

B Where to Find More Information

When you're trying to find the right program, or figure out which Mac is best for you, or how to hone your Mac skills, there are three main routes you can try: books, magazines, and other users.

This appendix covers those routes, and more.

Contributors

Sharon Zardetto Aker (SZA) is the chapter editor.

Elizabeth Castro (EC) fell in love with the Mac while living in Barcelona, and founded the publishing house *Pagina Uno*. She was this chapter's editor for the fifth edition.

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Magazines and Newsletters

You'd think that with millions of Mac users out there, there'd be more than two or three major magazines devoted to the Mac. But you'd be wrong. Luckily, there are many publications beyond the major ones.

Mainstream Publications

Shortly after the dawn of creation—that is, January of 1984—journalists and publishers jumped on the trail of the Mac. And here's the result:

Macworld (SZA/EC). *Macworld* magazine (\$4 an issue, \$30 a year) devotes a considerable amount of space to product reviews and lab tests, but also includes articles of a more general nature, including interviews with Mac movers, and a consumer column. *Macworld* maintains a presence on-line in America Online, where you can look up product ratings, read recent articles, and send letters to the editors and writers. *Macworld* also has a Web site at <http://www.macworld.com>.

MacUser (SZA/DD). *MacUser* (\$3 an issue, \$27 a year) has top-notch product testing and reports, lots of software reviews, and has recently mitigated its somewhat high-end

Can You Trust Them?

(SZA)

There's a general assumption that major magazines have to pull their punches when reviewing products because they might otherwise risk their advertising revenue from the manufacturer. As an insider, I know that's just not true. I've written for all the major magazines, including *Macworld*, *MacUser*, and *MacHome Journal*. Not once in 11 years of reviewing products have I ever, ever, ever been asked to change comments or temper my criticisms—and I can be quite critical.

One scathing review I did of a software program for *MacUser* did cause a little ruckus when it was turned in; the editors asked if I was *really, really* sure of everything I said, since it was pretty nasty. But it went to print the way I wrote it. The fallout came more than a year later when the new version came out: *MacUser* called for a review copy and was told they couldn't have it if they were going to send it to "that housewife in New Jersey." *MacUser* declined to review it with any strings attached.

The editorial and advertising departments of professional magazines are completely independent at reputable publications. And you have the added benefit, in reviews from major magazines, of the usually higher level of expertise and exposure that the professional writers have—it's hard to do a good review of a program if one is working in the vacuum of not having used other, similar, programs, too.

business focus by adding short columns on games and even kids' stuff. *MacUser's* on-line presence is on ZD Net, which you can access separately or through CompuServe; you can get product reviews, interact with editors, and download software utilities written especially for ZD Net users (which can then be freely shared with friends and user groups—you just can't post them on other on-line services).

MacWEEK (SZA/EC). *MacWEEK* is, obviously, a weekly publication, but its value is not so much in its frequency as in its timeliness, since the monthlies go to press about three months before you see them. It's the best source for the latest news, gossip, and product announcements, as well as what's happening on the business end of the market. A subscription is \$100 a year—which is actually in line with the magazine subscriptions, because of the number of issues. Zillions of complimentary subscriptions are available, however, for the right people—those who manage or purchase *lots* of Mac hardware or software.

MacHome Journal (SZA). As the venerable *Macworld* and *MacUser* focus more and more on high-end, cutting-edge business use of the Mac and related products, the home and family user is getting left out. *MacHome Journal* (\$2 an issue, \$24 a year), not as slick or technical as the two others, is filling the gap. You won't find “lab test” product reviews, but you will find plenty of family- and home-based business information in this magazine, which has significantly improved with almost every issue since its inception.

Other Mac Publications

There's more support available in print than just the glossy monthlies (and weekly).

Macintosh Multimedia & Product Registry (SZA). Despite its name change from the simpler *Macintosh Product Registry*, this Redgate Communications publication (\$15 an issue, \$40 a year) still provides a comprehensive listing of all sorts of products, not just multimedia. A paragraph of description is included for every product whose manufacturer agrees to pay for the listing; a separate section has a brief listing for every conceivable product the editors could find, regardless of whether or not the manufacturer is a paying advertiser.

