



# The *GAB'er*

The Newsletter of the Greater Albany Apple Byters

Volume 21, Number 6 - February 2005

## What's New at Apple Computer?

Three for the road. The new PowerBooks.



Featuring G4 processor speeds up to 1.67GHz, 512MB of memory, optional 8x DVD-burning SuperDrive and AirPort Extreme across the line.

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A million different ways.  
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## Coordinator's Corner



by John Buckley

Hopefully the weather will cooperate this month. Two months ago, we looked at designing web pages using *RapidWeaver*; a program published by *RealMac Software Limited*. During the discussion, we also looked at *Freeway Express* and *Freeway Pro*. I will bring some info on that program to the meeting.

This month we will look at *Photoshop Elements 3.0* from *Adobe*. This has become a very popular program and the latest version has some great features.

To find out what's happening in the Mac World, GAAB is the place to be. So be sure to be at our January meeting and every meeting to find out the best information about the Mac.

The February meeting will be held at Troy High School in room 212 on Wednesday, February 9, 2005. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Troy High School is located at 1950 Burdett Avenue two blocks south of Samaritan Hospital. From the Northway, take exit 7 to Alternate Route 7. Follow Alternate Route 7 to Troy. Route 7 becomes Hoosick Street in Troy. Travel east on Hoosick Street to the first light past the old Dunkin Donuts, which is now a liquor store. This is Burdett Avenue. Turn right and travel past Samaritan Hospital for about two blocks. Troy High School will be the second school on your left. The name is on the front of the building. You can park in the front lot. Come in the main entrance, go up the main stairway to the second floor, turn left and go to room 212.

**Next GAAB Meeting**  
**February 9, 2005**  
**7:00 p.m.**

**PhotoShop Elements 3.0**

**Room 212, Troy High School**  
**Burdett Avenue, Troy, NY**

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*Serving the Apple Computer User Community Since May 1984*

The Greater Albany Apple Byters is an Apple Computer User Group. Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month (except July and August) in Room 212 of Troy High School, located on Burdett Avenue, Troy, NY.

Annual membership fee is \$10.00. Membership privileges include this newsletter, access to a large public domain software and video/audio tape library, local vendor discounts, special interest groups, and other special offers.

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## Apple Ambassador

The following article is typical of what I hear all the time. However, a few years ago, I was told that by using a Mac, I was brighter than 95% of the people. Today, I am told I am brighter than 97% of the people using computers. Go figure.

### **Why Does Windows Still Suck? Why do PC users put up with so many viruses and worms? Why isn't everyone on a Mac?**

by Mark Morford, SF Gate Columnist

Friday, February 4, 2005

So about a year ago, the SO finally upgraded her Net connection to DSL, carefully installed the Yahoo! DSL software into her creaky Sony Vaio PC laptop and ran through all the checks and install verifications and appropriate nasty disclaimers.

And all seemed to go smoothly and reasonably enough considering it was a Windows PC and therefore nothing was really all that smooth or reasonable or elegant, but whatever. She just wanted to get online. Should be easy as 1-2-3, claimed the Yahoo! guide. Painless as tying your shoe, said the phone company.

She got online all right. The DSL worked great. For about four minutes.

Then, something happened. Something attacked. Something swarmed her computer the instant she tried to move around online and the computer slowed and bogged and cluttered and crashed, and multiple restarts and debuggings and what-the-hells only brought up only a flood of nightmarish pop-up windows and terrifying error messages and massive system slowdowns and all manner of inexplicable claims of infestation of this worm and that Trojan horse and did we want to buy McAfee AntiVirus protection for \$39.95?

Four minutes. And she was already DOA.

My SO, she is not alone. This exact same scenario, with only slight variation, is happening throughout the nation, right now. Are you using a PC? You probably have spyware. The McAfee site claims a whopping 91 percent of PCs are infected. As every Windows user knows, PCs are ever waging a losing battle with a stunningly vicious array of malware and worms and viruses, all aimed at exploiting one of about ten thousand security flaws and holes in Microsoft Windows.

