



BRMUG

Baton Rouge Macintosh User Group

News and Views

February 2004

BRMUG Information

Member Meetings

Regular meetings are held the third Thursday evening of each month at BlueBonnet Library at 6:30 P.M.

Planning Meetings

The Thursday after the regular member meeting the planning meeting is held at 6:15 at Calendars on Perkins near Essen.

About BRMUG

For more information call the User Group President, Isaac Traxler, 225-926-1552 or send e-mail to info@brmug.org or check our web page at <http://www.brmug.org/>

BRMUG Volunteers

Isaac Traxler president@brmug.org
 Glenn Matherne vp@brmug.org
 Don Ballard treasurer@brmug.org
 Don Ballard sec@brmug.org
 Richard Johnson m1@brmug.org
 Jeff Sheldon m2@brmug.org
 Contact anyone above if you have suggestions for BRMUG.

After the Meeting

Join us at Brewbachers on Bluebonnet after the BRMUG meeting: fun, food, open format. Get to know each other.

Newsletter Articles

Please submit newsletter articles to newsletter@brmug.org. Articles are printed on a space available basis. Submissions are welcome!

The February meeting will be held at the **Bluebonnet Library** on **February 19th**, the 3rd Thursday of the month, at 6:30 P.M. This month's presentation will center on **iTunes, the iTunes Music Store, and Music** by Isaac Traxler and Don Ballard. iTunes is more than an MP3 player. It is a total music management system. The iTunes Music Store and its \$0.99 a track price has changed the music industry. Find more out about iTunes, the iTunes Music Store, and burning CDs at the next meeting. Come join us! Members and guests are welcome. After the meeting, we will have our normal Social Hour at Brewbachers. If you need help getting there (<http://www.brmug.org/about-brmug.html>).

Meeting is at Bluebonnet Library!

Visit <http://www.brmug.org/next-meeting.html> for more information.

January Meeting

The January Meeting was our Annual Game Review. John Quebedeaux once again hosted this annual event -- thanks John! You showed us examples of a large spectrum of games. Macintosh gaming has changed over the years. The future is looking even more fun!

AAPL

After an up and down month, AAPL is just about the same place it was this time last month. To have remained relatively stable is a big deal considering the impending retirement of CFO Anderson was announced along with the Pixar/Disney talks ending. At a price of \$23.00, AAPL is still a good safe bet to go up. Apple appears to have a number of announcements that will occur in the next 30-45 days that should be good news for stock prices.

Garage Band Update

Apple released a 21 MB update to Garage Band on February 12.

iChat AV Beta

Apple released iChat AV Beta 2.1. The new version allows video conferencing with XP users who are using AOL's video conferencing software. This is the beginning of universal PC/Macintosh video conferencing. Hopefully it will proceed.

Safari/Java update

Apple updated Safari to 1.2 and Java to 1.4.2. in early February. Java support is a little better and Safari seems to be about the same. Apple, PLEASE release an update to Safari that disables animated GIFs! After a day or two, my machine slows to a crawl trying to keep all the animated GIFs happy.

Pepsi iTunes Giveaway

Apple and Pepsi have partnered to give 100 million songs away. Specially marked Pepsi products may have a cde under the bottle cap that can be redeemed for a free song at the iTunes Music Store. This event was launched via a commercial during the SuperBowl. Over the next few months, 100 million winning bottle caps are scheduled to be released (claimed 1 in 3 chance of winning). Many cities are reporting that none of the specially marked bottles have arrived yet.

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PowerBook 17

I have had the pleasure of using a 17" PowerBook. A brand-new PowerBook. It really reminded me of all the fun and excitement of using a new computer. Panther is a real pleasure on a modern computer!

Kathy is changing positions at LSU. Her new employer has graced her with a new 17" PowerBook (1.33 GHz, 512 MB, 70 GB drive, and a SuperDrive. This is a nice machine. Kathy let me "use" while I installed software for her. It is a really nice machine.

