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New Mac?   Confused?   Read This!

So you just bought a Mac and became one of the smart consumers who rose above all the people who suggested you buy an IBM.   Congratulations!   You made the right choice.   However your battle in the computer world has just begun.

Unlike any other industry, computers change faster than you can say "mouse click."   For that reason, if you are to ever use your Mac productively, you must constantly keep up-to-date in your computer knowledge.   Fortunately, in the Mac world, doing this can be fun and exciting.

The fact that you are reading this article is a good sign for you.   Reading is probably the first step to getting up to speed.   However, this is not going to come easy.   Unfortunately, you are joining the Mac community in its "adult stage."   In 1984, the Mac was a "baby."   It, along with its terminology, technology, and usefulness was just starting.   Basically, all you could do was word process, paint, work on a spreadsheet, and play games.   Therefore, learning what the Mac was all about was easy because it was only a "child."   Since then it has matured at such a rate that no one can say they are completely Mac literate.   Video imaging, desktop publishing, digital audio capturing, MIDI interfacing, and relational processing are just a few of the THOUSANDS of things today's Mac can do.   Each of these tasks are incredibly detailed and difficult to understand by themselves, let alone when they are discussed and explained together.

The confusion could very well kill the enthusiasm of ANY Mac user, let alone a new one.   That's why I'm here!   Hopefully, after reading this article, you'll have a personal direction to take with your Macintosh as well as a better understanding of the tremendous amount of power you have just purchased.

PART ONE: The (Almost Required) Macintosh Readings

Let's start with the reading basics.   There are two major Mac magazines available to you, MacWorld and MacUser.   Both are excellent publications that I highly recommend.   (Actually, the more that I think about this, I would steer new Macintosh users to MacUser before MacWorld.)   However, both the magazines are written for people with a very high level of understanding.   For this reason, I suggest that you follow these steps while reading either magazine:

1)   Do not buy at the newsstand!   Get a subscription and plan to keep it for as many years as you'll have your Mac. This way, once a month, you'll have an influx of new material to read without having to go out and make the effort of finding it.

2)   Read as many of the editorials, Q&A sections, and Tip/Hint areas of the magazine as you can understand.   And, don't force yourself to try to understand anything!   Your understanding will come to you with time.

3)   Selectively read any specific topics that interest you (i.e.- Word Processor comparisons, Hard Disk Management articles, etc.) and SKIP ANYTHING THAT YOU THINK IS OVER YOUR HEAD.   You are not missing out on anything by doing this, except for the possibility of getting very frustrated.   You can always go back at a later date when you have a better understanding of the topic.

4)   Contrary to my "don't understand it, don't read it" policy above, I strongly suggest that you study each and every software review and advertisement for software as if it were the bible, because when it gets right down to it, software is the most important part of the Mac.   Even if you don't understand what you are reading, READ IT ANYWAY!   The more you know about what your Mac can do, the better you'll be able to decide what you use your Mac for!

I would also recommend that you continue to read the Mac Street Journal.   While it certainly isn't nearly as comprehensive as MacWorld or MacUser, it is written at a very understandable level.   It is also edited in such a way

to allow each author's personal feelings to show toward particular products and techniques.   This can be very useful for new Mac users.   It gives them a better sense as to how other users react to using their Macs.

As for computer books about the Macintosh, they number in the thousands.   Don't let your local bookstore trick you either!   They're likely to only carry about 50 of them.   Unfortunately, the big money is in IBM books.   For some reason, which I can't explain, it seems that more IBM users need help understanding their machines than us Mac enthusiasts; therefore, the stores cater to them.   Maybe it's a sign of pity.   (But seriously....)   There are some very good books available for the Macintosh, you'll just have to look for them a bit harder.

One book I would force new Macintosh users to buy is The Macintosh Bible.   Like it's name suggests, the information contained in this book is almost divine.   The Macintosh Bible, which by the way is periodically revised to cover all the newly released Macs and software, addresses almost any question you'd have about the basic operation of your Macintosh.   In fact, for the first few month you have your Mac I would recommend that you have this book nearby.   If you're really interested in learning about your Mac, it'll be used probably as much as your mouse!

