



Southern Maryland
Mac User Group

20058-D Point Lookout Road
Great Mills, Maryland 20634
Meetings second
Monday of the month from 7pm to 9pm
at the SMARTCO warehouse.

April 2004

Apple unveils Spoken Interface for blind OS X users

By Peter Cohen pcohen@macccentral.com

March 17, 2004 8:00 am ET

Apple has introduced a new accessibility solution for visually impaired users that it will integrate with the next major release of Mac OS X. The company took the wraps off of the new technology today: It's called [Spoken Interface for Mac OS X](#). To find out more, MacCentral recently spoke with Mike Shebanek, Apple product manager for Mac OS X.

Spoken Interface provides a combination of speech, audible cues and keyboard navigation to help blind users navigate Mac OS X with the same ease of use as sighted users have. Users can manage access to the Dock, menu items, tool bars, palettes and other on-screen objects, pressing buttons, activating sliders and checkboxes, selecting radio buttons, and using all the other interface elements of Mac OS X and its applications.

Long history of accessibility support

"Apple has a long history of working on solutions for accessibility straight back through the Apple II," Shebanek told MacCentral.

Evidence of that is apparent today with the "Universal Access" system preferences pane built into Mac OS X, which enables users with sight, hearing and motor problems to more easily and effectively use the Mac.

Third-party applications have also long been available to assist Mac users,

as well. There's a category of software applications called screen readers that attempt to "speak" what's going on on the screen, handy for people who functionally blind -- but those applications have, by and large, not migrated to Mac OS X.

Apple's solution to the problem is Spoken Interface, which Apple says is a more effective solution than a third-party application.

"Those apps have been after-the-fact solutions," Shebanek said. "They've always been bolted on to the operating system by third parties and have had to play catchup when changes are made. Apple is building this into the operating system instead."

Preview release

Spoken Interface is being released now as a preview version -- by filling out a form on the Spoken Interface Web site, users can gain access to a preview release build, Shebanek said. When Apple releases its next major revision to Mac OS X, Spoken Interface will be included.

The preview release will also feature applications that have been enhanced for Spoken Interface accessibility, including Safari, Mail, TextEdit and system preferences. Shebanek told MacCentral that third-party support for Spoken Interface is a relatively simple proposition, as well.

"If [developers] have been using the Cocoa frameworks to develop their applications, they're about 90 percent of the way there already," Shebanek said.

Apple has been working on a special accessibility application programming interface (API) that was introduced with the Panther introduction at WWDC 2003. Shebanek said that Apple has been telling developers to use the technology since then.

Ease of use

Because Spoken Interface is built in to the operating system, it won't require users to install anything separately when it's released in its final form. And it provides a single set of key-commands to use to provide a unified, consistent user interface.

Shebanek said that Spoken Interface utilizes the F1 through F4 keys on the keyboard as "orientation keys." Pressing them will describe to the user where in the interface they are and what they're doing. An integrated help system and a contextual menu system provide further access and information.

Spoken Interface also integrates with Mac OS X's existing Universal Access capabilities, so users who are already dependent on those functions don't need to relearn how they work.

Spoken Interface uses Mac OS X's built-in text-to-speech capabilities to describe much of what's going on. Visually impaired users can often listen to speech at a much faster rate than normally sighted users, so Apple has retuned the voices in its text-to-speech technology to be more clear at a faster rate.

"Apple has listened to its customers with Spoken Interface for Mac OS X," said Shebanek. "We knew we could do a great job on this, and develop something that our customers would expect for the Mac platform."

Federal Computing Weekly On The Power Mac G5 **March 23rd, 2004** by **Vern Seward**

Apple's Power Mac G5 product line continues to pull in positive reviews from nearly every corner of the computing landscape, from mainstream press reviews to reports from special interest users such as scientists and mathematicians. Even government users have had good things to say about Apple's pro-computers, and today we have another example of that in the form of an [article](#) featured in Federal Computing Weekly. From the article:

"The 64-bit G5 processor lets you use way more main memory and to do certain types of computations that aren't feasible with a 32-bit chip," said Todd Benjamin, Apple product manager for the Power Mac G5. The size of main memory is related to the processor because 32-bit chips max out at 4G of RAM.