I find my dual 450 MHz G4 PowerMac very usable, but not exactly fun. Even with the compromises Apple made to produce this laptop, it feels quick and fun. The screen is great -- not quite as gorgeous as an Apple Desktop LCD, but much more than adequate. The 17" display is very useable. It is wide enough to see a page in InDesign and its palettes at the same time. The 1440 x 900 pixel display provides an excellent size to work with. Even my poor eyesight was not stressed reading the screen -- with no changes.

I have not challenged the processor yet -- software installs are just not cpu hogs. The SuperDrive read the install CDs quickly and without problems. Hopefully, I will get a chance to comment on the writing capabilities of this system.

The system is decked out with a wealth of ports. The left side has a headphone jack, line input jack, a PCMCIA slot, USB 2.0 slot, modem line in, power and security slot. The back has no connectors because the display cantilevers down as you open it. The right side has a USB 2.0 slot, a FireWire 400 slot, a FireWire 800 slot, 10/100/1000 ethernet jack, S-Video jack and DVI Video connector (a DVI to VGA adapter is included in the box. I have yet to try the ethernet. The wireless works really nice. The front includes a thin slot on the right for CDs or DVDs.

The size of this laptop is very paradoxical. It is huge. And it is tiny. The entire laptop is really VERY thin. The screen is way to thin. There is no way it can be that thin and survive. In spite of being so thin, the screen is very stiff. The bottom is about 2/3s of the thickness. It feels very solid. The trackpad and mouse button are rather large and work fine. The button is close enough that you can hold control down while clicking (but a second button would be a

LOT more convenient. Please Apple, the time has come to give us another button. Panther is much more complicated than the original Macintosh OS. The number of shortcuts have increased enormously. The day of point, click and drag being the only necessary skills is over. If we can master click, shift click, control click, ... -- we can master a second button.

If you try to pick the laptop up by one end, it feels very heavy and awkward. It is very easy to drop. Handled in the middle or on both ends and it feels balanced and relatively light. The bottom does not normally get to hot. I was able to work with it sitting in my lap for extended periods. Constant disk I/O or extended computation will warm it enough that this becomes noticeable. Enough so that you might need a pad. This will probably be a much bigger issue in the summer. Even so, it was no worse than the 900 MHz Toshiba with the loud fan that I have been using for a while.

After using this system for a while, I understand Apple's efforts to encourage us to upgrade our old systems. Panther really is a different world on a machine capable of running it easily. In fact, this laptop is perfectly suited for Panther at this time. I know that lots of people have been dreaming of G5 laptops, but this is plenty right here. I could see being very happy with this system. With an external 17" LCD connected and a multi-button mouse it could very possibly replace a PowerMac (desktop) system.

So, if you have been thinking about buying a PowerBook but are not sure if you should wait -- I say go ahead and buy now. Based on demand for the new G5s, it might well be after the end of the summer before G5 PowerBooks arrive. Maybe I will change my mind after running cpu or video intensive applications, but I do not think so. If only I had one.

by Isaac Traxler

iTunes, iTMS & iPod

iTunes came out a while back. Everybody called it an MP3 player. In general, people thought it was okay, but were not sure why Apple had invested the time and money to produce iTunes. Many said it was nice, but aren't other things more important. Today, it is obvious that iTunes was very important. It was the beginning. So, lets take a look at where we are now (and guess about where we might go).

When it was introduced, people called iTunes an mp3 player. Before I

address this over simplification, maybe I should talk about music and what an mp3 is. Music recordings used to be analog (records, reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes, etc). Analog recordings attempt to continuously capture the intricacy of sound waves and reproduce them on some media. Playback means translating these recordings back into continuous sound waves. When CDs came out, all of this changed. A CD recording is a digital sampling of the sound source. In other words, many times a second the actual sound at that instant is recorded. As each of these discrete sound samples are played back in sequence, it reproduces a sound very similar to the original analog sound source. The best thing about digital recording is that once a recording is made, it can be copied indefinitely with no further loss. Normal commercial CDs provide more than enough digital samples that most humans can not tell the difference between its sound and a good analog source.