<u>PART TWO: Protect Your Mac (or Who To Believe and Why)</u>

Like in many other areas of life, your Mac is likely to bring you both joy and pain.   The key here is to BOTH maximize your joy and minimize your pain.   For your sanity this will be important, because if you're like all the other Mac users I know, after a while your Mac will become a part of your life.

With that in mind, let us set forth some CARDINAL RULES that I have learned during my 7 year relationship with the Macintosh.   Following these few simple rules will save you from a lot of that ugly pain and may even bring you a good amount of joy.   I've learned that developing good habits reap huge rewards.   As you read these rules, don't get nervous if you've broken any of them.   When you first get started with your Mac, it is usually easy to correct your early mistakes.

CARDINAL RULE #1 -- ASK QUESTIONS   Question any and all information you are given.   While there are many people who USE (and possibly abuse) the Mac, there are only a handful who KNOW the Mac. Unfortunately, like in real life, people shoot there mouths off about thing they don't know about.   If you take the wrong advice, it could mean MacTrouble for you down the road.   So my advice is ALWAYS get a second opinion (maybe even a third and fourth) and after that, if you still don't think the information you were given is right, don't follow it.   Whatever you end up doing, DON'T CHANGE ANYTHING ON YOUR MAC THAT YOU DON'T HAVE A BACKUP OF.

CARDINAL RULE #2 -- SYSTEM SOFTWARE PROTECTION   One of the most important parts of your computer, and therefore, the most likely to have problems, is the system software.   Apple has enough difficulty releasing system software that is relatively bug-free, so when you have a brand-new, clean copy of it, treat it like gold.   How do you treat your system software like gold?   Follow the next three steps:

Step #1

Properly install your system software from the original Apple-supplied disks that came with your Macintosh by using the INSTALLER software.   Once installed, don't update any of your system software unless you use the INSTALLER program again.   The above also intrinsically tells you never to mix different versions of system software or simply copy system software from disk-to-disk. When you do an Apple approved system software update, you will replace the entire system.   There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but I suggest you triple check anyone who tells you to go against what I just outlined above.   Apple is very specific about the installation procedure, and with good reason.   A buggy or improperly installed set of system software can cause problems with every piece of software you'll ever run!

Step #2

Don't make internal changes to your system unless you KNOW what you're doing.   As you get more familiar with your Mac, people and magazines will suggest that you add and change things with your system software. These changes are usually quite appealing.   They allow you to customize your Mac in almost limitless ways ranging from better fonts to digitized sounds to a better user interface.   Usually these changes are performed by running small programs (known as utilities), sometimes they are done by using a powerful program called ResEdit (a program that literally let's you change the guts of a program).   Whatever the case, and no matter how simple it looks to do, remember what you are doing.   You are making changes to your system software.   Granted, 99% of these changes will work and never cause problems, but the more changes you make, the more chance you have "conflicts".   These conflicts occur when one or more of these changes interact unfavorably with each other in your computer's memory.   They can cause computer quirks ranging from incorrect data to entire system crashes.   So, once again, I suggest that you try to resist changing your system, at least until you know what you are doing and know how to fix any problems that can arise.

Step #3

The last step to keeping your system software in tip-top shape is to take care as to way you handle inits, cdevs, fonts, and desk accessories. Using any of these little "system helpers/enhancers" almost never cause problems by themselves, but when mixed, these little 'buggers' can reek havoc on your poor defenseless little Mac. Again, installing inits, cdevs, fonts, and desk accessories are all system changes! The only differences between these changes and the ones described in Step #2 are that all of these are temporary changes, which can be fixed with minimal effort.