Here, then, is my big obvious question: Why the hell do people put up with this? Why is there not some massive revolt, some

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# Internet SIG



## Taxes Made Free and Easy on the Internet

by Kim Komando

Gather up your receipts and W-2s, because it's tax time. But forget about sharpening your pencils and finding a calculator. If you use an online tax service, all of the forms and calculations are done for you. And it's free.

To encourage taxpayers to file electronically, the IRS, in conjunction with commercial tax preparation software companies, offers free e-filing. That is, as long as those individuals meet certain age, income, residency or other requirement.

To begin, you'll need an Internet connection and the necessary documentation (W-2s, 1099s, receipts, etc.). Then go to the IRS' Free File site (<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html>) and click the Start Now! button. This leads you to a list of Web sites providing free e-filing service. Click "more details" for information on individual sites' qualification requirements. It also includes pricing information, if you don't qualify.

But you don't have to read the requirements of each site. Click Guide Me to a Service! This brings up a form that asks about age, adjusted gross income, state of residence and other questions. With that information, the IRS directs you to those sites for which you qualify.

This year, several sites, including H&R Block, have opened free e-filing to all taxpayers. TaxACT and TurboTax, which are tax preparation programs, are also providing free e-filing with no restrictions.

Regardless of the service you choose, you must begin with the link on the IRS' Web site. If you go directly to a company's Web site, you will pay for the service.

Many sites offer different tiers of service. Generally, the free e-filing gives you access to a basic level. This usually includes access to forms and technical support through e-mail.

If you've never used tax preparation software, you may be in for a shock. Instead of filling out an online version of the

1040, the sites conduct an online interview. The interviews are filled with easy-to-understand but very detailed questions about income, interest earned, stock options, real estate holdings and so on.

The programs do a good job of holding your hand. But if you're used to zipping through the forms, you may find the numerous questions tedious and repetitive. If you get tired or bored, you can stop at any time and return later.

If you used an online tax preparation site last year, you might be able to import last year's income tax information into this year's forms. But you'll have to use the same site you used the previous year.

Sites may urge you to upgrade to a higher tier of service. But you are under no obligation to do so. However, you may find the basic tier inadequate.

For example, H&R Block offers 50 percent off its premium online tax program. This gives you free 24-hour technical support, access to an interactive video library, a free phone or e-mail session with a tax advisor, and other tools.

Most sites will import your federal data and electronically file your state tax forms for a fee. The cost varies from \$6 to \$20. If you want to fill out the forms yourself, some states allow you to file electronically. You can get state Web links from the IRS for more information at: <http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=97558,00.html>

One of the great advantages of filing electronically is a faster refund. Your bank account could see a nice bump in less than two weeks. And your return will not be lost in the mail. You'll receive an electronic acknowledgement when the IRS receives your return.

Finally, the companies listed on the IRS Web site agree to abide by rules and standards. So your return should be accurate and secure.





# Education SIG

## National Educational Technology Plan

by John Buckley

The following is part of the new log awaited National Educational Technology Plan issued by the Federal Department of Education this past January. It shows the direction that technology in schools will take over the next few years. One important aspect to be determined is the source for funding such a plan.

Over the next decade, the United States will face ever increasing competition in the global economy. To an overwhelming extent, this competition will involve the mastery and application of new technologies in virtually every field of human endeavor. It will place particular emphasis on the need for heightened skills in mathematics and science. It is the responsibility of this nation's educational enterprise—including policymakers—to help secure our economic future by ensuring that our young people are adequately prepared to meet these challenges. Today, they are not. This report explores why—and recommends steps to ensure that they will be. We have clearly reached a turning point. All over this country, we see evidence of a new excitement in education, a new determination, a hunger for change. The technology that has so dramatically changed the world outside our schools is now changing the learning and teaching environment within them. Sometimes this is driven by the students themselves, born and comfortable in the age of the Internet.

