

The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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BITS & BYTES

Apple's OS V10.6 – Snow Leopard

By Chris Tarr

On Friday, August 28th 2009, Apple released the long awaited update to its OS X operating system, version 10.6, code-named “Snow Leopard.” Since then the burning question for Mac users is whether or not to upgrade.



A LEAN CAT

On the surface, Snow Leopard appears to be nothing more than a service pack to the original Leopard (OS X 10.5). Even the price (\$29) leads people to believe that there is not much going on under the hood. The reality, however, is that there have been some significant changes; while some are minor, others stand to be game changers to a certain subset of users.

The first thing you will notice when installing the upgrade is that if you are still on the PowerPC platform (G4/G5 processors) you will not be able to install Snow Leopard. Apple has finally ended OS upgrades for the legacy, non-Intel hardware.

The flip-side to this coin is that it eliminates the necessity for “universal” code, making the installation much leaner. Coupled with the move to an “on-demand” printer driver installation (the previous versions installed all available print drivers by default), you will find that you stand to gain back 7 to 15 GB of drive space on an upgrade. And that is not a bad deal!

Installation is pretty straightforward. Unlike the Microsoft Windows series, there is one version of Snow Leopard. The upgrade preserves your settings, programs, and files as you have them,

64-BIT SPEED

Secondly, OS X has finally moved to a full 64-bit platform, which means that some Macs will run the OS X kernel itself at 64-bit, while others will be able to run 64-bit applications. For some users this will allow for better memory management.

Thanks to another “under the hood” upgrade, applications written to take advantage of 64-bit processing – especially processor-intensive apps – will run noticeably faster. Apple refers to this technology as “Grand Central Dispatch.” It allows developers to optimize their code to take advantage of the newer multi-core processors that power today’s computers.

EXCHANGE SUPPORT AND OTHER FEATURES

Moving on to more everyday upgrades, a huge benefit to Snow Leopard is the new Exchange support. If your office uses Exchange and Outlook like mine, you are going to be excited about this! Finally Mac’s built-in applications such as Mail.app, Address Book, and Calendar, can sync with Exchange servers. This means you no longer have to settle for OWA (Outlook Web Access) or Entourage for your email, contacts, and calendars.

Another nice, though controversial, addition is the ability for OS X to automatically scan downloaded packages for viruses. While there are no OS X viruses in the wild, it is nice to have the added ability in the event activity picks up.

Other minor changes includes a new format for stacks, making its use a bit more intuitive by allowing for larger icons and scrolling from within the stacks window, and a smarter quick-view which allows for previewing of more file types.



Snow Leopard contains a couple of useful utilities. One is called “Substitutions” – it is something similar to Word’s auto-correct feature. Substitutions also works with Apple’s email and other programs. And Snow Leopard can be set to automatically display the correct time zone when you are travelling.

NIT-PICKS

Are there any problems you should know about?

Well, like the first version of every new OS update, there are a few bugs. The original Snow Leopard shipped with an older, non-secure version of Flash. In response, Apple quickly pushed a 10.6.1 update to address this as well as some other quirks.

Another problem is that due to the deep changes to OS X’s inner workings, there are some applications that do not play well or are completely broken after the upgrade. I strongly recommend that you check the compatibility of any critical programs that you have *before* doing the upgrade.

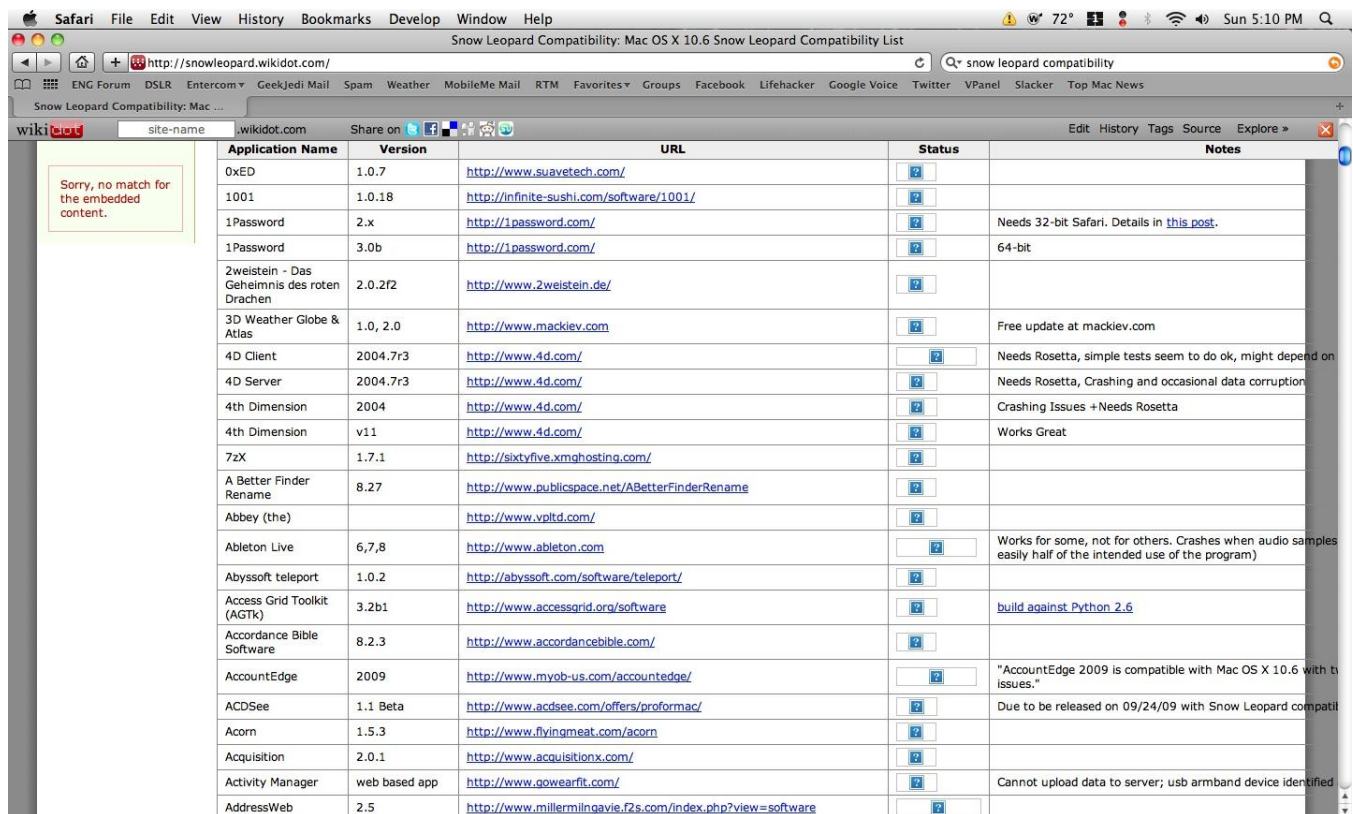
Here is one for those of you in radio production: ProTools *is* compatible, though some plug-ins are not.