Let's discuss inits and cdevs as one topic. Inits and cdevs are 'system enhancers.' In effect, they are little programs that are intended to improve your Mac's capabilities. For example, an init may place a clock on your desktop window or another may give you the ability to operate an elaborate spell checker. Cdevs are similar, however, they not only perform a particular function, they also allow you to customize the function they are doing through the use of the Control Panel (under the apple-icon menu). These changes can range from controlling screen savers, allowing digitized sounds to be played during specific operations, or protecting your computer from viruses. Many inits/cdevs are under constant re-writes and change version numbers almost monthly. Therefore, if you either update your system software or install a newer version of the init/cdev you have make sure they are compatible with each other. You should also determine if the version you have is the best one to run. Do this by either reading documentation (which normally accompanies updates) or ask other Mac users who have already used the version you plan to install. Whatever the case, if you begin to have trouble (system crashes, unexplainable errors) with any init or cdev, simply remove it from your system folder. This will stop them from being loaded when your computer is turned on, and will thus eliminate the problems. For now, that is all you need to know about inits and cdevs. However, I suggest that as you accumulate your own inits and cdevs you read all the documentation that comes with them. Don't blindly put them into your system folder "just to see what happens..." Under a few isolated cases, what could happen is nothing short of disaster!

The next set of system modifiers are fonts and desk accessories. Fonts and DAs are the least likely system changes to give you problems. Your Macintosh comes with several fonts and desk accessories pre-installed into your system. What is important to understand about these installed items is that they are totally removable! The nice folks at Apple gave you some to begin with, but you can make the final decision as to which ones you want as part of your system. There are two ways to install fonts and DAs to your liking. You can either use the Apple-supplied program called Font/DA Mover, which makes permanent changes to your system software or you can purchase either Suitcase II or MasterJuggler, which allows you to modify fonts and DAs without making permanent system changes. While either method is acceptable, I strongly suggest you purchase Suitcase II (or MasterJuggler). These programs allow for faster, more intricate, easier changes that do not modify system software.

CARDINAL RULE #3 -- BACKUP! This is probably the most written about topic in all of computing and there is a reason for it. When you least expect it, that's precisely when you will lose your data. So before it happens to you, begin to BACKUP! If you don't, you could soon learn what it feels like to lose a 'loved one.' Recently, I suffered a hard drive crash, and unfortunately it was during a time that I hadn't backed up for a while. As a result, I lost several original drawings and nearly 60 pages of a screenplay I had worked on for nearly a year! Take it from me, it feels as if you've lost someone special to you. Since that crash, I have purchased a second hard drive for the sole reason of doing backups. I do them every night now. And after several weeks of recovering from my loss, I can finally sleep well again.

OK, now that I have your attention (did I mention BACKUPS?), let's discuss when, where, and how to do them. What you are about to read is a guideline. You can modify it, reject it, or follow it to the letter....just as long as you somehow get around to backing up the information you wish to keep.

Backups almost always feel like busy work. You may also feel that the added expense of purchasing more floppy disks, a tape drive, or (in my case) another hard drive is not justified, but believe me, it is. Your personal information is priceless and should be the first things you protect. Anything that you've typed, drawn, planned, or toiled over is most at risk. Why? Because these documents are truly originals! No other Mac users has these items. Programs and commercially-supplied data are replacable because there are always ways of getting copies. In fact, if the product is commercial, you probably were sold an original floppy disk. This serves as an emergency backup. (We all know that you should never use a master disk for everyday work, right?!)

Anyway, there are several ways to approach backing up software, depending on the type of storage devices you have. If you only have floppy disk drives, all you need to do is duplicate all your program disks, use the copies for you work, and store the originals in a safe place AWAY FROM ALL SPEAKERS! Then, simply backup all your original documents once a week or so. If you are dedicated to doing this, you'll be safe from most data losses.

If you have either a hard drive, tape drive, or CD-ROM, things get more complicated. Since these devices store mass amounts of information, it is far more important to make sure you stay on top of backing them up. Losing the information on one floppy disk may only wipe out a few word processing documents, whereas a damaged hard drive

could leave you completely wiped out!   So, unless you are storing under 10 megabytes of information on your storage device, I strongly recommend you rush out and purchase a software package that manages your backups.   Typical program names are: DiskFit, Redux, and HDBackup.   These programs are so necessary to manage hard drive backups that many manufacturers include one of these programs as a courtesy when you buy their drives.   However, while each of these programs accomplishes the task of backing up your programs, they are not all created equal.   Some allow limited options, others are slow, some simply have size limitations.   For that reason, I suggest that before you get a backup program you research which one will best suit your needs.