There has been explosive growth in the availability of online instruction and virtual schools, complementing traditional instruction with high quality courses tailored to the needs of individual students. Tests now can be taken online, giving students, teachers and parents almost instant feedback. This is a major step forward in tracking progress and identifying needs. New student data management systems will greatly facilitate the collection and use of test, demographic and other data for more effectively designing and managing instructional programs. Examples cited in this report illustrate not only the changes now taking place in the nation's school systems, but the often dramatic improvements that we are beginning to see in student achievement. The new testing, reporting and accountability requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* are accelerating this trend. From being a Nation at Risk we might now be more accurately described as a Nation on the Move. As these encouraging trends develop and expand over the next decade, facilitated and supported by our ongoing investment in educational technology, and led by the drive, imagination and dedication of a reenergized educational community at every level, we may be well on our way to a new golden age in American education. Today's students, of almost any age, are

far ahead of their teachers in computer literacy. They prefer to access subject information on the Internet, where it is more abundant, more accessible and more up-to-date.

Progressive teachers, principals and superintendents understand this. As examples cited in this report demonstrate, they have successfully adapted the endless opportunities presented by computer technology and married them in creative and challenging ways to the high-level technical capabilities and motivation of their students. Students and teachers become partners in the exploration of this new universe. Thus students, teachers and technology are driving a return to educational excellence. But complementing these is what will surely be seen as the single most important driver of educational progress in the coming decade: the *No Child Left Behind Act*, passed in Congress in 2001 with strong bipartisan support. This seminal legislation with its 2014 deadlines is breathtaking in its scope and poses powerful goals to the education community. Within 10 years it aims to abolish illiteracy and bring millions of children currently "lost" to the educational system into the mainstream of learning and achievement. It is comparable in many ways to this country's 1960s quest to put a man on the moon. Combined with the increased use of new technologies and the motivated expertise of today's students, it means that 10 years from now we could be looking at the greatest leap forward in achievement in the history of education. By any measure, the improvements will be dramatic.

### Seven Major Action Steps and Recommendations

#### 1. Strengthen Leadership

For public education to benefit from the rapidly evolving development of information and communication technology, leaders at every level—school, district and state—must not only supervise, but provide informed, creative and ultimately transformative leadership for systemic change. Recommendations for states, districts and individual schools include:

- Invest in leadership development programs to develop a new generation of tech-savvy leaders at every level.
- Retool administrator education programs to provide training in technology decision making and organizational change.
- Develop partnerships between schools, higher education and the community.
- Encourage creative technology partnerships with the business community.
- Empower students' participation in the planning process.





*“Our children can’t wait. The future is now. We need to be preparing them for a future that few of us can even visualize.”*

– Dr. Mark Edwards Former Superintendent Henrico County, VA Public Schools 40

## 2. Consider Innovative Budgeting

Needed technology often can be funded successfully through innovative restructuring and reallocation of existing budgets to realize efficiencies and cost savings. The new focus begins with the educational objective and evaluates funding requests – for technology or other programs – in terms of how they support student learning. Today, every program in *No Child Left Behind* is an opportunity for technology funding – but the focus is on how the funding will help attain specific educational goals. Funding and budgetary recommendations for states, schools and districts include:

- Determine the total costs for technology as a percentage of total spending.
- Consider a systemic restructuring of budgets to realize efficiencies, cost savings and reallocation. This can include reallocations in expenditures on textbooks, instructional supplies, space and computer labs.
- Consider leasing with 3-5 year refresh cycles.
- Create a technology innovation fund to carry funds over yearly budget cycles.