The CD-ROM version (\$60) has all the information in a HyperCard stack that has an annoyingly clunky and slow interface.



The Macintosh Multimedia & Product Registry on CD is so complete it even includes itself.

It's great for finding information when you already know a product or company name, but the general Find function is a little weak; you can search through descriptions for specific words, but there's no formal keyword setup so you can search in categories like "preschool education" or "arcade games".

BMUG Newsletter (EC). This 500-page "newsletter" is published twice a year by the folks at BMUG—the Berkeley Mac User Group. It's jam-packed with reviews, commentary, and tips written by honest-to-goodness users. There's not a single ad, which frees BMUG's staff to say exactly what they think about the products they talk about (see "[Can You Trust Them?](#)" in this chapter). The newsletter is included free with membership, but I'd buy it even if it weren't. (You don't have to be a member of the group to get the newsletter; back issues are available for \$7 directly from BMUG.)

TidBITS (Adam Engst). TidBITS is a free electronic newsletter that covers the computer industry with an emphasis on the Macintosh and the Internet. It's distributed to about 150,000 readers each week on the Internet and on most commercial services. Issues are 30K of straight text, with topics ranging from the latest Macs to software reviews to editorials on the future of Apple and the Internet. TidBITS has been around for over 300 issues and six years, and sports one of the largest Internet newsletter mailing lists. TidBITS is widely quoted and republished; nonprofit, noncommercial publications are welcome to reprint articles with proper credit to the author and TidBITS. For subscription information, send e-mail to info@tidbits.com or check the Web page at <http://king.tidbits.com/>. *[Adam's the editor of TidBITS—who better to write the description? It's a great newsletter, and you can't beat the price.—SZA]*

Books

(SZA)

There's a wealth of Mac books out there; I know, because I've written many of them myself over the years. Aside from general-purpose Mac books such as this one, you'll find books that are more focused on certain aspects of Mac computing—such as font-handling or troubleshooting—as well as books on every major software program around.

Browse the bookstores. As a general rule, if you like one book by a specific author or publisher, you can trust other books by that author or from that publisher. A good book is the best, and cheapest, investment you can make to get the most out of your Mac.

Special Interest Publications

You don't need Mac-only publications to glean helpful hints and information for your Mac. Newsletters and magazines that focus on special programs, such as Microsoft Word, or special activities, such as desktop publishing—even when it's a cross-platform approach—can be exactly what you need.

Cobb Group newsletters (ND). The Cobb Group publishes several excellent monthly newsletters for Mac users. *The Mac Authority* (\$50 a year) contains general Mac techniques and tips. Four others, with prices ranging from \$40 to \$50 a year, focus on popular Microsoft products: *Inside Word*, *Excellence*, *Inside Microsoft Works*, and *Inside FileMaker Pro*. *Inside HyperCard* (\$60 a year) is aimed at stack developers.

For desktop designers (Carol Aiton). One of the benefits of subscribing to magazines and newsletters aimed at designers is that they're so well-designed; it makes reading them a pleasurable, as well as educational, experience. Three of my favorites:

- *Before & After* (bimonthly, \$36 a year) is a truly delightful 16-page newsletter packed with truly *usable* design information. Not only does writer John McWade give good, sound advice on the concepts of great design, he also provides realistic, technical "how-to" info in terms that are easy to understand and apply. It's a great source for expert and novice alike.
- *The Board Report* (newsletter, \$69 a year; complete monthly \$96 a year) is stuffed with information, all of it easily archivable with a built-in filing system for easy reference. Seemingly everything is included: tips, techniques, surveys, marketing reports, and fresh ideas and concepts. It's astute, knowledgeable, and a pleasure to read.
- *Color Publishing* (bimonthly, \$20 a year) is a sound publication with articles from acknowledged leaders in the color publishing arena. The magazine keeps you abreast of trends in the graphics industry, supplies reviews of what's already in the marketplace, and talks about what's on the way.