Now that you're ready to backup, I will suggest that you (1) backup at least once a week, (2) do backups only after you check for viruses (I'll be discussing viruses very soon.   For now, just understand that if you do a backup of a virused program, the backup is USELESS!), and (3), do backups with all the system extras OFF (sometimes INITs and other programs can crash your backup program in mid-backup!).

Don't get all worried if this stuff sounds confusing, backing up isn't as difficult as it's beginning to sound.   Just buy a good backup program and READ THE MANUAL.   If you follow the directions properly, you'll have a lifetime of happy MacEncounters.   I just wanted to stress how important backing up is.

CARDINAL RULE #4 -- VIRUS PROTECTION!   This is my least favorite topic to write about.   Unfortunately, in the Macintosh community, we all have to be on the lookout for little destructive programs called viruses.   We are not alone though.   Users of the IBM, Atari, Amiga, and other computers systems also suffer in the same way.

To put it in the simplest terms possible, viruses (also called worms, trojan horses, and strains), are program that play nasty tricks on your computer and software.   To explain how they exist, get into your computer, and what exactly they do could fill a book, but let us suffice to say that you NEVER want to have a virus.   They can do things ranging from simply making your computer beep for no reason to displaying crude messages on your screen to erasing entire hard drives.   Unfortunately, viruses abound in the Mac community.   They usually spread when floppy disks are traded back and forth.   However, even if you've never traded software or data, you're still not totally safe.   Once in a blue moon, even software companies will unknowingly release program disks with viruses on them!

Thank god someone has come to our rescue.   Several programs exist on the market that do nothing but detect and destroy these invisible viruses.   It is imperative that you get a virus program immediately!   While several manufacturers sell programs, I strongly suggest using Disinfectant, which is a shareware (free) program.   It is available through NYMUG and is an excellent virus fighter.

<u>PART THREE: Learn Your Mac (from the ground up...please!!!)</u>

OK, now for the real secrets.   In this section I hope to give you a painless way to enter the 'adult' world of the Macintosh computer world.   As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Macintosh computer line has matured quickly since its introduction in 1984.   Back then, new Mac users had no problem quickly understanding their Macs because there was almost nothing to learn.   Everything related to the Mac was in its infancy, and thus users from that era grew up <u>with</u> the technology and programs, not behind them.   Nowadays, new Mac users could be compared to four year olds chasing after the theory of relativity!   It just can't be done in one leap.   Instead, just like it was eight years ago, slow and methodical learning is necessary to reach the final goal: MacKnowledge.   However, new users today have one big thing working against them, the temptation of skipping steps and jumping to the flashy things the Mac can now do.   Trust me, this is the worst thing to do!   One must overcome temptation. It is only then that you can really begin to understand the world of the Macintosh.

The Macintosh is a computer for EVERYONE.   It is a simple machine to users that don't want to learn a lot of technical jargon.   It is a powerful machine for people who need serious number-crunching capabilities.   And, it's a fun machine for others who just want to enjoy the Mac.   The reason the Mac is all these things is because of its software.   Mac software is some of the best written in all of computing.   Macintosh software is also unique, unique because it all follows something called the Macintosh graphic user interface (or GUI).   The GUI includes using pictures (or icons) to represent long and wordy procedures on-screen, pull-down menus that constantly remind the user what options are available, and point-and-click technology that lets the user graphically manipulate the computer in powerful ways.   All this talk may sound impressive, and it is, but more importantly, once you begin to use the Mac you'll see that the GUI is comfortable.   That is, it's easy to use.   That's exactly what the Mac is all about: comfort and power!

