

# California Computer Care

News,  
Views,  
Tips and  
Cool Techniques  
for CCC Members

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

## Should You Upgrade?

Your Mac is acting a little old and slow; you feel that it could do better. If you are still using Mac OS 9 or are missing important features like USB and Firewire, you are being left behind technologically. Should you stand pat? Buy a new Mac? Or increase the capabilities of your current Mac?

Ask yourself these three questions:

1) **Can I do everything that I want to do as easily as it can be done?**

*If you answered yes to this question, you would be wise to stand pat. Of course, sometimes wisdom succumbs to lust for the new and cool. If that desire is stronger than the pitfalls of expense, transferring files, needing to get new versions of software and/or hardware for compatibility and installing tons of it, then by all means, go for it!*

However, if you answered no, go on to question 2.

2) **Do I need to use new hardware or software that my current Mac can't handle?**

*If you answered yes to this question, there's no argument; you must upgrade. The question then becomes: In what way?*

If you answered no; see question 3.

3) **Do I have new goals and projects that my current Mac wasn't designed to do?**

*If you answered yes to this question, then ask: Would a new Mac do all that I need to do? If you have very specific tasks and goals, it may be better to add a second Mac for the new tasks rather than upgrading and trying to do everything with one machine. For instance, you may have an iMac that surfs the internet as well as you'd like, but for a new job you need a Powerbook that can travel with you. Adding the Powerbook will give you the portability your job needs without sacrificing the comfort of the familiar iMac.*

If you answered no; go back to question 1.

Ways to upgrade, differ depending on your goals. Perhaps you need more memory to run a new piece of software. Mac OS X requires at least 512MB and really shines with 1GB of memory. So, unless your Mac is already stuffed as full of memory as it can be, this is a worthwhile upgrade. RAM is inexpensive now (256MB for most Macs is only \$60.00) and adding RAM changes nothing else about your machine.

Like adding more RAM, adding additional hard drives for storage space can be simple on those Macs that can accommodate more than one. G3, G4 and G5 towers can have two to four separate, internal hard disk drives. iMacs and Powerbooks cannot have more than one internal hard drive, but you can replace small hard drives with larger ones. Hard drives are inexpensive as well. Keep in mind that, ideally, you want to have your Mac's hard drive at least 25% empty. So, if that hard drive is filling up quickly with music, movies and pictures, a bigger or second drive is necessary. 120GB IDE hard drives start at about \$100.00.

Many folks find that they need to upgrade their operating system (OS) for compatibility with new software. This upgrade should be done cautiously and only when absolutely necessary. Doing so can require a cascade of other upgrades and change the way you interact with your Mac. If your Mac is over four years old and you want to upgrade to Mac OS X, it would be best to buy a brand new Mac. Macs less than four years old already have Mac OS X. However, if your Mac OS X is version 10.0 or 10.1 upgrading is virtually mandatory.

If faster speeds are wanted, processor upgrades are available for most Macs. Power Macs are the most cost effective Macs for processor upgrades. G4 and G5 upgrades

are readily available and will give a substantial boost. Costs for these upgrades begin at about \$200.00. They are straight forward to install and cause no changes in the way you work with your machine (except it is faster, of course!). Add RAM and a larger, faster hard drive at the same time, and your rejuvenated Mac may improve the equivalent of a generation at a fraction of the cost of a new machine.

Other popular upgrades include:

**DVD burning optical drives.** The new double-sided DVD drives double the storage capacity of older drives (up to 8.5GB on one disk!) and also are great for burning CDs and watching movies.

**Video display cards (see this month's tip).** Many of the features of Mac OS X 10.3 and 10.4 are best seen with powerful video display cards. Top of the line games need them, too. High quality video cards cost \$200.00 and up.

**USB and Firewire ports.** There never seems to be enough of them! USB and Firewire expansion cards can be added internally to G3, G4 and G5 tower Macs and most Powerbooks.

If you have upgrade questions, please call or email us for more information and help assessing what you need. 800-540-8989 or [curt@calcompcare.com](mailto:curt@calcompcare.com).

## Software Upgrades to Beware Of!

Look out for these current upgrades:

**Mac OS X 10.4:** Fine when factory installed, Mac OS X 10.4 (Tiger) is no pussycat when installed over previous Mac OS X versions. See CCC News June and August 2005.

**iTunes 5:** Windows users are having many problems with iTunes 5. Mac users are having a much better upgrade experience. A bug fix is due soon.

**QuickTime 7.0.2:** Problems have been serious enough that Apple has created a de-installer that returns affected users to QuickTime 7.0.1.

**Adobe Creative Suite 2 (CS2):** many very serious performance problems with little acknowledgement by Adobe.

**Stuffit Deluxe 10:** Installation and performance problems. A special installation workaround is often necessary.

OOPS! I made an error in the August CCC News. I referred to a forthcoming 10.3 upgrade to Mac OS X 10.4. That should have read: *10.4.3 is expected to ship in a week or two...* Sorry for the confusion. (Oh, yeah, it hasn't.)

## September Tip—

What is a *video display card*? (AKA *graphics card*) Despite the name, it has nothing to do with TV shows.

Your Mac uses a monitor (screen) to display your work. Older monitors looked like TVs and worked like TVs to display images (these days, flat panel TVs act like computer monitors, but that's another story.). The electronic circuitry in your Mac, used to put the image on your monitor's screen, is technologically similar to your TV. Computer or TV, both use video technology to do their job.

G3, G4 and G5 Tower Macs have the video circuitry on a removable, replaceable part called a *video display card* ("card," because it is flat and thin like a piece of cardboard). Usually, the factory installed video display card is a low to middling model chosen to keep the computer's price down.

If fast graphics performance or complex games are what you need, replacing the video display card with a better version will produce a huge improvement in performance.

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