recently completed my annual federal income tax form. For the second year, I used MacInTax to assist me with the arduous project.

A year ago I wrote my first MacSense article. It was a review of the USA's Internal Revenue Service Tax Year 1994 version of MacInTax. (LINK HERE TO MAY 1995 ARTICLE) Since then, my "Brave New World" columns have featured a range of facts, opinions, and interviews, but no product reviews. My outstanding MacSense colleagues are more qualified in that regard. (I would like to express my appreciation to the readers of my monthly articles, especially those of you who have written me with your own experiences and points of view.)

This time around I chose to use the Deluxe version of Tax Year1995 MacInTax, after seeing a demonstration by a representative of Intuit at the December, 1995 meeting of the Tucson Macintosh Users Group (TMUG). I have a CD-ROM drive—which is required for the Deluxe version—and I expected to benefit from the additional multimedia features included in MacInTax Deluxe, which costs $10 more than the standard diskette version.

A statement concerning the reporting of form-1099 income made by Marshall Loeb, one of MacInTax's financial experts, during an "Easy Step Interview" QuickTime explanation, helped me so much that I immediately considered the entire cost of the CD-ROM a virtual gift! (I confirmed the information in the printed 1995 IRS's 1040 Forms and Instructions booklet) In addition, the straightforward way MacInTax guides, calculates, and reviews the barrage of financial data is so comprehensive as to be worth its entire cost once again. In comparison to using a conventional calculator and endless scraps of paper, I estimate I have gained one entire week of normal life, not to mention eliminating the hundreds of hours of stress, anxiety, eyestrain, and fear I had not really done my tax return correctly in the first place.

So, let me once again give it to you straight: if you are somewhat organized financially, and would like to participate in the preparation of your USA federal income tax return, take the plunge. Buy and use MacInTax next February, and purchase the Deluxe version if you have a CD ROM drive.

After MacInTax and I eventually checked and double-checked all the myriad calculations, I sent the return via modem to the electronic filing center in Rome, Georgia. By this time I actually looked forward to paying the $15 additional fee for electronic filing. The sigh of relief I exhaled a few days later, after sending the final paperwork to the Internal Revenue Service, set off a windstorm that blasted through Tucson for three gusty days. Okay, You get my drift.

xperiencing the magnificence of MacInTax got me thinking about the potential for commercial software developers to produce truly top-notch applications, year after year.

At the March, 1996 TMUG meeting, we were introduced to a preview of Aladdin's StuffIt Deluxe 4.0. StuffIt occupies an unusual niche in the Mac world: it has both a shareware and a commercial version. In addition, StuffIt has no serious competition. I had been using the shareware version, and was not particularly motivated to obtain the new offering.

Like MacInTax, StuffIt Deluxe is highly regarded by the Mac community. StuffIt in one form or another is utilized by a tremendous percentage of Macintosh users, with unanimous acclaim.

A few days after the March meeting, this announcement by Richard Laue of TMUG appeared on our bulletin board (BBS) in "TMUG Central."

> From: Richard J. Laue
> Subject: Killer Deal on StuffIt!
>
> Here's an even BETTER deal on StuffIt Deluxe than what was presented at the TMUG Meeting!
>
> Mac Connection (1-800-800-1111) is selling StuffIt Deluxe 3.5 for $19.95 ($24.95 with overnight shipping) for a limited time.
>
> I called Aladdin, the makers of StuffIt, and they said that anybody who buys Version 3.5 AFTER March 4 can upgrade to 4.0 for FREE!!!   All you need is your proof of purchase, showing the date.
>
> So you can order version 3.5 for under $25, and wind up with 4.0 at no extra
>
> charge!
>
> Mine's on the way......

I asked a couple of email buddies if this deal was too good to pass, and they both said I should definitely acquire StuffIt 4.0 via this method at this great price. So I did what Richard

suggested (Make sure you follow all of Aladdin's Read Me installation instructions after you read the installation info in the manual, and before you begin the actual installation onto your hard drive.).

hat are the other commercial applications that we take for granted; the ones we routinely expect to work wonders on our Macs? RamDoubler is one. Conflict Catcher is one. Norton Utilities is another. So are Quicken, Retrospect, and FileMaker Pro. ClarisWorks is definitely one.

What about Microsoft? Excel is a sure bet, but Word is now suspect, and has several outstanding word processing competitors. What about Adobe? Do Photoshop, Illustrator, and PageMaker consistently bring home the bacon (or tofu)? How about QuarkXPress? Which applications immediately come to mind as being absolutely indispensable and reliable, from version to version, and consistently worth the cost?

