



Michael Schubach

CHTP, CHAE, Chief Information Officer
Trump Hotel Collection

MAC ATTACK

Impulse Buy, Lifestyle Change

It was December, 2007. My last generation laptop was dying and I'd decided to give myself a replacement for Christmas, mostly because I'd been so good all year long. Ordinarily I'd be thrilled both at my gift-giving generosity and the fun of acquiring a swell new plaything, but this time I was apprehensive. New laptops were being delivered with Vista® and I knew I'd be forcing myself through a new learning curve. I would have to start again from scratch with new applications sitting over Vista, a platform about which I'd heard nothing but horror stories for months. I hesitated pulling the trigger, not looking forward to what was to come.

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On a gift-buying trip to the mall, I impulse shopped my way into an Apple® store. I was amazed: stylish hardware and software integration represented by a staff loaded with enthusiasm, helpfulness and a genuine desire for customers not just to purchase a Mac®, but to join an exclusive club of those who understand — really understand — the coolness of technology. The Apple store is a right brain experience that appeals to the artist that lurks inside the technician, and Mac products fulfill the promise made by the popular computing revolution of the '80s.

My heart wanted the Mac® but my head knew that I was hopelessly committed to Microsoft's Office® automation. I had a career's worth of Word™ documents, Excel® spreadsheets and PowerPoint® presentations that I couldn't forego in the name of newfound love. That problem was very simply solved with the Mac version of Office. True, it takes a few minutes to orient oneself to the changes in layout and iconography, but that was half the struggle I had moving from Office 97 to Office 2007. (P.S. Whose bad idea was Office 2007? It has all the same functionality as Office 97 except that now the features are skillfully hidden to prevent you from accidentally using them as you work. I feel trapped by the application, and that's exactly the feeling that causes Microsoft misfits to want to jump ship.)

Nonetheless, as my Apple expert reassured me with the Mac® version of Office®, he asked if I would like to see Apple's version of office automation. He showed me Pages®, which is Mac-speak for Word®, and asked me what I liked least about Word. Admittedly, I am half as good at Word as I should be: I can type but can't do a lot of the fancy stuff that seems to suggest an abundance of spare time. I struggle with images in Word documents, specifically getting pictures to actually appear where on the page I want them

and getting them to stay there as I amend the text. Yes, there are anchors and text boxes and margin lines and paragraph markers and secret ways to con the application, but it's all rather painful to those of us with intermittent demand and who steadfastly refuse to buy a book or follow directions. My Apple expert said, "Watch this," and dragged a photo from the top to the bottom of a text-filled Pages® document. The text parted like the Red Sea, making way for the photo bubble as it made its way down the page. The photo could be positioned anywhere on the page; each line healed seamlessly as the bubble passed. The office automation suite from Mac was a quarter of the price of Microsoft Office®.

But he had me at "watch this."

When I bought the Mac I signed up for lessons and tutorials and voice assistance and haven't used a tenth of what I opulently over-purchased. Truthfully, I'm still a Mac idiot, but even knowing as little I know, I love using my Mac. In the first few days of ownership I downloaded photos, put them into a move format, added a soundtrack from my iTunes®, edited in stock sunsets, glossy transitions and special effects ("FX" to us Hollywood Mac types) and I still don't know what half of the buttons do. I started using the GarageBand® application that comes standard on the Mac. GarageBand is designed to let you record your own voice or instrument input, edit in prerecorded loops, set tempos and arrange your own recordings. You export your tunes to iTunes and burn CDs for your adoring public. My favorite GarageBand feature is that I can edit CD tracks to get out the boring parts. Any fumbling fool can delete a CD track; it takes a Mac user to reduce a three-hour soundtrack down to the really good 12 minutes.

Mac's standard Time Machine™ backup utility writes to an external terabyte drive (which also has a wireless router for home networking. Mac backs up automatically and allows you to step quickly and effortlessly back through time to recapture any file on your machine as it stood at any end of any one day. Like everything Mac, it is a thing of great beauty.

I watch network television, movies (Mac has its own remote control) and theatrical trailers on Mac. I work and play in Mac land and I've joined the ranks of the true believers. I paid handsomely for my machine, and feel well rewarded for my investment. Now, if I can just figure out what all those other buttons do...