So now that you understand that the GUI is the main (but certainly not only) reason that the Macintosh is such a terrific computer, you should also agree that the only way to take advantage of your Mac is to know your GUI inside and out.

The way to learn the GUI is to start at the beginning, with the system software (or operating system).   Forget about diving into the thirty programs you just got from a friend or NYMUG (you did remember to join, right?), begin by learning how to use your mouse.   Click on the menu bar.   Learn how the alarm clock works.   Play with

the settings in the Control Panel.   Learn that one click on an icon 'selects' that icon for further change and that a 'double-click' on an icon puts that program or document into action.   See how the scroll bar allows you to look at files that are hidden from view in a small window.   And, I can't stress this enough, learn how to place and move things in and out of folders.   Learning how to move through folder levels is the most important thing you can learn about the system software, yet I would guess only 60% of today's users do it correctly!   Learn these simple mouse operations NOW and learn them to the point that you don't have to think about them.

Over the past eight years, I've been a consultant for nearly 100 people who were new to the Mac, and I cannot stress how important the above information is.   You should be comfortable with EVERY operation the system software can perform for you.   In my experience, the few people who have told me they don't like the Mac all have one thing in common.   They never learned the basics!   They thought they could skip steps and cut corners.   And, as you might have guessed, this practice came back to haunt them.

Remember, it is impossible to build a house unless you know how to use the tools.   However once you know your tools, not only can you raise a house, but you can build most anything.   In the Mac world, once you know how to use the basic tools well, any program you encounter will be easy to understand.   This of course leads to productivity, which leads to accomplishment, which leads to happiness.   Need I say more?   Q.E.D.

PART FOUR: Quick General Suggestions

The following is a list of little Macintosh programs I would be lost without.   Again, these are my personal suggestion.   You should research and explore to see if these items are right for you.   (1) "SuperClock," a cdev that place a clock in your menu bar, (2) "OnCue," a program launcher that speeds up loading programs and documents, (3) "DiskTop," a desk accessory that allows you to do desktop operations while in a program, (4) "After Dark," a screen saver, and (5) "Suitcase II," an innovative init that I explained in the Font/DA section of this article.

I also would be remiss if I didn't pass on these short tid-bits.   These are suggestions and tips to help make your Macintosh an enjoyable machine to work with:

1)   Steer away from installing internal hard drives.   They put added strain on your Macintosh power supply and thus cause more internal heat.   Both of these side effects are bad for you Mac's long-term health.   In addition, with an external hard drive, you can take your data with you without lugging your Mac along too.   If you have the option, purchasing a slightly more expensive external hard drive will pay for itself almost immediately.

2)   Keep all your Mac equipment away from speakers, radiators, dusty areas, and damp basements.   Need I mention why?   MACINTOSH REPAIR BILLS CAN BE STAGGERINGLY EXPENSIVE!

3)   Set up your Mac so you have the screen just below eye level, have space for your keyboard, and still have ample room to move your mouse around.   (Simple advice goes so far in life.)

4)   Don't buy extra memory because the dealer tells you to.   Go home and try out your software first.   The only time you need more memory is when your Mac tells you its out of memory!   Extra memory is just a waste.   Contrary to popular belief, more memory does not speed up operation.

4.5)   If you do need more memory, order it mail-order and install it yourself!   Most companies will send you instruction on how to do the installation, which, by the way, is about as easy as putting bread into a toaster.   You'll also save up to 300% by doing it yourself.

5)   If you are planning on using your computer for short periods of time over an entire day, do not shut the computer off between sessions.   Leave your Mac on all day (make sure you either use a screen saver or turn the brightness down of your screen when you do this).   It is better for wear on the electronics inside you Mac not to have their temperatures cycle often.   Literally, chips and components can fail from thermal stress.

6)   Also, if you haven't already, join a Macintosh users group.   If you live in New York City, NYMUG is the group you'd join.   However, no matter where you join, a users group provides you with endless help and information.

Once again, congratulations and welcome to the Macintosh world, only enjoyment lies ahead!