27-inch Thunderbolt display, and a MacBook Pro (Retina, 13-inch, early 2013). Titus the Cat kept me alert as I worked; having given up trying to conquer my desk, he now contents himself with sleeping in my lap, in a position where, should I move the wrong way, he will fall and use his well-honed claws on my legs to hold on.
Music that accompanied me as I worked on this project was by Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, Hot Tuna, Darkside, Brad Mehldau, Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Schubert, Josef Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Steve Reich, Morton Feldman, John Cage and others.

To relax, and keep my mind nimble, I like to see performances of Shakespeare plays; I live only a few miles from the Royal Shakespeare Company’s two theaters. If you’re a Shakespeare buff like me, check out my articles about Shakespeare and his plays.

About the Publisher

Publishers Adam and Tonya Engst have been creating Apple-related content since they started the online newsletter TidBITS in 1990. In TidBITS, you can find the latest Apple news, plus read reviews, opinions, and more.

Adam and Tonya are known in the Apple world as writers, editors, and speakers. They are also parents to Tristan, who has reached the age where he can read, understand, and find mistakes in the Take Control series.

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