## 3. Improve Teacher Training

Teachers have more resources available through technology than ever before, but some have not received sufficient training in the effective use of technology to enhance learning. Teachers need access to research, examples and innovations as well as staff development to learn best practices. The U.S. Department of Education is currently funding research studies to evaluate the effective use of technology for teaching and learning. The National Science Foundation also provides major support for educational research. Recommendations for states, districts and individual schools include:

- Improve the preparation of new teachers in the use of technology. Ensure that every teacher has the opportunity to take online learning courses.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teacher education through measurement, accountability and increased technology resources.
- Ensure that every teacher knows how to use data to personalize instruction. This is marked by the ability to interpret data to understand student progress and challenges, drive daily decisions and design instructional interventions to customize instruction for every student’s unique needs.

## 4. Support E-Learning and Virtual Schools

In the past five years there has been significant growth in organized online instruction (e-learning) and “virtual” schools, making it possible for students at all levels to receive high quality supplemental or full courses of instruction personalized to their needs. Traditional schools are turning to these services to expand opportunities and choices for students and professional

development for teachers. Recommendations for states, districts and schools include:

- Provide every student access to e-learning.
- Enable every teacher to participate in e-learning training.
- Encourage the use of e-learning options to meet *No Child Left Behind* requirements for highly qualified teachers, supplemental services and parental choice.
- Explore creative ways to fund e-learning opportunities.
- Develop quality measures and accreditation standards for e-learning that mirror those required for course credit.

## 5. Encourage Broadband Access

Most public schools, colleges and universities now have access to high-speed, high-capacity broadband communications. However, broadband access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year could help teachers and students to realize the full potential of this technology and broadband technology needs to be properly maintained. Recommendations to states, districts and schools include:

- Thoroughly evaluate existing technology infrastructure and access to broadband to determine current capacities and explore ways to ensure its reliability.
- Encourage that broadband is available all the way to the end-user for data management, online and technology-based assessments, e-learning, and accessing high-quality digital content.
- Encourage the availability of adequate technical support to manage and maintain computer networks, maximize educational uptime and plan for future needs.

## 6. Move Toward Digital Content

A perennial problem for schools, teachers and students is that textbooks are increasingly expensive, quickly outdated and physically cumbersome. A move away from reliance on textbooks to the use of multimedia or online information (digital content) offers many advantages, including cost savings, increased efficiency, improved accessibility, and enhancing learning opportunities in a format that engages today’s web-savvy students. Recommendations to states and districts include:

- Ensure that teachers and students are adequately trained in the use of online content.
- Encourage ubiquitous access to computers and connectivity for each student.
- Consider the costs and benefits of online content, aligned with rigorous state academic standards, as part of a systemic approach to creating resources for students to customize learning to their individual needs.

## 7. Integrate Data Systems

Integrated, interoperable data systems are the key to better allocation of resources, greater management efficiency, and online and technology-based assessments of student performance that empower educators to transform teaching and personalize instruction. Recommendations to states, districts and schools include:



- Establish a plan to integrate data systems so that administrators and educators have the information they need to increase efficiency and improve student learning.
- Use data from both administrative and instructional systems to understand relationships between decisions, allocation of resources and student achievement.
- Ensure interoperability. For example, consider School Interoperability Framework (SIF) Compliance Certification as a requirement in all RFPs and purchasing decisions.
- Use assessment results to inform and differentiate instruction for every child.