More for desktop designers (Lorraine Bebee). There are many notable design periodicals for a Mac designer to choose from. Some of them don't have the computer as the main focus, concentrating mostly on important design issues. Of the eight that I subscribe to, there are two that I read cover-to-cover the minute they arrive:

- *Communication Arts* is one of the oldest, and, in my opinion, the best, in the design publication arena. It features a variety of work from the fields of graphic design, illustration, advertising, and photography. The focus is on good design, regardless of the tools used; it also includes regular columns on legal affairs, design issues, freelance questions, design technology, technology reviews and resources, and book reviews. A subscription includes four regular issues, four annuals, and an interactive design CD-ROM (\$53 a year; \$99 for two years; \$39 a year for students).
- *Step-By-Step Electronic Design* (12 issues, \$48 a year, \$90 for two years) is a monthly four-color newsletter that focuses on specific production techniques used by leading computer graphic designers and illustrators. There're plenty of detailed "how-to"

Mac History Books

(EC)

If you're interested in how two guys in a garage started a billion-dollar company, and how one of them got kicked out halfway through, check out:

Steve Jobs: The Journey is the Reward, Jeffrey Young (pro-Jobs, pro-Wozniak)

Accidental Millionaire, Lee Butcher (anti-Jobs, pro-everyone else)

West of Eden, Frank Rose (pretty even)

Odyssey, John Sculley (pro-Sculley, doesn't talk much about anyone else)

Hackers, Steven Levy (an amazing book that explains where Woz came from)

pieces, and a good question-and-answer section for the most popular applications. All issues are three-hole-punched, making them easy to keep in a binder for later reference.

Other Resources

Some of the best help for Mac users comes in forms other than the printed word.

User Groups

A user group is a club whose members are interested in computers in general, or in a particular kind of computer, or even specific software. They're typically nonprofit and independent of manufacturers and publishers.

Meetings are usually free. Membership, with its perks of a newsletter, access to shareware libraries, and sometimes even discounts on major products, usually runs \$20 to \$60 a year. Subgroups, called *SIGs* (Special Interest Group), meet for members who share a particular focus, such as beginners or musicians.

Finding a local user group (EC). Unless you live in a very remote area, finding a local user group shouldn't be hard—especially if there's a college nearby. Call Apple's user group hot line (800/538-9696) to find out about user groups near you. If you can't find a group in your community, get together with some other Mac users and start one of your own.

There are a few user groups that are so big, or so old, that they serve as an example for all the rest. Even if you don't happen to live near them, their enormous software libraries (from which you can generally order by mail), incredible newsletters, member discounts, and tech support make long-distance membership very tempting.

Boston Computer Society (EC). There are more than 45 SIGs in the country's largest user group, the Boston Computer Society, and each of them publishes a newsletter (in addition to the slick main magazine). When you join (\$40 a year), you get to choose two SIGs to belong to (more than two costs extra). BCS' Mac SIG has more than 10,000 members and its newsletter, *The Active Window*, is excellent. In addition, it offers great tech support, advice on buying software and hardware, and occasional discounts to members for third-party items.

BMUG (EC). BMUG's motto is "We give away information." With more than 12,000 members all over the world, and offices in Berkeley and Boston, BMUG is truly a Mac institution. BMUG maintains an extensive shareware library, sends out a 500-page newsletter twice a year to its members, and offers tech support, hard disk salvaging, and a great BBS.

And Don't Forget...

The list of learning resources goes on and on....

On-line (SZA). Gone are the days when a modem was an "extra," bought only by professionals or the nerdiest of hobbyists. A modem is now, if not an absolute essential, certainly part of almost every basic computer setup.

Once you have a modem, you can get on-line. And once you're on-line, you can join tens of thousands of other Mac users asking questions, providing answers, and generally sharing information. Of the major on-line services, America Online is the biggest Mac-oriented company you can find. CompuServe's MAUG (Micronetted Apple User Group) section is incredibly active and staffed by a great collection of experts in all Mac fields. ZiffNet is Ziff Publications' on-line service—they're the people who bring you *MacUser* and *MacWEEK*.

The Mac Expo (SZA). There are trade shows for everything from motorcycles to florist supplies. The one that's devoted to the Macintosh, Macworld's Mac Expo, is held twice a year: January in San Francisco and August in Boston. The show is three to four days of vendors showing their wares, and experts showing their stuff at seminars. The price is a little stiff if you want to attend the seminars (almost \$60 for unlimited attendance) but is usually well worth it.