"It is good for somebody who is using video or manipulating large images

in [Adobe Systems Inc.] PhotoShop," Benjamin said. "These applications will benefit from large amounts of main memory. Anyone who works with 3-D models will benefit because you can manipulate those images in memory instead of using the hard drive."

The chip is also tuned to attack the floating-point calculations that are important for many scientific applications. The chip can produce as many as four floating-point results in a clock cycle in ideal circumstances. "That is one of the reasons Virginia Tech liked this processor," Benjamin said. The university built one of the world's fastest supercomputers last year by linking Power Macs together in a cluster.

But, Benjamin emphasizes, although Power Mac G5 machines can be used to create a supercomputer, the machines are designed to give desktop PC users more power in everyday applications. So far, the benefits of 64-bit computing have been limited to scientific workstations and PC servers running Intel Corp.'s Xenon processors. But even running existing 32-bit applications, the G5 is much faster than the G4.

There's also an interesting anecdote about how a government office was able to continue working while many other Windows based offices were busy with virus problems. The article is a good read, so stop by [FCW.com](#) for the [full story](#).

The Mac Observer Spin: It amazes us that more government offices haven't caught on to using Mac and OS X, especially in light of the many insecurities presented by Windows. It's not like the problems that Windows has had is any secret, and the results of some of those problems can be seen in e-mail inboxes around the world, including those of the federal government.

It would almost seem that security is not the utmost concern of those whose job it is to see that our tax dollars are wisely spent. Having government workers sitting idle while IT folks combat viruses does not strike us as an optimum use of our dollars. The argument that it will cost money to swap out PCs for Macs could quickly be put to rest the first time an office survives a viral attack without noticing there was one. Employees doing meaningful work that might otherwise sit idle during an attack could more than pay for any upgrade to Macs. Once done, each time a virus is released can be counted as money saved by Switching.

Be that as it may, we are happy to see that some government offices have Switched and proven that Macs can coexist in a PC world quite well. We look forward to seeing more government offices making the Switch.

Apple gets juiced up

Upgrades redefine the Mac's role

**BY Dan Carney
March 22, 2004**

Raw processing power hasn't always been Apple Computer Inc.'s claim to fame, but the company's latest crop of 64-bit desktop computers might prompt an image makeover. Throw in a host of workplace-oriented software enhancements to the platform's Unix-based operating system, and the rugged individualist Macintosh computer is starting to look corporate.

On the hardware side, the Mac got its newfound muscle through the introduction of the IBM Corp. PowerPC G5 64-bit processor, as opposed to the 32-bit processors of the previous generation of products.

"The 64-bit G5 processor lets you use way more main memory and to do certain types of computations that aren't feasible with a 32-bit chip," said Todd Benjamin, Apple product manager for the Power Mac G5. The size of main memory is related to the processor because 32-bit chips max out at 4G of RAM.

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But, Benjamin emphasizes, although Power Mac G5 machines can be used to create a supercomputer, the machines are designed to give desktop PC users more power in everyday applications. So far, the benefits of 64-bit computing have been limited to scientific workstations and PC servers running Intel Corp.'s Xenon processors. But even running existing 32-bit applications, the G5 is much faster than the G4.

The dual-processor version of the Power Mac G5 is most popular. It runs a pair of 2.0 GHz or 1.8 GHz chips. Single-processor models are available with 1.6 GHz or 1.8 GHz chips.

"When I got my dual-processor G5, it was real noticeable that it was faster than my G4, to the point that the network has become the bottleneck," said Ngozi Pole, administrative and systems manager in Sen. Edward Kennedy's (D-Mass.) office.

The latest version of the Mac operating system, OS X 10.3 Panther released last fall, has several features that are useful to Pole's users. The new Fast User Switching feature gives different users access to different resources on the same computer quickly and easily. The feature has been particularly helpful in an office in which interns outnumber the available computers, Pole said.

When offices were evacuated during the recent ricin scare on Capitol Hill, Pole was able to reach his users' files remotely with workgroup manager tools, letting him relay files to colleagues who were working from home. "I just went to the server and started e-mailing files to people," he said.

The Senate has also been attacked by computer worms and viruses recently, but those attacks have all targeted Microsoft Corp. Windows users, so Kennedy's Apple-based office has been unaffected. Panther has proved more stable than the previous version of the OS, called Jaguar, suffering none of the dreaded kernel panics that occasionally afflicted Jaguar, Pole said.