UTILIZE A SMART UPGRADE POLICY

As with any OS upgrade, I recommend that you pick one “beta machine” to install the upgrade, just to make sure nothing is broken before you do the rest. Furthermore, some people prefer to wait until the first major update is released, just to make sure the major bugs are squashed. Either method is acceptable if you are risk-averse.

To help check for any potential problems with the programs on my machines, I found a great resource online at <http://snowleopard.wikidot.com/> This wiki lists many programs and advises as to how they will run on Snow Leopard. I found that out of the five or six programs I had that were not compatible, all but one had updates listed that fixed any issues.

The site is fairly comprehensive:



Application Name	Version	URL	Status	Notes
0xED	1.0.7	http://www.suavetech.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
1001	1.0.18	http://infinite-sushi.com/software/1001/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
1Password	2.x	http://1password.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Needs 32-bit Safari. Details in this post .
1Password	3.0b	http://1password.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	64-bit
2weistein - Das Geheimnis des roten Drachen	2.0.2f2	http://www.2weistein.de/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3D Weather Globe & Atlas	1.0, 2.0	http://www.mackiev.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	Free update at mackiev.com
4D Client	2004.7r3	http://www.4d.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Needs Rosetta, simple tests seem to do ok, might depend on
4D Server	2004.7r3	http://www.4d.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Needs Rosetta, Crashing and occasional data corruption
4th Dimension	2004	http://www.4d.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crashing Issues + Needs Rosetta
4th Dimension	v11	http://www.4d.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Works Great
7zX	1.7.1	http://sixtyfive.xmghosting.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A Better Finder Rename	8.27	http://www.publicspace.net/ABetterFinderRename	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Abbey (the)		http://www.vpltd.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ableton Live	6,7,8	http://www.ableton.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	Works for some, not for others. Crashes when audio samples easily half of the intended use of the program)
Abysoft teleport	1.0.2	http://abysoft.com/software/teleport/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Access Grid Toolkit (AGTK)	3.2b1	http://www.accessgrid.org/software	<input type="checkbox"/>	build against Python 2.6
Accordance Bible Software	8.2.3	http://www.accordancebible.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
AccountEdge	2009	http://www.myob-us.com/accountedge/	<input type="checkbox"/>	"AccountEdge 2009 is compatible with Mac OS X 10.6 with t issues."
ACDSee	1.1 Beta	http://www.acdsee.com/offers/proformac/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Due to be released on 09/24/09 with Snow Leopard compati
Acorn	1.5.3	http://www.livingmeat.com/acorn	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Acquisition	2.0.1	http://www.acquisitionx.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Activity Manager	web based app	http://www.qowearfit.com/	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cannot upload data to server; usb armband device identified
AddressWeb	2.5	http://www.millerlingavie.f2s.com/index.php?view=software	<input type="checkbox"/>	

I upgraded to Snow Leopard when it was released (I am a fearless guy!) and so far I have been happy. In doing the upgrade on my old MacBook, I gained back about 12 GB of drive space. I have found things to be much snappier, though not without a few annoyances, such as Safari’s new propensity to freeze and “beach ball” for 10 seconds or so, once or twice a day. That aside, I have had no major issues.

Since then, I have upgraded to a MacBook Pro with a clean installation of Snow Leopard, and have had the exact same experience (“beach balls” and all) so I can say that an upgrade or clean install will yield the same results.

A quick note about backups: While Mac OS installations are usually problem free, it is always a good idea to do a backup before an OS upgrade. In fact, it is good to do before OS updates as well.

You might consider using either the built-in Apple Time Machine backup system, or try a free program such as Carbon Copy Cloner from <http://www.bombich.com/software/ccc.html> before making the changes. Either way, you will be able to easily roll back your installation if anything goes wrong.

I am looking forward to seeing how Snow Leopard matures. It may look like a service pack, but Apple smartly took a mature operating system and made some fine low level changes that will allow it to continue to grow and improve. If you are a Mac fan such as I am, the future of OS X definitely looks bright!

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