

Organize your student life

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Friday, 16 June 2006

Being a high-schooler nowadays comes with plenty of responsibilities, and most of us have never been formally taught how to deal with the endless pressures of being in school and the work that it entails. We have all tried to slosh through everything, running around from project to project, day after day. Whether you just need to finish your daily history assignment or are applying to colleges, things have to get done no matter what. And what better way to get things done than on a computer? Computers have become standard equipment in most homes so there is no reason one should not take advantage of their many uses. This article will do just that: it will outline several different applications and solutions to help the average student with their daily school life. Most of these programs are "shareware" applications, meaning that you can try them out for a period of time and then you must pay and register to continue using them.

First on the list is Yojimbo (\$29 for students), a complete organization tool from Bare Bones Software. A strange name, yes, but this is easily one of the best products of this article. Put simply, Yojimbo is a program for your Mac that does what your notebook, desk, and filing cabinet (for those of you that even use them) all do already; it stores information. Except this information is in digital form (not that you expected to toss some paper at your computer and have Yojimbo remember it, right?). Yojimbo will store notes, passwords, serial numbers, bookmarks, archives, and with the ability to create new categories, pretty much anything you can throw at it (again, not literally). Browsing Wikipedia for information for your next report but don't really want to write anything right this moment? Copy the text and/or URL to the clipboard (Apple-C) then hit the F8 button and it will be automatically filed into the correct Category in Yojimbo. Simple as that. No need to pull up a Microsoft Word document to save all your notes and ideas. This is as easy as it gets and Yojimbo excels at it. Another way to organize your information within Yojimbo is to create a Collection for each of your classes. You can then color code each item by due date, priority, or any other way to make the information overload easier to manage. This program is so revolutionary and so easy to use that nearly every student can find a use for it.

This next piece of software could be considered a direct competitor to Yojimbo, if only because of its organizational functionality. Flying Meat's VoodooPad (\$24.95) is a highly useful program for organizing your thoughts. It differs substantially from Yojimbo in that VoodooPad is more free flowing while Yojimbo has more structure in its organization. VoodooPad works along the lines of a Wiki, in that pages link to each other. On your main page, which serves as 'home base,' you highlight words or sentences and create a new page by clicking the appropriately titled "Link" button. You are then redirected to the new page and can start adding more information. Pages spawn from other pages so you will have a digital tree of sorts, all leading back to the main page. Again, running along the same lines as the Yojimbo program, you could create a page for each class then list homework assignments, projects, and tests, all with helpful links to websites or images to refresh your memory. This will create an extremely helpful command center for your schoolwork and other thoughts.

For the mobile student (or the forgetful) this next program might be of great use. Packrat (\$24.95) from infiniteNIL is a program that works in conjunction with Backpackit.com, an organizational site that allows you to create our own online account and set up pages, lists, notes and reminders. The reminders function can send an email to you and/or a text message to your cell phone. This is easily the best part of the Backpack service because you can set up reminders so you will never forget anything again. Keep forgetting to pick up your missed assignments? Not a problem. Schedule a reminder in Packrat for the time during which you will be in the class and forget about it until you get the text. Need to remember to pay someone back for that dollar you borrowed to get a Reeces Fastbreak but always miss the chance? Let Packrat do it for you. Another advantage to Packrat is that it stores a copy of your Backpack account on your hard drive. This is advantageous if you are ever disconnected from the Internet because you can continue to make notes and lists and then simply sync with Backpack as soon as you go back online. This kind of functionality is indispensable for the student on the go, something that we are seeing in increasing amounts these days.

Objectpark Software's MenuCalendarClock (\$18.95) is an excellent system-wide add-on to your Mac. Like the name says, it is a calendar (and a clock if you choose) that sits right up top in your menu bar, unobtrusive until clicked on. A minor but still relatively common complaint about the Mac is that iCal does not show the current date in the dock icon unless it is open. MenuCalendarClock solves this by always displaying the current date, whether or not iCal is open. In addition, when you click on the icon, a mini calendar drops down with all of your scheduled events in iCal on the calendar. This is quite handy for students who use iCal for scheduling but don't want to always have it open.

