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Views,
Tips and
Cool Techniques
for CCC Members

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We
speak
Geek,
so you
don't
have to.

Is Tiger Ready to Roar?

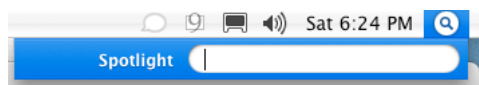
In a word, no. Sad to say, but Mac OS X 10.4, nicknamed “Tiger”, is, so far, the most problematic Mac operating system upgrade since the *Mac OS X Public Beta* five years ago.

A computer's operating system is its most important software. The operating system (OS) turns the computer from a mass of inert metal, plastic and silicon into a real tool. The OS underlies all processes. So, if the OS is bad, everything on your Mac is compromised.

The previous Mac OS X big cats, *Puma* (10.1), *Jaguar* (10.2) and *Panther* (10.3) brought improvements to Mac OS. Each also had problems but these mostly affected folks who didn't practice good upgrade “hygiene” (see CCC News June, 2004) or these problems were expected allowing users to be prepared and to compensate. *Tiger* (10.4) problems, however, caught many of us by surprise.

Much of the surprise, came as a result of reviews in the computer press that have praised the new operating system with very few reservations. After six weeks of *Tiger*, I am wondering what new OS those reviewers were using!

The most talked about new feature in *Tiger* is the *Spotlight* search function. *Spotlight* puts a small magnifying glass icon in the menu bar. Clicking on this icon produces a field



into which you can type information about what you want to find in your Mac. *Spotlight* attempts to search simultaneously through your documents, emails, bookmarks, logs, caches, etc. for anything that matches your request. It returns a list of results that you can view and pick out what you like. Nice in theory, *but it doesn't work!* *Spotlight* isn't as fast, accurate or easy to use as previous find functions in *Jaguar* and *Panther*.

An example. A client emailed about a potential virus problem (No, it wasn't. *There are no Mac OS X viruses.*). I recalled that I had answered this question for another client recently and tried to use *Spotlight* to find that previous email. To do so, I searched on the word “virus.” *Spotlight* returned almost 300 results, 14 of which were emails, all 14 being email newsletters from discussion groups that I subscribe to. Not one email from me or to me was found. Knowing full well that I have written many emails on the subject of viruses, I launched *Mail.app* and used its built-in search function to look for my lost emails. To my surprise, *Spotlight* has usurped *Mail's* search ability. The result was the same.

So, with no alternative, I manually reviewed emails starting one year ago (I keep handy a year's worth of email). About an hour later, I had found the email I was looking for and several more containing the word virus. The old *Mail* search function always found these things instantly and accurately.

Spotlight works by creating an index of the files on your drives. In so doing several bad side effects occur. First, indexing is a slow and disruptive process on older Macs and Macs that have minimal memory. Secondly, databases cannot be searched internally. Applications that use database files like email, *Quicken*, address books, must be rewritten to accommodate *Spotlight*. This rewriting has been done for the Apple *Mail* and *Address Book* applications, but other email applications like *Entourage* and *Netscape Mail* are not searchable. In re-writing how *Mail* and *Address Book* store their data, it was necessary to duplicate all of the data so that there are now two versions, one for the application's use and one for *Spotlight's* use. This has caused the data for these applications to double in size. And, so, my *Mail* backup no longer fits on its backup disk.

Also, because of the indexing, when I insert a backup disk, *Spotlight* insists on trying to index it. I then must take the time to stop the indexing. *Spotlight* is supposed to be instructable, so it should be possible to tell it not to index the backup disks. Unfortunately, *Spotlight* forgets to exclude the disks as soon as they are ejected and indexes them the next time they are inserted.

While not finding things that it is supposed to easily find is the worst failing of *Spotlight*, the second worst is that searching now is a multi-step process where one step sufficed before.

There's much more wrong with *Spotlight*, but space is limited. So, what other problems have I found with *Tiger*? Here's a partial list:

- Soon after install, my Home folder broke down and I had to delete my user account and create a new one (a huge job).
- An external Firewire drive was destroyed with loss of all data.
- *Mail.app* has been redesigned with tiny toolbar buttons, hard to read window layout, requires opening a separate window to see progress in sending and receiving and is unreliable when managing mail from IMAP email accounts (like .Mac).

- *Mail.app* is unreliable when placing picture attachments inline (so that they show in the body of the email). Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.
- A high-pitched squeal emanates from my Mac when objects move on screen (such as when moving icons on the Desktop, animated ads on web pages or cards in solitaire). The sound is somewhat akin to fingernails on a blackboard though not terribly loud. The sound is caused by changes in the software that drives my Mac's video card (video cards are used by all computers to create the image that is seen on the computer's screen).
- *Tiger* adds audio cues to many *Finder* functions (such as the sound of paper crumpling when the Trash is emptied). These sounds are cute for a day or two, but when you get tired of them, they cannot be turned off!
- Font menus are broken in several applications with gibberish font names appearing and other fonts going missing.
- Dashboard widgets could be used to attack your Mac remotely (fixed with the 10.4.1 update).
- Dashboard is very clumsy and many widgets do not function well or at all. The *Dictionary* widget is a good

example. You can use the *Dictionary* widget to look up a word, but you can't view the result and the document you are working on at the same time. You can see the widget or you can see your document, but not both.

- Screenshots (pictures of how your Mac's screen looks) are no longer saved as *.pdf* files, but as *.png* files. While *.png* files are a bit smaller, they are not universally compatible like *.pdf* files. This means that you must often do the many steps necessary to convert the the screenshot from *.png* to *.pdf*.

These are just some of the problems of *Tiger*. Apple's tech support is getting tired of talking to me, but they have not yet been able to address any of these or other concerns. It is a very, disappointing mess. I have every confidence that this will be cleared up in time, but for now, please avoid Mac OS X 10.4 *Tiger*.

Breaking News —

Hell has frozen over. Apple announces the move from PowerPC to Intel microprocessors. The conversion will take approximately two years with the first Intel-based Macs appearing this time next year. For more information go to:

<http://www.calcompcare.com/breakingnews.html>

California Computer Care

P.O. Box 9445

Santa Rosa, CA 95405

(800) 540-8989

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