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.

February 2006

FRESHLY SQUEEZED REVIEWS: Make Podcasts, Not War
by Frank Petrie

Product: iTunes
Company: Apple <www.apple.com/itunes/>
Requirements: OS X 10.2.8 or later; 500MHz G3 processor or better;
QuickTime 6.5.2 or later; 256MB RAM
Price: Freeware

Product: DTV
Company: Mozilla
Requirements: OS X 10.3+ and QuickTime 7.
Price: Freeware

Product: Fireant for OS X
Company: Mozilla
Requirements: OS X 10.3 or greater
Price: Freeware
Test Rig: PowerMac G4/DP 1.42Ghz/1.5 GB RAM/OS 10.4.4
Review Date: 26 January 2006

For the longest time, we've been caught up in the Browser War, not to
mention the Iraqi War or the never-ending Cola War. Now, another
conflict has arisen and calls for our attention. You won't see it on
ABC, NBC, CBS, or FOX. But you'll see them on it.

The Aggregator War.

There are many factions in this conflict and all are struggling to cease control of the territory. Today, I thought that I would look at who I consider three of the main combatants. They're all free-dom fighters.

iTunes

Not the first but arguably the 800 lb. gorilla in this contest. iTunes entered the fray late in the game, but because of Apple's dominant position already established in the digital media market, they immediately became the most commonly used aggregator.

iTune's problem is that Apple is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Because they have a brand to consider, they have begun censoring by kicking some shows out of their directory. That's they're right. But it is exactly the opposite of what the whole dynamic is about. A conundrum. (You can add those removed programs manually.)

As far as performance, iTunes has one main problem. It'll stop downloading a feed that you have been downloading for months. I don't know what the technical reason for this is, but I do know that it's very annoying. But the player is very good and very responsive. And it lets me look at my catalogue in several ways. I particularly like to use the expanded view for a quick reference.

DTV

DTV (still in beta) reminds me of the big, lumbering kid in school who meant well, but wasn't the fastest out of the gate. On my rig, at least, DTV takes seemingly forever to launch. And while it is easy to navigate, it's GUI is clunky. And while I can set it up to automatically download my feeds, from time-to-time I have to manually coax it to download single episodes. Lastly, I can't find a way to expand

the dialogue box. This is important because some of my feeds come with links that I cant get at without scrolling through this tiny window.

On the bright side, It plays my downloads, ALL my downloads with one click of the button. So, if I have seven downloads in the queue, I click the first one, it plays all of them back-to-back. It would be nice if I could separate that function by feed, but it's a step in the right direction. And the quality of their player is quite good.

Fireant for OS X

Fireant for OS X (also in beta) is so far my favorite. What impresses me the most is the fact that it grabs so little real estate. I can play my feeds, while multi-tasking and my other program won't cover the screen (I have a 20" display). The GUI is very clean and easy to navigate.

On the downside, it doesn't have the back-to-back feature that I appreciate so much in DTV. If they'd incorporate that then I'd be a happy pup (young dawg).

THE PULP

Yes, I'm aware that there are more players out there such as PodderX, Juice, etc. And I'm aware that they all don't download text feeds. I was looking at it from the point of downloading podcasts and vodcasts.

Since so many aggregators are involved in the war, please place comments about your favorite one in the 'Comments' section so we can start a dialogue about this. Besides, vendors read some of these and would no doubt like to hear what features you like and which ones you don't like.

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Words Alone Cannot Describe GarageBand

One of the ways I earn a living is teaching private guitar lessons to youth
and adults in the Washington DC-area. Quite often I bring along my iBook
to guitar lessons. If the house has wireless Internet, I can quickly look up
the lyrics to songs. And sometimes I use my iBook to pass along some
MP3 or QuickTime videos that I've made that help my guitar students learn
fingerpicking, chords or
strumming. Using my USB flash drive, It takes just a minute to copy some
files from my iBook to any Mac,Windows or Linux computer.

Last week I ran into an experience worth writing about. One of my guitar
students is a nine year old boy who has been playing guitar for 4 years.
That's quite unusual. The guitar is a difficult instrument to learn. I usually
only take on a guitar student if they are 12 years old or older.

This particular guitar student is a real delight to teach. I've been showing

him some fingerpicking and rock and roll strumming techniques. He catches on fast. We both enjoy the lessons a lot.

This boy mentioned to me that his parents were thinking of buying him a new laptop. I quietly mentioned that an iBook would suit his musical interests well. He quickly agreed. Not only would he have iTunes on such a laptop, but also Garageband. GarageBand is such an incredibly playful program that words alone cannot describe the joys this software can bring you. Within the past month I discovered just how playful GarageBand can be when some friends and I used
GarageBand to compose a song for the Spread Firefox campaign.

At the end of last week's guitar lesson I chatted with the parents of this student about how happy I was with their child's progress. During our conversation, the parents mentioned to me that they decided to get their child a Windows laptop -- one that had previously been used by their business. My guitar student looked crestfallen at the news. I did the only appropriate thing a person should do -- and supported their decision. "A Windows laptop is a fine choice," I commented. "In fact, I'd love to have a Windows laptop myself." (So that I can install Linux on it.)

What I needed at that particular moment was to reach into my laptop case and pull out a free DVD video showing adults and youths playfully using GarageBand. I should have said, "I think a Windows laptop is a fine choice. By the way, here's a DVD you can have that shows some adults and youth using Apple's GarageBand software. GarageBand comes for free with all new Macs."

Words failed me. There was nothing I could do at that moment to explain the joys of GarageBand other than to have a DVD video to pass along to this family.

If Apple were to create such a video, how could it be distributed? Apple users would gladly pay the $5 shipping charges for 10 copies of such a video. (Or better yet -- 12 copies of the video -- cheaper by the dozen.) So if Apple picked up the cost of producing the video and the cost of duplicating it, the cost of distribution would amount to zip. Zero. Nada. How

many Mac enthusiasts would pay for such a video to share with their friends, family and neighbors.
Oh, just 100,000 or so.

This same video could be placed on the hard drive of every shipping Mac. And this same video could be installed on the hard drive of every shipping 5th generation iPod.

I need to mention one last fact in this article. My student lives in a house whose driveway is long and winding. The house is probably worth between $3 to $5 million. The issue here was not that this family could not afford an iBook. The issue was that Apple didn't give me the tools I needed to help this family understand why their son needed an iBook.

Words alone cannot describe the joys of GarageBand. That's why a GarageBand demonstration video is so sorely needed -- posthaste.

Do you know what would happen if more people learned about GarageBand? A broad smile would break out across their face. Come to think of it, a broad smile is about the only way to convey what GarageBand is about.

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