I remember ten or twelve years ago, long before I ever owned a Mac, being stunned by the cost of software. I had figured that programs, as most of them were then called, should cost about ten or fifteen dollars, just like a book. When I learned that the brand-name heavies of the day cost from dozens to hundreds of dollars I reasoned, "I'm missing some piece of this puzzle. Why don't the consumers demand lower prices and competitive products, as in the real world?"

I now understand why software is so expensive. The best applications are dynamic partners alongside the computer users, and are worth every penny. The inferior products don't stick around very long. The shareware competitors are worthy additions to the commercial products, but rarely dominate market share. The best commercial applications are, well, simply sensational, and no self-respecting Mac person goes to sleep without using one or more of them on a daily basis. At $50 or thereabouts, Quicken, RamDoubler, StuffIt Deluxe, and Conflict Catcher are tremendous bargains, and so is Photoshop at more than $500. I'm sure you know what I mean.

hich brings me to the pressing matter facing me: at what point do I have enough commercial software (or shareware)? What is the optimum investment in Macintosh applications? If buying MacInTax every year is a no-brainer, as is cheerfully paying for new versions of ClarisWorks, when is it logical to extend my reach into new areas of expense and learning?

In the process of working with MacInTax, I have been giving plenty of serious thought to my finances. I am more than curious as to the end in sight. I am perhaps unnecessarily thrifty, but why should I own more than I really need, in software or anyware?

For example, what would you do regarding this offer?

> Date: 21 Mar 1996
> From: MacWay@aol.com (Guy Kawasaki's EvangeList)
> Subject: OneClick

OneClick is an innovative new Personal Productivity product. It's like having the best of several automation and utility programs rolled into one product, with many powerful new features. OneClick automates and simplifies any Mac task through customizable, easy-to-use, on-screen button bars or keyboard shortcuts. You can assign any Mac task, in any program, as a button shortcut: from a menu choice to multi step sequences. OneClick makes repetitive or complex actions a snap.

Special EvangeList offer—get OneClick for just $49.98 Save over $79 off the suggested retail price of $129! 60-day money back guarantee.

To quote one of thousands of satisfied OneClick users: "OneClick is easily the best piece of software I have purchased. I no longer need Now Menus, QuicKeys or DragStrip..."

 A few features and benefits of OneClick:

* Add customizable button bars to any Mac software
* Easy-to-use scripting language and Script Recorder
* Library with hundreds of pre-made buttons and scripts

OneClick works similar to macro programs, like QuicKeys, but it offers more ower, features, and capabilities. Since OneClick provides its shortcuts as on-screen buttons, you don't need to remember dozens of complicated keyboard commands. The buttons are right there on the screen, ready to click. OneClick can perform a variety of actions such as: selecting menu commands, typing text, interacting with dialog boxes and windows, launching applications and documents, changing system settings, repeating any series of steps in any application, running AppleScript scripts, and much, much more.

You can fully customize your OneClick button palettes to match the way you like to work. Design your own buttons or choose from hundreds of pre-made buttons that add new features and shortcuts to many popular applications.

For more information go to <http://www.westcodesoft.com>

To order at this special price, contact our sales department at (800) 448-4250 or mail to westcode@westcodesoft.com. Remember to mention the EvangeList when ordering.

A few days later I observed the same offer in TidBITS, the weekly Mac/Internet ezine. I usually skim or ignore these "special offers," but occasionally one of them intrigues me. I honestly don't have extra time to evaluate new software I might need, but I'm happy to invest in new or updated applications which will prove to be beneficial.

Eventually I make my decision based more on the time-factor than the money-factor. I can afford the cost of good tools in every aspect of my professional and personal life, but I can't afford the time to decide if tools of questionable value are worth the effort.

In discussing this philosophy with my friend Stuart, he commented that "I agree with you that we don't have time to check out every new program that comes along.   However, demo versions of many of them are posted on America Online or user group bulletin boards,

and you can download them and try them for a period of time before paying or trashing.   I usually wait until I read one or more favorable reviews in a magazine before trying a program out, and I rarely buy unless I hear lots of good things about it.   As you know very well we can live without a lot of these programs and not be worse off.

Many programs sound as good as OneClick, but may or may not be worth the money.   The program descriptions are often written by ad people.   However, Guy is very well respected in Mac circles, and probably gives full consideration to the products he personally recommends. Please let me know how you like the new version of StuffIt. If you decide to order OneClick, make sure you really put it through its paces during the 60-day trial period.

What was my conclusion regarding OneClick? Well, I'm ordering it today, since I will have two full months of concentrated time to evaluate it. I'm excited, and I welcome your comments. Keep in touch!

ohn Nemerovski's monthly column explores the trends, psychology, and emerging culture of the "digital renaissance" and how we are all adapting to this "Brave New World." You can write to John at johnemer@aztec.asu.edu.