"We've had tremendous interest from federal, state and local governments because of the security of a Unix foundation," said Ken Bereskin, director of Mac OS X product marketing. "Every aspect of the OS has been enhanced, from the drivers to the kernel."

One feature of OS X 10.3 that could be particularly useful to federal customers is the FileVault 128-bit real-time encryption. Kennedy's office has not yet begun encrypting its files, but a recent incident in which Republican staffers accessed Democrats' files have prompted Pole to plan to do it soon. "I'm not saying it is going to happen again, but it is what people do," he said.

Carney is a freelance writer based in Herndon, Va.

INTEGO SECURITY ALERT

Intego Announces Protection against the First Mac OS X Trojan Horse: MP3Concept

April 8, 2004 – Intego, the Macintosh security specialist, has just released updated virus definitions for Intego VirusBarrier to protect Mac users against the first Trojan horse that affects Mac OS X. This Trojan horse, MP3Concept (MP3Virus.Gen), exploits a weakness in Mac OS X where applications can appear to be other types of files.

The Trojan horse's code is encapsulated in the ID3 tag of an MP3 (digital music) file. This code is in reality a hidden application that can run on any Macintosh computer running Mac OS X.

Mac OS X displays the icon of the MP3 file, with an .mp3 extension, rather than showing the file as an application, leading users to believe that they can double-click the file to listen to it. But double clicking the file launches the hidden code, which can damage or delete files on computers running Mac OS X, then iTunes to play the music contained in the file, to make users think that it is really an MP3 file. While the first versions of this Trojan horse that Intego has isolated are benign, this technique opens the door to more serious risks.

This Trojan horse has the potential to do any of the following:

- Delete all of a user's personal files
- Send an e-mail message containing a copy of itself to other users
- Infect other MP3, JPEG, GIF or QuickTime files

Due to the use of this technique, users can no longer safely double-click MP3 files in Mac OS X. This same technique could be used with JPEG and GIF files, though no such cases of infected graphic files have yet been seen.

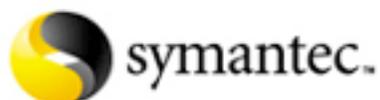
Intego VirusBarrier eradicates this Trojan horse, and Intego remains diligent to ensure that VirusBarrier will also eradicate any future viruses that may try to exploit this same technique. All Intego VirusBarrier users should make sure that their virus definitions are up to date by using the NetUpdate preference pane in the Mac OS X System Preferences.

About Intego

Intego develops and sells desktop Internet security and privacy software for Macintosh.

Intego provides the widest range of software to protect users and their Macs from the dangers of the Internet. Intego's multilingual software and support repeatedly receives awards from Mac magazines, and protects more than one million users in over 60 countries. Intego also offers Windows and Palm OS versions of some of its software. Intego has headquarters in the USA, France and Japan. For further information, please visit www.intego.com.

As the dangers of the Internet grow, Intego is hard at work, developing new software to protect users and their Macs from the latest security and privacy threats. We protect your world.



united states

security response

MP3Concept

Discovered on: March 20, 2004

Last Updated on: April 09, 2004 05:20:49 PM

MP3Concept is a proof-of-concept Trojan targetted at the Mac OS X platform, that is currently not seen "in the wild". It is not spreading or infecting Mac users. The proof-of-concept program does not contain any malicious payload such as viral code, ability to email itself or perform destructive functions such as deleting files. It only contains code to display a message box and mp3 audio data of a man laughing.

Also Known As:

MP3Virus.Gen [Intego]

Type:

Trojan Horse

Infection Length:

88,121 bytes

Systems Affected:

Macintosh

Systems Not Affected:

Linux, Microsoft IIS, OS/2, UNIX, Windows 2000, Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows Me, Windows NT, Windows XP

April 09, 2004

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Intelligent Updater definitions are released daily, but require manual download and installation. Click [here](#) to download manually.

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LiveUpdate virus definitions are usually released every Wednesday. Click [here](#) for instructions on using LiveUpdate.

Wild:

- **Number of infections:** 0 - 49
- **Number of sites:** 0 - 2
- **Geographical distribution:** Low
- **Threat containment:** Easy
- **Removal:** Easy

The MP3Concept file will appear to be an ordinary mp3 file due to the mp3 icon.