## Conclusions

- There is no dispute over the need for America's students to have the knowledge and competence to compete in an increasingly technology-driven world economy.
- This need demands new models of education facilitated by educational technology.
- In the realm of technology, the educational community is playing catch-up. Industry is far ahead of education. And tech-savvy high school students often are far ahead of their teachers. This "digital disconnect" is a major cause of frustration among today's students.
- Public schools that do not adapt to the technology needs of students risk becoming increasingly irrelevant. Students will seek other options.
- Some of the most promising new educational approaches are being developed outside the traditional educational system, through e-learning and virtual schools.
- Reforms within the system will require strong leadership and a willingness to restructure the learning environment in fundamental ways.
- *No Child Left Behind* is a powerful catalyst for needed reform.
- Today's technology-literate middle and high school students will also be drivers of reform, creating a new student-teacher partnership.
- The current ferment within the education community will lead to major changes in the way we teach, learn and manage public education.
- With the benefits of technology, highly trained teachers, a motivated student body and the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*, the next 10 years could see a spectacular rise in achievement – and may usher in a new golden age for American education.
- This is an exciting, creative and transforming era for students, teachers, administrators, policymakers and parents. Systemic change is being shepherded through the efforts of dedicated teachers, administrators, parents and students. Technology ignites opportunities for learning, engages today's students as active learners and participants in decision-making on their own educational futures and prepares our nation for the demands of a global society in the 21st century.

## Apple Ambassador

*Continued from page 2.*

huge insurrection against Microsoft? Why is there not a huge contingent of furious users stomping up to Seattle with torches and scythes and crowbars, demanding the Windows Frankenstein monster be sacrificed at the altar of decent functionality and an elegant user interface?

There is nothing else like this phenomenon in the entire consumer culture. If anything else performed as horribly as Windows, and on such a global scale, consumers would scream bloody murder and demand their money back and there would be some sort of investigation, class-action litigation, a demand for Bill Gates' cute little geeky head on a platter.

Here is your brand new car, sir. Drive it off the lot. Yay yay new car. Suddenly, new car shuts off. New car barely starts again and then only goes about 6 miles per hour and it belches smoke and every warning light on the dashboard is blinking on and off and the tires are screaming and the heater is blasting your feet and something smells like burned hair. You hobble back to the dealer, who only says, gosh, sorry, we thought you knew — that's they way they all run. Enjoy!

Would you not be, like, that is the goddamn last time I buy a Ford?

I see it all around me. All Chronicle employees receive regular email warnings from our IT department about all sorts of viruses that are coming their way and aiming for company PCs. The AP tech newswires are full tales of newly hatched viruses and worms and Trojan horses and insidious spyware programs sweeping networks and wreaking havoc on PCs and causing all manner of international problems, and all exploiting this or that serious flaw in the Windows OS.

Oh yes, the Serious Windows Flaw. This is astounding indeed. It seems not a month goes by that Gates & Co. isn't announcing yet another Microsoft Security Bulletin, one that could cause serious problems for users and networks and millions of Web sites alike, could compromise your personal data and make it very easy for any 10-year-old hacker to waltz right into your hard drive and swipe your credit card info and wipe out all your porn and read your secret emails to the babysitter and won't you please hurry over to Microsoft.com and download Major Windows Security Bug Fix #10-524-5b?

There have been not a few of these dire warnings. There have been dozens. Maybe hundreds. Each more dire and alarming than the last.

And with very few exceptions, every Mac owner everywhere on the planet simply looks at all this viral chaos and spyware noise and Microsoft apologia and shrugs. And smiles. And pretty much ignores it all outright, and gets back to work. (By the way, yes, I own a tiny handful of Apple stock. Do I need to



advocate for Mac? Hardly. I'm already happy as can be thanks to the success of the brilliant, world-altering iPod.)

It's very simple. The Mac really has few, if any, known viruses or major debilitating anything, no spyware and no Trojans and no worms, and sure I've been affected by a couple email bugs over the years, but those were mostly related to my mail server and ISP. For the most part and for all intents and purposes, Macs are immune. Period.

I know of what I speak. I am not a novice. I've been using Macs almost daily for 15 years. I am online upward of 10-12 hours a day. I run multiple Net-connected programs at all times. I receive upward of 500 emails a day, much of it nasty spam that often comes with weird indecipherable attachments that try, in vain, to infiltrate my machine. My Mac just shrugs them off and keeps working perfectly. I dump them all in the trash and never look back.

