OS X Mountain Lion: The Missing Manual

by David Pogue, O'Reilly Media, 2012,
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I went to Amazon to look for a book and my landing page displayed this title. I like what Pogue has to say about technology and this seemed like a good book to read. Actually, it is a *great* book. I once heard Jerry Pournelle say that the great thing about Mac OS X is the fact it takes only a few minutes to figure out whether you can do something or not, whereas with the other major desktop OS it can take much, much longer. This book demonstrates that OS X is very feature rich and contradicts Pournelle's statement because there are so many really, really useful features in OS X that are not obvious, ones that you really need once you learn about them.

The author fulfills what he set out to do, which is to provide the missing manual for OS X. Frankly, the chapter on Spotlight alone is worth the purchase price. After finishing the second chapter, I bought the upgrade to 10.8. After finishing the chapter on security I decided the next computer I buy for home will be a Mac. Also, the editions for Snow Leopard and Mountain Lion would have saved me a lot of money, time and grief had I known about them when I switched to Mac OS three years ago. I've bought a number of apps that I probably did not need because the functionality was buried in the OS somewhere.

I do have one negative comment. I bought this as an ebook for my Kindle and that was a mistake. The Kindle does not know how to display ⌘ properly. Sometimes it is displayed, but more often than not it is replaced with a space or, worse, overlayed with the symbol to the right. I have the Kindle app on my MacBook, so I read the book there when convenient. This actually had a very positive

effect. I could switch from the Kindle reader to the OS and try out whatever I was reading. I found this positive reinforcement very beneficial in committing keystrokes to memory.

Another important feature of the Kindle version is that everything is hyperlinked, so you can bounce around or use another great feature: www.missingmanuals.com, where you can access The Missing CD-ROM for this book. The book's index is massive, taking up 25% of the book itself, making it easy to find specific items. There are sidebars with the titles "Gem in the Rough", "Note", "Tip", "Power User Clinic," and others. These provide details beyond the main text and are quite useful.

The book is divided into eight sections: Introduction, The OS X Desktop, Programs in OS X, The Components of OS X, The Technologies of OS X, OS X Online, Appendices and Index. As I mentioned earlier, the chapter on Spotlight is very illuminating, and even details the query language available, which allows for intelligent searching. Here's one neat trick I learned: ⌘-space takes you to Spotlight. Enter a formula, for example sin(pi), and you get the answer. Spotlight is a basic scientific calculator. If you type a word, look down a bit and hover over the "Look Up" entry, the dictionary entry appears.

OS X is capable of taking dictation (Chapter 5), but it requires one to upload their contact list to Apple. I haven't tried it yet, because I cringe at the thought of uploading my contacts, but I would be curious to hear about your experiences with dictation.

Chapter 11 is chock full of useful stuff. Calendar has a feature that will display a document at a specific time, which is great for reminding you what you should be doing right now. Preview is far more powerful than I realized, especially in the way it handles PDFs. In fact, I am going to see if I can jettison Acrobat and all other utilities I've acquired for handling PDFs and live with Preview alone. If you turn on TimeMachine it will make backups of critical files to your main disk when your backup drive is not connected. TimeMachine is so easy to use there is no longer an excuse for being among the 96% of people who don't back up their files.

Chapter 13 covers security, and Mac OS X provides plenty of that by default. However, I learned I can enhance security significantly. I have already activated FileVault and will add a boot password. There is one command program not described that is extremely useful: purge. Execute this from a terminal and your Mac's memory is cleared of rubbish. Do this once or twice week and you won't have to reboot except for updates. Now if I can just get Calendar to activate this every day at 0200.

Before I close, here is another great time saver: hold down any character key for a second or so and an accented character selection dialog appears. Pick a number and you are done. I could go on and on about things I learned about OS X, but you really need to get the latest version of OS X, 10.8, and this book to take advantage of the rich features. Or you can spend all your free time poking around and figuring it out for yourself.

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