When the file is executed by double clicking on the icon it does the following:

1. Display a message box with the text "Yep, this is an application (So what is your iTunes playing right now?)".
2. Launch iTunes and play the mp3 file which is the sound of a man laughing.

When the file is loaded directly by iTunes, by using the "Add to Library..." menu command, it gets registered in the library as the song "Wild Laugh".

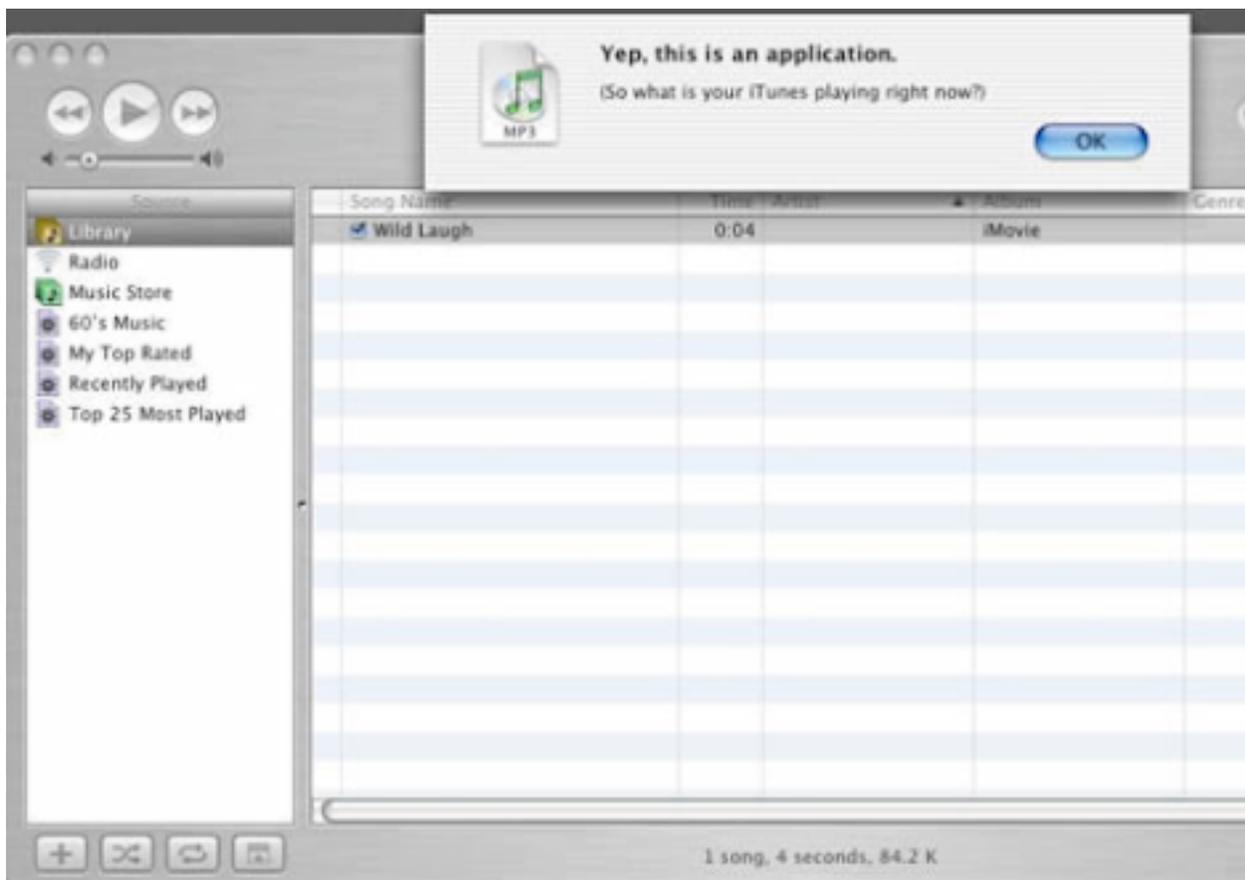
Playing the song "Wild Laugh", only plays the music file of the man laughing and does not display the message box.