The digital data on an audio CD is about 650 MB. This is not that much in comparison to modern hard drives (a 200 GB hard drive will hold over 300 CDs). Early hard drives were much smaller. Portable devices have only recently entered into the multi-GB range. Audio CDs can easily be translated into wav files (Microsoft's audio wave format). wav files are very close to the audio on the CD (and just as big). Since music has been recorded digitally, people have sought ways to reduce the amount of storage needed to store a sound sequence. Many reduction schemes lose significant sound quality. Some lose very little. Oth-



BRMUG Mailing Address

5261 Highland Road #202
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

For more information call the User Group
President, Isaac Traxler: (225) 926-1552
e-mail: info@brmug.org
web: <http://www.brmug.org/>

ers lose none. In all cases, you trade size reduction for some loss of quality. mp3 (MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3) is one of the many MPEG (Motion Picture Experts Group) standard formats that have been developed over time. The mp3 format allows for a variable amount of compression. You can squeeze a 650 MB CD down to a very small size at the cost of having a very poor reproduction of the original. You can reduce a CD to about 10% of its original size with minimal loss (depending on who you talk to). Many of us have heard bad mp3s. Usually they are the result of bad compression or compression of a bad initial source. An mp3 (at about 90% compression) will store a sound that is suitable for playback on the typical home stereo, car stereo, or portable player.

So, an mp3 is a digital sound file that has been compressed significantly at the cost of some sound quality. In spite of this, mp3s became very popular on computers. The dramatic reduction of disk space out-weighed the sound quality loss in the early days. And mp3 players were born. iTunes accomplish this goal. It will very proficiently play an mp3 song (file).

iTunes is much more though. iTunes is capable of played streamed audio. A number of radio stations broadcast there shows via this streaming format (open iTunes, click on Radio and then double click on one of the stations to see how it sounds). So iTunes can displace a tuner.

iTunes is much more. It will automatically convert an audio CD into a series of mp3s. Just stick an audio CD in your Macintosh and wait. iTunes will open and attempt to identify the CD via the CDDB database (online database that can identify many sound recordings). After this, the icon in the upper right corner will change allowing you to start importing the CD. This process is known as ripping (the conversion of an audio CD to mp3 format).

iTunes can also produce custom audio CDs. Just select the songs you want and tell it to burn. iTunes will produce an audio CD that should work fine in any CD player. You can do this to make backup copies of your CDs or to custom mix your favorite songs. Some folks immediately import new CDs and put them away. They then burn a copy on inexpensive CD media and play these copies on their stereo (keeping the original as a backup).

Future Meeting Calendar

February 19, 2004 iTunes, ITMS..... Isaac Traxler Library

March 18, 2004 TBA..... TBA..... Library

We need ideas for future meetings! Help us develop a plan to fill out 2004's schedule.
Send ideas to newsletter@brmug.org.

And now iTunes is the way you buy songs from the iTunes Music Store. Apple added code to the original iTunes software so that you could connect to there store servers, browse through there offerings, select some, pay for them and have the songs automatically downloaded. Now things get a little complicated. Apple chose to encode there music in the AAC format. AAC is a part of the MPEG-2 standard. It provides for comparable compression to mp3s with less loss. AAC recordings are not as good as real audio CD recordings, but they are closer than mp3s. More importantly for Apple is the fact that AAC supports the idea of DRM.

