

Essence of the Hack

A near-random set of notes which may be of some use to you when thinking about writing a hack...

Brought to you by Scott Boyd and Greg Marriott at MacHack 92.

Material to spark conversation and questions with and from the audience.

Why?

- Home improvement

- Something new

- Fun

 - the surprise

 - the enriched experience

 - visual excitement

 - sonic excitement

How

- Patching traps

- Hooking into vectors

 - jGNEFilter

 - jCheckLoad

- Resource imposition

- Slamming code or data

How to win a hack contest

Parenthood — how to let go

Don'ts

Hacks of the past — Siskel and Egbert's Top Ten or So...

- Façade

 - Can you really patch CopyBits without sacrificing the performance of the machine?

 - Yes, if...

 - Bail out as soon as possible if this isn't your turn

 - check CurApName

 - check the most convincing parameters

 - source rect, dest rect

 - find other ways to know when to bail out by getting to know the specific situation you are patching.

 - can you count on what's on the stack?

 - can you patch some other trap that gets called only when you need to trigger?

 - Use good algorithms

 - If you're going to do something silly like test for icon equivalence, do something cool like sorting the icons first, then do a binary search.

 - Find a fast way to reject an icon as a match.

- ColorFinder

- FinderKeys

- ColorDesk

 - if it's not fast, it's not worth doing

- NetBunny

 - crashability takes the fun out of leaving a hack on someone else's machine (or your own, for that matter)

- Oscar

 - it seemed so obvious, why didn't someone do it earlier?

- Oscar the Grouch

 - painful lesson number two

 - if it's cute and little kids like it, make sure that it doesn't involve throwing things in the trash.

- MountImage

- FinderPict

- Bully

- SuperClock

Don't do more work than you have to. Drawing every time through works fine, but it isn't necessary. It draws once a second whether seconds are showing or not.
Patch the extra stuff if it avoids the unpleasant or unexpected disappearance of your enhancement. SuperClock patches DrawMenuBar and makes sure that it stays around.
You might not even notice the problem unless you turned off seconds display and did your drawing only once a minute, but then you'd notice entire minutes without the clock showing.

CommanderTabs

it's always a good clue when someone tells you it can't be done.

More Disk Space

Do not use facilities of the machine which Apple has not published.

Do not put your customers at risk of unpleasantness.

AshTray

a cool hack can be written overnight

Boomerang

VideoBeep

DoubleTrouble

we need more hacks that help us understand better what our machines are doing

they help us write better, longer-lasting code

why write it if it ain't gonna last?

DisposeResource

Switcharoo

Dimmer

AfterDark

how many bad things can we say about this? maybe we can get Tom Dowdy incited!

NoComment

MobalDialog

StandardGetFiles

How many ways can you do the same hack?

Darin's rule: A good programmer can always think of at least three different ways to do a hack.

Scott's corollary: A good programmer always thinks of at least three different ways to do a hack.

Do's

Check your error codes

Remember that there is more than one model of machine out there

Color vs. B/W

Monitors

Big screens vs. little screens

Machines with horsepower and those without

These differences can be both opportunities and limitations

Dues

Hacks are one way to pay your dues

Style

Hack and slash

Finesse

Perfection

Pure pragmatism

SIG(H)ack!

SIC(lub)Hack

Packaging

Number of files

User configurability

Hack Classification

Cool stuff that should have been in the system to begin with

RearWindow

OK, OK, OK

The existence proof

Neat toys that get annoying after five minutes

OK, OK, OK

Bug fixes for other people's boneheaded software

Stuff that you like

Stuff that you use

The hack that became system software