Symantec Security Response encourages all users and administrators to adhere to the following basic security "best practices":

- Turn off and remove unneeded services. By default, many operating systems install auxiliary services that are not critical, such as an FTP server, telnet, and a Web server. These services are avenues of attack. If they are removed, blended threats have less avenues of attack and you have fewer services to maintain through patch updates.
- If a **blended threat** exploits one or more network services, disable, or block access to, those services until a patch is applied.
- Always keep your patch levels up-to-date, especially on computers that host public services and are accessible through the firewall, such as HTTP, FTP, mail, and DNS services.
- Enforce a password policy. Complex passwords make it difficult to crack password files on compromised computers. This helps to prevent or limit damage when a computer is compromised.
- Configure your email server to block or remove email that contains file attachments that are commonly used to spread viruses, such as .vbs, .bat, .exe, .pif and .scr files.
- Isolate infected computers quickly to prevent further compromising your organization. Perform a forensic analysis and restore the computers using trusted media.
- Train employees not to open attachments unless they are expecting them. Also, do not execute software that is downloaded from

the Internet unless it has been scanned for viruses. Simply visiting a compromised Web site can cause infection if certain browser vulnerabilities are not patched.

If you believe you have been infected, please download the latest virus definitions via LiveUpdate or from the Symantec Security Response Web site.



Apple responds to Trojan Horse Advisory

By Jim Dalrymple jdalrymple@maccentral.com

April 09, 2004 12:35 pm ET

Apple Computer Inc. responded on Friday to an [advisory issued by security software-maker Intego](#) on Thursday. Apple said they were aware of the issue outlined by **Intego** and that they were investigating. While one security analyst doesn't feel this is a very big deal, he does note that this incident gives absolute proof of the vulnerability.

"We are aware of the potential issue identified by Intego and are working proactively to investigate it," said Apple in a statement given to MacCentral. "While no operating system can be completely secure from all threats, Apple has an excellent track record of identifying and rapidly correcting potential vulnerabilities."

In the advisory issued yesterday, Intego said a Trojan horse called MP3Concept (MP3Virus.Gen), exploits a weakness in Mac OS X where applications can appear to be other types of files, according to the company.

The release of the Trojan Horse, which has been classified by some as more of a proof-of-concept rather than a real Trojan Horse, may be the result of Apple's own success in marketing its operating system. As Mac OS X becomes more popular in the market, virus writers will receive more notoriety for exposing vulnerabilities.

"This is something you have to expect as an operating system gets a higher profile," Ray Wagner, Research Director, Information Security Strategies at Gartner Research, told MacCentral. "I don't think virus writers were ever thinking they could not write a virus for Mac OS X, I just don't think they were interested in the lower profile systems."

In a note posted to their Web site on Friday, Intego defended releasing the Trojan Horse information yesterday.

"The exploit that it uses is both insidious and dangerous and it is our duty as a vendor of Macintosh security solutions to protect our users," says the note on Intego.com. "We don't believe in waiting until the damage occurs, unlike some of our competitors."

While the Trojan Horse itself may be benign, exposing the vulnerability is significant.

"This certainly gives absolute proof that there are vulnerabilities in Mac OS X," said Wagner. "In this case it's relatively high-profile because of the use of MP3, but this does not appear to be a terribly big deal."

[Symantec Corp.](#) told MacCentral on Friday that they were aware of the Trojan, but noted that the virus has not been found in the "wild." Symantec

also provided a screenshot of what happens when the Trojan Horse is executed.

"Discovered on March 20, MP3Concept (MP3Virus.Gen) is a Trojan that imbeds mp3 data in an application," said Symantec in a statement to MacCentral. "Once the file is executed, the Trojan executes and displays the following message, 'Yep, this is an application. So what is your iTunes playing right now?' After displaying the message, the program launches iTunes and plays the mp3 file."

Symantec noted that the Trojan would only execute if opened as an attachment, but not if it was played through iTunes. "This Trojan does not contain any malicious code. MP3Concept is a proof-of-concept Trojan and is not currently seen 'in the wild' -- it is not spreading and infecting Mac users," said Symantec.

Symantec said they would release an updated virus definition on Friday for the Trojan and would continue to monitor the situation for any unusual activities.

***Update:** This story has been updated with information from an interview with Ray Wagner and notes from the Intego Web site.*

***Update 2:** This story has been updated with the information from Symantec Corp.*