

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?

It's time, again, to ask the \$1000.00± question. Should you upgrade the software on your Mac, replace your Mac with an newer, upgraded model or stand pat with ol' reliable?

These days most folks are motivated to upgrade by the internet. Web technologies, media players (*FlashPlayer*, *Quicktime*) and security requirements are constantly being improved, forcing users to upgrade so as to remain compatible with their favorite sites.

Ask yourself these three questions:

1) Can I do everything that I want to do?

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 and installing tons of it, then by all means, have a go!

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 or software 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 is fine at home, but for a new task you need a MacBook that can travel with you. Adding the MacBook will give you portability without sacrificing the comfort of the familiar iMac.

If you answered no; see question 1.

Ways to upgrade differ depending on your goals. Perhaps you need more memory (RAM) to run some new software. Unless your Mac is already stuffed full of memory, this is an easy upgrade. RAM is quite reasonable (512MB for most Macs is only \$95.00) 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 handle more than one. All Macs in tower cases can have more than one internal hard drive. iMacs, MacBooks and Mac minis cannot have multiple hard drives (not enough space in the case) but they can have small hard drives replaced with larger ones. Hard drives are inexpensive these days. 120GB IDE hard drives start at under \$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 if absolutely necessary. Doing so can start a cascade of other upgrades and change the way you interact with your Mac. If your Mac is over four years old, it would probably be best to buy new. Web standards have changed so much recently that using a Mac OS version older than Mac OS X 10.3.9 is untenable.

If faster speeds are wanted, processor upgrades are available for many older Macs. Power Macs are the most cost effective Macs for processor upgrades. G3, G4 and G5 upgrades are readily available and will give a substantial boost. These upgrades range from \$200.00. They are straight forward to install and cause no changes in the way you work with your machine (except it's much faster, of course!). Processor upgrades do provide a speed improvement, but replacing your old Mac with a new model will give far more value for the computing dollars that you spend.

The Intel factor. There is an important, new issue at work in the upgrade question. All new Macs use Intel-made processors as their brains. Older Macs, using IBM and Motorola processors are fundamentally different from the current models.

Macs using Intel processors cannot understand software made for Macs using IBM and Motorola processors. Most Mac users are unaware of this because Apple includes a clever, invisible application with all Intel Macs called *Rosetta* (after the Rosetta Stone that helped linguists decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing). *Rosetta* translates Mac software from IBM/Motorola language into Intel language that the new processors can understand.

This is a great accomplishment that preserves our investment in the older, IBM/Motorola software. However, there is a dark side as well.

Rosetta can only translate IBM/Motorola software that was written to Mac OS X standards. Older software written for Mac OS 9 or earlier cannot be translated by *Rosetta*. Therefore, Intel Macs cannot use any software older than five years.

The flip side of this is that software is now written for both Intel and IBM/Motorola processors. However, this will not continue for more than a couple of years. Soon, new software will appear that *requires* Intel.

A new Mac may be your best upgrade option. The transition from IBM/Motorola to Intel is done and has been accomplished with surprising speed and efficiency. The new Intel Macs are arguably the best Macs Apple has ever made. They are faster, more reliable and better designed than previous models. The Intel Macs will not be obsolete for a long time.

Plus, the Intel Macs have the ability to run other operating systems such as *Linux* and *Microsoft Windows*. These are the most versatile desktop computers ever made.

If you decide to upgrade, you have many choices. Cost, as always, is important. Here are some sample upgrades and approximate costs (including CCC labor):

• Memory (RAM) upgrade	\$95.00
• Hard Drive upgrade	\$100.00
• Processor upgrade	\$300.00
• Operating System upgrade	\$400.00
• New Mac mini	\$900.00
• New iMac	\$1600.00
• New MacBook	\$1500.00
• New MacBook Pro	\$2800.00
• New Mac Pro	\$2800.00

Whatever upgrade path you choose, let CCC help you determine the right hardware and software for your needs. Then you can go back to having fun with your new and/or improved Mac.

September Tip—

Did you know that the label side of a CD or DVD is more delicate than the data side? Well, it is.

The data side of a CD or DVD is protected by a thick layer of clear plastic. While this layer can be scratched, it takes a severe scratch to cause irreparable damage.

The label side, however, is just a thin coat of ink right on top of the actual data layer. Damaging the ink coating will destroy the disk.

To protect the label side, avoid these abuses:

- 1) Handle disks carefully by the edges and spindle hole only.
- 2) Do not use “stinky” xylene-based markers.
- 3) Do not use stick on labels (the adhesive will eventually melt the ink coating).

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