For those wanting to support or participate in the open source movement, Adium (free) is the premier chat client. For students, it is ideal mainly because of its support for tabbed chatting. Along the lines of shifting from handfuls of open web browser pages to a single, tabbed interface, one will immediately recognize that tabs are the next big thing in terms of chatting. Adium also supports all of the major chat networks, such as Yahoo! Messenger, AOL Instant Messenger and MSN Chat. This is a great feature that allows Adium to be your central chat client, without resorting to separate programs for multiple accounts.

Text is important to every student, no matter what his or her area of study is. But for the Mac, the most popular text editors and word processors are either bloated in their functionality or running on significantly slower technology. Take Microsoft Word for example: The average student does not need most of its advanced features, yet every time Word boots up it loads the necessary resources to access these features, sucking precious processing power from your system. Word is an even less than decent choice for those running new Intel Macs because it must run under Rosetta, which hogs even more resources. Fortunately, there is something that does not weigh down your system like Word, but has much more functionality than the Apple-bundled Text Editor. From Macromates comes TextMate (€39, about \$50), which is considered by many in the Mac community the Holy Grail of text editors. It combines simplicity and power into one package that TextWrangler or BBEdit can't even touch. Even though most people use TextMate for programming and coding, students can use it to draft outlines, papers, and stories. Many people enjoy using TextMate more so than Word because TextMate has a much better Mac OS X feel to it, something that Word desperately lacks. TextMate is quick to start, so you know that once you click it's icon you can begin writing in a matter of seconds, important if ideas flutter through your head and you need a quick way to capture them.

Making intelligent backups can be the Achilles heel of every well-to-do student. Everyone thinks that it won't happen to them but it's this very mindset that will get you in trouble. It would help to think of the most mission-critical files on your computer when you are beginning backing up. If you're a student, this will usually be your Documents folder. With SuperDuper! (\$27.95) from Shirt Pocket, backing up is made simple. Along with some of its more advanced features such as cloning your entire hard drive and scheduled backups, SuperDuper! will back up your Documents folder to another hard drive or even a flash drive for on the go access to all of your documents. Students will love this feature, because they can keep up to date copies of all of their files on their flash drive, to use at school or a friends house.

TextExpander (\$29.95) from SmileOnMyMac is a program that recently created a fair amount of controversy and discussion around the Internet. Initially, TextExpander belonged to Peter Maurer, and also used to be called Textpander. He then sold the program to SmileOnMyMac, which is partially based here in Portland. The catch? Textpander used to be free, but now is sold for \$29.95. Is the software worth the new cost? From a student's point of view, absolutely. Again, working along the knowledge that students rely on text like they rely on caffeine, TextExpander is indispensable. With the ability to insert snippets of text with a few short keystrokes, typing repetitive documents becomes easy. For example: for every document you write, you are usually required to type your name, the teachers name, period, date, and so on. By setting TextExpander to automatically insert these with just a few characters, you will continually save time on every report you write.

In the genre of web browsers, there are literally dozens to choose from. From Safari to Camino, one stands head and shoulders above the rest: OmniWeb. From the OmniGroup comes OmniWeb (\$19.95 for students), a web browser packed with features that propel it to the top. With live-preview tabs to excellent OS X integration, it's no wonder why OmniWeb is the browser of choice for many. Students will love the simplistic style that, like Apple's campaign slogan, "just works." A combination of OmniWeb with Yojimbo would prove to be a killer combo for completing late night assignments. Other OmniGroup applications include OmniGraffle and OmniOutliner, both of which could also be perfect for student use.

Overall, there is a lot of software for the Mac that can make a students life easier. From organizing information to typing up reports, there is something for everyone out there. No matter what your style is for getting things done, the Mac is a platform that will outperform and outdo your expectations with the help of third-party applications. Everyone wants to get things done quicker and more efficiently these days, so why don't you start looking around and try some of these superb programs? You never know what you may find.