I'm a power user. And I have yet to suffer a single debilitating virus or worm or spyware or malware whatsoever. Not one problem in 15 years, save the time I spilled water in the keyboard of my PowerBook and I took off the back and let it dry out for two days and it worked perfectly.

Oh, I know all the arguments as to why Macs aren't the dominant system in the world. I know Apple screwed up 20 years ago by not licensing its OS, and Gates stumbled in and made a killing by stealing the Mac's look and feel but mangling the actual usability and thus irritating about 150 million people for the next 20 years.

I know Macs are (well, were) more expensive, even though they're really not, when you finally jam that ugly cheapass Dell with enough video cards and sound cards and disk burners to make it comparable to a Mac that comes with all of it, standard.

I know Macs are not perfect, that there have been a handful of serious Apple security fixes over the years, and even a few rumored viruses and spyware apps (though rarely any reports of major server attacks or system shutdowns). I know Apple releases regular security updates of its own. The Mac is not flawless. But it's damn close.

And I know, finally, the argument that says that if the world was using Macs instead of PCs, the hackers would be attacking the Macs. It's a game of numbers, after all. Anti-Mac pundits always mutter the same thing as they install yet another PC bug fix: there just aren't enough Macs out there to warrant a hacker's attention.

Which is, of course, mostly bull. I'm no programmer, but I know what I read, and I know my experience: the Mac OS architecture is much more robust, much more solid, much more difficult to hack into. Apple's software is, by default, more sound and reliable, given its more stable core. (Sometime in the later '90s, a Mac org whose name I forget ran a rather amazing hacker competition: they offered a \$13,000 cash prize to anyone in the world who could hack into the company's unprotected Mac

server and alter the contest's home page in any way. Needless to say, no one ever could).

Perhaps there is something I'm missing. Maybe there's something I don't understand as to why there is not a massive rush of consumers and IT managers to dump PCs in favor of Macs (or even Linux OS). Surely thousands (millions?) of work-hours have been lost nationwide as tech departments spend untold months debugging and installing PC virus protections and keeping abreast of the latest and greatest worm to come down the pike, all due to Microsoft's lousy software.

Am I being unfair? Maybe. Hell, I'm sure Windows has its gnarled and wary defenders, war-torn and battle-tested folk who still insist that, because there's more software available for the Windows OS, it's somehow superior — though I challenge them to name one significant, common activity the Mac can't do as well as, if not better than, PCs. For 97 percent of users in the world, Macs would be a more elegant and intuitive and appealing solution. Period.

So then. Here's hoping the new, incredibly affordable Mac Mini converts a hundred million people to Mac in the next year. Here's hoping the borderline illegal and monopolistic domination of Microsoft comes to an end in the next decade. Apple appears poised, finally, again, ready to take over the consumer world. Hell, thousands of glorious iPods have already infiltrated the Microsoft campus up in Redmond, causing MS management no end of humiliation and frustration. Can revolution be far behind?

And what about my SO's PC woes? Well, after her Vaio was so violently debilitated, and after being told by various experts that it would require nothing short of a complete (and very expensive) Windows system debugging and OS reinstall followed by a mandatory soak of the machine in a tub of bleach and then spraying it with a thick coat of road tar as she waved a burning effigy of Steve Ballmer over it while chanting the text of the Official Microsoft 'Screw You Sucker' Windows Troubleshooting Guide, she promptly dumped the useless hunk of sad landfill and bought herself a beautiful new iBook.

And of course, in a year of solid use, she has yet to have a single problem.

Oh wait. I take that back. She has had one nagging issue with her Mac. One program keeps crashing in the middle of her work, for no apparent reason. It is baffling and frustrating and makes you shake your head and want to scream.

Mark Morford's Notes & Errata column appears every Wednesday and Friday on SFGate, unless it appears on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which it never does. Subscribe to this column at [sfgate.com/newsletters](http://sfgate.com/newsletters).

URL: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/gate/archive/2005/02/04/notes020405.DTL>

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