DRM (Digital Rights Management) is the idea of encoding license information with the audio data so that a user's right to listen can be established at replay time. The idea of DRM came from trying to use technology to protect the rights of the consumer and the distributor. DRM has many drawbacks and advantages. If Apple had not implemented any form of DRM, the major recording labels would not have signed up. If the DRM is to restrictive, consumers will abandon the format. Apple's DRM seems to be a reasonable compromise from both parties perspective.

iTunes will also manage transfer of music to your iPod. As a matter of fact, that is what iTunes was always designed to be. iTunes was always intended to be a music manager. Playing the music is just one small function that it performs. iTunes has grown into the broker for iTMS, the manager for the iPod, the CD ripper, the CD burner, the radio station and much more. And that is the secret of iTunes. It is a tool to manage sound. The format of the sound, how it arrives and where it needs to go is secondary. The process of managing this flow is iTunes real job.

by Isaac Traxler

Hyperdictionary

Hyperdictionary (www.hyperdictionary.com) is a hypertext dictionary, a web-based dictionary. This in itself is not a

very big deal (in fact several other exist). Hyperdictionary is very appealing. Its pages are very clean and simple. They load fast. The definitions are good and make sense. Significant words in each definition are already links to there definition so that you can eventually understand the concept you are reading about.

Hyperdictionary is actually five different resources connected together: English Dictionary, Computer Dictionary, Thesaurus, Dream Dictionary, and Medical Dictionary. Regardless of which part you search in, the result will show results from each section it feels relevant.

The English Dictionary is what you would expect. Its 150,000 entries have sections for pronunciation, matching terms (hyperlinked synonyms), definitions, and a list of other words to check out.

The Computer Dictionary has some really good explanations and can be really helpful for a novice trying to develop a basic understanding as well as an expert dabbling in an area that is a little out of their normal area of expertise.

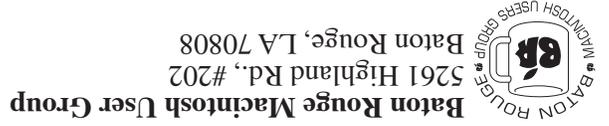
The Thesaurus is exactly what you would expect. A pretty good one to.

The Dream Dictionary is a little odd. It really is a dictionary of the possible meaning for something occurring in a dream. I am not sure that it should be relied on to heavily -- dreams can mean many things and may be nothing more than the result of eating a loaded pizza before bedtime. Still, it is intriguing.

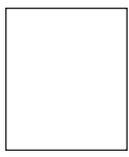
The Medical Dictionary is a good basic medical dictionary. A great place to go to start learning about a medical condition.

No one part of this site is spectacular. Even the site as a whole is not that amazing. But the no-nonsense approach to providing information without distraction is a welcome change from the normal web site. The absence of banner ads alone makes it feel like an oasis. The speed that a page loads makes it very useable. Next time you are not sure what something means, give the hyperdictionary a try.

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This Month:
iTunes, The iTunes Music Store
by Isaac Traxler and Don Ballard

Hiroshima 45
Chernobyl 86
Windows 95

**THIS NEWSLETTER IS RECEIVED BY ALL
BRMUG MEMBERS, CONTRIBUTORS, AND
REPRESENTATIVES.**

The Baton Rouge Macintosh Users Group is a non-profit organization dedicated to Macintosh Users. Our mission is to help bring these users together in order to keep them informed of Apple Computer, Inc.'s trends, visions, and educate them on how to best use this most cost effective, easiest and friendliest of all platforms: **The Macintosh.**

If you are in the position of selling, supporting, or using the Apple Macintosh computer or any of Apple's products, we would like your participation and support for the benefit of our membership and your customer base.

Everyone is invited to attend the meetings. For a complimentary newsletter, or flyers to give out to others, or any information about the group contact the following BRMUG Ambassador: Isaac Traxler, President, (504) 926-1552, e-mail: president@brmug.org. We'll be most happy to talk to you about the Macintosh!

Send this form with \$15 (\$10 with copy of current school id for students) check payable to BRMUG to: BRMUG Treasurer, 5261 Highland Road, #202, Baton Rouge, LA 70808.

BRMUG Membership Form 2/2004

Name: _____

Address: Street, City, State, ZipCode

Home Phone: _____

Office Phone: _____

Things the club should do:

My interest areas:
