

MacPoint™ users' guide

by Rick Harrison

PURPOSE

MacPoint allows a Macintosh user to connect to certain electronic bulletin boards and download a compressed bundle of messages from selected conferences. (This is done using Z-Term, FreeTerm, Red Ryder, or any comm program the user likes.) Then, using MacPoint, the user can read and reply to these messages off-line, at leisure, without tying up his phone line and without racing against the bulletin board's time limit.

This system lets sysops have more users in the same amount of time since most of the message reading and replying takes place off-line instead of on-line. The user saves money if he is calling via long distance. In a way, this system is like a VideoCassette Recorder for echo-mail, because it gives the user more control of his time. You can even write a "script" for your comm program and have it pick up messages late at night, while you are asleep and the BBSes are easier to reach; then you can read and reply in the morning or afternoon, and have your replies sent back to the host BBS during the next automated late-night call.

Since the messages are compressed before being sent to the user, it is possible to receive and view a much larger volume of messages than you could if you were reading them one-by-one or scrolling them into a capture file while connected to the BBS. If you are exchanging messages about a deeply technical or philosophical matter, MacPoint gives you time to research and think about your assertions before entering them into the echo-mail system. The benefits are virtually endless...

LICENSE AGREEMENT

MacPoint is copyright ©1989 by Rick Harrison. All rights reserved. You are granted a license to try the software for a period of 15 days. After that, you may send in your shareware registration fee and receive a license to use the software in perpetuity.

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS

to use MacPoint, you will need:

1. a Macintosh computer with a modem
2. the MacPoint files: MacPoint, MacPoint.OL, Point.control
3. a good telecommunications program (like Z-Term or FreeTerm)
4. a program to decompress .ARC or .ZIP archives (recommended: ArcPop)
5. a bulletin board in your area that uses QuickBBS or TComm software and has installed Mike Ratledge's eXpress Response System (XRS & QMX).

WARRANTY

The author makes no warranties, either express or implied, regarding the software package, its merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose. As always, be sure to make backup copies of any irreplaceable data.

HOW TO USE MACPOINT

0. play with the sample files

If this is your first time using the program, give it a test drive. Put the MacPoint application in a folder along with the files called MacPoint.OL, Point.control, areas1.xrs, user1.xrs, and bat1mail.xrs. These sample files enable you to try out the program without actually downloading a message bundle from a BBS. Skip ahead to step 4.

1. contact your sysop

First, leave a message to the sysop of a BBS that runs the QuickBBS and QMX/XRS software. Inform the sysop that you are a Macintosh user, that you would like to use the XRS system, and that your replies will be uploaded in non-compressed ".PKT" format. (This is a technical difficulty caused by the impossibility of reliably creating 'archive' files on a Macintosh which can be de-compressed on an IBM clone.) If you don't understand all this jargon, just cut and paste the sample message below into a message to the sysop. The point is to get the sysop's permission to operate in this manner before proceeding.

Dear Sysop,

I am a Macintosh user and would like to experiment with MacPoint, a program which allows users to receive and reply to messages through the QMX/XRS set-up. I cannot create archived mailbags, however, I can create and upload non-compressed ".PKT" files. (You can automate the handling of these .PKTs simply by adding a line to your batch file that will move the incoming packets from your QMX directory to your incoming mail directory - the same thing you have to do now for the compressed mailbags; only the filenames are different.) The program has been tested successfully on boards that use the D'Bridge, Qecho, and ZmailQ echomail processors.

awaiting your permission,
(insert name here)

If you want the sysop to start carrying a particular conference that is not already on his BBS, say for example ECHOMAC, send him a polite request and offer to pay \$10 or so to help defray the long distance costs involved.

There's a good chance you downloaded this program from a QuickBBS bulletin board that already runs QMX/XRS and likes Macintosh users, but if you are having trouble locating a BBS that runs QuickBBS and QMX/XRS, most areas have a person or organization that compiles a list of BBSes in the area; try to find one of these lists; call around; leave a message on a BBS asking if anyone knows of such a board.

Orlando-area QuickBBS+QMX boards, as of 20 Oct 89, include:
Data Exchange II 297-8043 <- carries the EchoMac conference
Digital Connection 644-1318
NCC-1701 380-6446
The Revelation 856-0356
The Work Station 380-2893

2. Call the BBS and download messages.

Call your host BBS - the one that runs QuickBBS and XRS/QMX. Use the menu options to select the messages that you want, pack them into an archive, and download the file.

Some of the following instructions are adopted from the XRS documentation:

The program used on the host BBS side to select and download messages is called QuikPoint Mail eXpress or "QMX."

QMX enables the user to pack and download messages from selected echo conferences. First it asks if you have a MailBag to upload. If this is the first time you are using these programs, then of course answer "No". Usually you will have a new set of messages to upload back to the BBS. If so, select the protocol desired to upload the file. The software will prompt you for the filename {unless you are using the Z-modem protocol, in which case you select "send Z-modem" in your comm program's menu, then point and click at the file you want to send}.

The first time you use QMX, you should select the menu option that allows you to "Configure areas and protocol." You will be asked if you want to limit your selection to those message bases which currently have new messages in them; normally answer "No" to this. Then you go through the list of available message bases, also known as echoes, and answer Yes or No as to whether you want to receive each one.

When the programs prompt for the message number to start reading, you can accept the default by just hitting 'return', or select earlier messages by number.

Remember, your host BBS will give you a choice of data compression methods, usually PKArc, PKZip, and sometimes LHARC or PKPAK. Be sure to select an archiving method that can be unpacked on the Macintosh. Mac utility programs exist to de-compress files that were packed by PKARC and by PKZip. Check your local Mac-oriented BBS for the most recent un-archive utilities.

Now, download the resulting archived messages. Select from several different file transfer protocols, although Z-Modem is preferred. Be sure that enough space exists to receive the file if using diskettes instead of a hard drive.

Finally, if new messages have been read, QMX asks if the "Last Message Read" number should be updated; normally, always answer "Yes".

3. Unpack the message archive.

Log off of the bulletin board and quit from the communications program. Move the archived message file which you just received into the folder that contains MacPoint. Use the appropriate utility program to de-compress the message file. It will "explode" into several data files.

DO NOT enable the "eat linefeeds" option in your un-archiving program. MacPoint expects to find linefeeds in the files. I still recommend ArcPop because it saves all the files as type TEXT and gives you more control over where they end up than PKunZIP does, and also if you save an empty file called SUMMARY1.XRS and an empty file called MAIL1IDX.XRS in the MacPoint folder, ArcPop won't waste its time unpacking those particular files.

4. Double-click on the MacPoint icon to boot the program.

The file "Point.control" must be in the same folder as the MacPoint application. The other needed files (except bat1mail.xrs) will be opened automatically if they're in the same folder, otherwise, you will have to hunt for them with a file-find window. First you are shown a shareware notice, then the main menu.

5. Go through MacPoint's "log-on" procedure.

Square One, a.k.a. the main menu, consists of three buttons.

"Read the Echomail" enables you to read and reply to messages. "Build outgoing mail Packet" combines your replies into a file which you will upload back to your host BBS. "Go to Control Board" takes you from Square One to the Control Board, where you can manipulate all kinds of esoteric options. (To Quit to the Finder, use the Quit option in the "File" menu.)

Press the "Read echomail" button. MacPoint tries to open a bunch of files in a procedure which is explained in detail below. If you don't care about all these details, move on to the next step.

If the "MacPoint.OL" file is in the same folder as the application, MacPoint automatically reads its contents. This file came with the MacPoint program but you are welcome to modify it. It must consist of a phrase less than 50 characters long, followed by a carriage return. This phrase will appear in the "origin line" at the bottom of all your messages. (If the message archive you get from your host BBS includes a file named ORIGIN.XRS or XORIGIN.XRS, that file contains the origin line that your sysop wants you to use. If the MacPoint.OL file has been deleted or hidden, MacPoint will ask you to help it find the ORIGIN.XRS file. If you re-name XORIGIN.XRS to MacPoint.OL, the program will open it automatically.)

Next MacPoint tries to open the "USER1.XRS" file. Your name, your net, node and point numbers, and other vital data are extracted from this file. If MacPoint can't locate the file, you will be asked to locate it with a standard file-find window.

MacPoint displays your name and your origin line. (If you're using the sample files provided with the program, your name will be "Your Name Here".) If the information displayed is garbled or incorrect -- unlikely, but it could happen if you open the wrong files by accident -- click on the Abort button, otherwise click on Proceed.

Next MacPoint opens the "AREAS1.XRS" file, which contains a list of all the echo conferences you could potentially receive from your host BBS.

Next MacPoint asks you to select a "BAT1MAIL.XRS" file.

If you hit the "Cancel" button during any of these file-selection processes, you will be returned to Square One, the main menu.

If you have to hunt for any of these files with a file-find window, they must be of the file-type specified in the "Point.control" file. However, if they are all in the same folder as MacPoint, the program will open them automatically regardless of their file-type, except for "bat1mail.xrs" which must be opened manually.

6. Read and enter messages.

At this "point" you should arrive at the "Filtration Menu." Here you are presented with three message selection options: read all messages, read the messages in a selected echo, or only read messages addressed to you. Pick one of these options.

Now the first message appears on your screen. While a message is being printed to the screen, you have the option of hitting "P" to pause, "N" to skip to the next message, or "S" to stop reading messages. (Very similar to being on-line with a QuickBBS bulletin board.)

After the entire message is displayed, you are shown a mini-menu of options:
"R)reply N)ext E)nter A)gain D)isk H)ardcopy S)top"

NEXT: Displays the next message.

AGAIN: If you want to view that message again, hit "A."

HARDCOPY: This will cause the message to be transmitted to your printer. Make sure your printer is turned on, connected, loaded with paper, and selected. I've only tested this option on an ImageWriterII, in which case the print quality is controlled by the print quality button on the printer.

DISK: Another option, in which you hit "D" for Disk, has been added. This lets you save an incoming message to a text file on disk, in case you want to preserve, print, or edit it later on.

STOP: If you hit "S", you will go back to the filtration menu.

REPLY: Very similar to the reply option on a QuickBBS bulletin board. Your message is automatically addressed to the person who wrote the message to which you are replying. The "subject" remains the same.

You are given the option of beginning your message with a quote from the message to which you are replying. If you select "yes" to this option, the original message is displayed line by line, and you hit Q to quote the displayed line, N to skip to the next line, or S when you want to stop quoting and start writing.

You have to do all your quoting during this one pass at the beginning of your message. However, you can reply to various parts of the quote or break the quote into pieces by using the I)nsert-line option available during message composition.

ENTER: You can enter a message in any available "group" or "conference." You get to name the addressee and the subject. First you will have to select which echo to enter the message in, by scrolling through the list of echoes which your sysop has made available to you. Then type in your message. Automatic word-wrap has been provided. If you want put a "blank line" between paragraphs, enter a space then hit 'return.'

- * While you are composing a message, the Options menu in the menu-bar becomes active and the "Import text file" option is available. You can open any text file shorter than 7500 bytes, and less than 250 lines long; the file's contents will be inserted in your message. Opening a file that is empty or too large just results in a "beep."
- * The ability to import text files has many uses. A sysop is now able to store "stock answers" to frequently-asked questions and paste them into replies as needed. Using this textfile import option, you can add to your message a bit-mapped graphic image which has been converted to hexadecimal character strings. The hex'ed graphic should be the last thing in your message. Open the sample bat1mail.xrs file if you want to study an example. I haven't yet had time to write an accessory program to create these hex'ed images; any idle programmers out there interested in this project, contact me. Some info about the protocol has been included in the "HexPix info" folder.
- * You can now have true underlining in your messages. While you're typing in your message, use the code "^_" (caret followed by underscore) to begin underlining, and "_^" (underscore followed by caret) to end underlining. For example, if you type:

I read in ^_The Boston Globe_^ that this rookie is a ^_switch hitter_^

other people who read your message using MacPoint will see:

I read in The Boston Globe that this rookie is a switch hitter

As with QuickBBS, if you hit the 'return' key at the very beginning of a line, you will be shown a menu of options:

- C**)ontinue message : add some more lines
- I**)nsert a line : insert a new line into your message
- D**)elete a line : erases a specified line from your message
- E**)dit a line : allows you to correct spelling errors
- L**)ist message : shows your message as it is 'so far'
- S**)ave message : saves your message to disk
- A**)bort : discards your message and displays the next incoming message

The options in this menu behave very much like their counterparts on QuickBBS bulletin boards. If you have used QuickBBS to enter messages a few times, this will seem fairly familiar. With the Insert, Delete, and Edit options, if you enter a non-existent line number, the program will beep at you and display the menu again. You cannot Insert before line #1 of your message. (Is this a bug or a feature?)

7. Prepare your reply message bundle for upload to your host BBS.

When you reach the end of the incoming messages, the program gives you two beeps and returns you to the Filtration Menu. If you're through reading and replying, press the "back to Square One" button, then the "Build outgoing mail packet" button.

Each of the messages and replies that you entered and saved has been stored on disk. The filenames are eight digits followed by ".MSG". The eight digits represent the day, hour, minute, and second when you pressed the "S" key to save your message to disk. The ".MSG" files contain the text of your message plus various bytes of control data. (Note: the message files usually end up in the disk folder which contains the MacPoint application; their file type is "POIN".)

You and the MacPoint program select the ".MSG" files one by one and combine them into a ".PKT" file. Each ".MSG" file is automatically erased after being copied into a ".PKT". After you've added all the ".MSG" files, press the "cancel" button and the ".PKT" file will be closed. This file, which has a name ending with the suffix ".PKT", is also called your "mailbag" or your "message reply bundle."

Now you are done. Take the "Quit" option from the File menu and exit the program.

8. Next time you call your host BBS, upload your outgoing messages.

Be sure to upload your packet using a "binary" file transfer method -- DO NOT USE MACBINARY. The MacBinary protocol adds a header to the file which is being transferred; this would make it impossible for your host BBS to understand the data in your message packet. Some Mac comm programs habitually strip control characters from files which they think are text files - don't let this happen to your PKT file.

Note to Z-Term users: The file type of the .PKT, specified by an option in the Control Board, should be "zBIN." If you have the "Xfer Convert" option set to "Smart MacBinary," Z-Term will upload the zBIN-type .PKT file correctly (as binary and not as text or MacBinary), according to Dave Alverson. I've only tested this a few times but it seems to work.

Once you have finished reading and replying, be sure you upload your replies to the same board from which the original messages were downloaded. Your reply bundle contains links to messages to which you replied, so **never** upload to the wrong BBS! Be sure to delete your reply message bundle after transmitting it to your host BBS. If you send the same message bundle twice, duplicate messages might appear in the echoes, and this will cause the sysop to have a headache. Sending duplicates could cause you to lose your privileges on the BBS.

about the Control Board

The Control Board lets you fine-tune some echomail control data, and in the future, it **might** be used to initiate a sequence in which MacPoint dials up the boss node via modem and automatically exchanges mail packets. The latter feature will only be implemented if I can afford to take the necessary time to work on it, so send in those shareware fees and donations and don't forget me at Christmas time. Here's what the Control board settings do:

font/window

<input checked="" type="radio"/> Monaco	
<input type="radio"/> Courier	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 9 pt	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 504
<input type="radio"/> 10	<input type="radio"/> 560
<input type="radio"/> 12	<input type="radio"/> 672
<input type="radio"/> 18	<input type="radio"/> 900

The font/window section gives you a choice of fonts and font sizes, and also window sizes. Window width options are shown; window height is always 2/3 of width.

HRS:

.PKT:

The edit fields shown above are where you set the expected file type of the incoming XRS files, and the desired file type for the outgoing .PKT mailbags. For Z-Term users, "zBIN" is recommended for the latter setting.

user key

2A3E01

Registered users are mailed a 6 character hex string called the "user key." This will turn on extra features in program versions after 0.97.

30027/#

The PKT is marked as originating from a fake pointnet. You can pick 30027, the same net number used by XRS, or 31407, a number I pulled out of thin air.

31407/#

seen-by: host

MacPoint, like XRS, normally puts your host board's net/node number in the seen-bys.

seen-by: fake net

If your sysop requests, you can switch to putting the fakenet/point number in the seen-bys.

AREA: TAG

MacPoint, like XRS, normally puts a space between "AREA:" and the echo tag. If your sysop's mail tosser gags on this, press the second button shown here.

AREA:TAG

These items will only become meaningful if and when MacPoint acquires "true point capabilities."

ATZ

Modem initialization string.

ATDT 911

Dialout string: usually "ATDT " followed by host board's phone number.

PASSWORD

The password used by your point when communicating with your host board.

300 baud

Baud rate setting for the data transfer.

1200 baud

2400 baud

Dial Boss Node

(feature not implemented yet)

Defaults

Restores the default settings.

Save Settings

Saves your settings to the "Point.control" file. If you've changed any of the edit fields' contents, you must save the changes before they will take effect.

Square One

Takes you back to Square One.

SHAREWARE

Sending in your shareware registration fee will make it possible for me to work on enhancements to this program.

THANKS

Thanks for specimen files, technical data and assorted assistance to:

Tony Austinson at 1:282/22
Richard Creighton at 1:363/34
Glenn Davis at first base
Mac Druaidh at 23:1/1
Allen Fitzsimmons at 1:363/47
Steve Gabrilowitz at 1:363/1701
Eric Larson at 1:260/330
Dale Nimnicht at 1:363/31
Mike Ratledge at QMX/XRS headquarters
Frank Sledge at SBHQ

CONTACTING THE AUTHOR

I can be reached via US Mail at the address below. I also monitor the ECHOMAC and QMX_XRS conferences, and will try to monitor MacComm. I receive NetMail at 1:363/31.

Shareware Registration Form 0.97a2

make checks payable to: Rick Harrison
mail to: Box 547014, Orlando FL 32854

Enclosed is \$5. Keep up the good work and please notify me when updated versions are released. (The \$5 registration gives you the right to use all shareware versions of the program, which will be distributed via BBSes.)

Enclosed is a generous donation of \$_____

name: _____

mailing address: _____

city, state and ZIP: _____

bug report or suggestion (as detailed as possible, please):

end of file

