

.5 stars - 1 Star Poor, 5 Stars Excellent

Product: MacOS 8

Version: 8.0

Manufacturer: Apple/Claris

List Price: \$99 (\$69 and \$10 discount prices available)

Contact Info: <http://macos.apple.com/>

Yeah, I know. You've all read about 18 reviews of MacOS 8. You're asking yourself why you should read yet another OS 8 article about all of the new features, the stability, the multitasking finder, yadda, yadda, yadda. Well, this article is different, I promise. This article is about living with OS 8. All of those spiffy new features don't mean very much unless they actually make you more productive or more satisfied with your computing adventures. Get ready for a completely honest look at Apple's newest operating system.

Installation and the First 24 hours

Many Macintosh users dreamed of receiving that long-awaited OS 8 disc, popping it into the drive, and within a few painless minutes, entering Computing Utopia. Reality: system bombs, illegal instruction errors, and other unruly behavior. How a certain boot from the CD flaw slipped past the engineers at Apple Headquarters, I'll never know. I do know, however, that this "intro to OS 8" continues to throw terror into the heart of many a Macintosh user.

Of course, there are many successful work-arounds for this issue, and I have yet to hear of anyone who couldn't eventually get it to work. MacFixIt <http://www.macfixit.com/> is a great place to find the information that will help you to install OS 8 in a relatively smooth fashion.

After you get the OS 8 CD to begin installing the new OS, you must decide whether or not to do a clean install. A clean install creates a whole new system folder, puts your old system folder aside, and allows you to begin your adventures without the fear of corrupted files or extension conflicts. As time goes on, you may move 3rd party items back into the system folder as I have done. I felt that a clean install was the best choice for me, but a month after the install I still have 15 MB of space tied up by my old 7.6.1 system folder.

I still can't decide what I want to trash and what I want to save for a rainy day!

OS 8 comes with a nifty set-up assistant to help users adjust to the new system, but my speedy little mouse clicked right past it. I felt that I was cool enough to set up my system preferences without it. However, I have heard many good things about the set-up assistant, so don't hesitate to use it. I moved from "installation horrors" to "maximum productivity" within about an hour and a half. That's pretty good in my opinion. At this point I was already pleased with what lay before my eyes.

New Features

After I started playing with OS 8, I noticed the nice new features that have contributed to the better relationship that I now have with my Performa 6400. Below I have listed my five favorite and most useful new MacOS features:

3D Appearance/Desktop Pictures

I rolled these two features into one because they both relate to the look of the new operating system and they don't really act as a utility. The new 3D Platinum appearance of OS 8 looks so good and is so satisfying that I haven't felt the need to reinstall Kaleidoscope yet. Bear in mind, this is coming from a former Kaleidoscope junkie. This 3D platinum appearance, which is relatively customizable via the Appearance control panel, makes the new OS look just that, brand-spanking new. Desktop Pictures eliminates the need to use Decor, DeskPicture, or other third party utilities in order to see full screen pictures on your monitor. MacFixIt <http://www.macfixit.com> has reported some problems with this control panel, but it has worked perfectly on my machine. Other users have reported that Desktop Pictures can be

slow to redraw the desktop after closing windows when memory is running low. Performance can be improved by choosing a solid pattern in the control panel and then choosing your favorite picture to lay on top of that pattern. Also, choosing "Use Defaults" in the Memory control panel will set your disk cache to the appropriate level and speed up the activities of the system. One final note — after installing OS 8, be sure to look on your OS 8 CD for additional Desktop Pictures.

Spring-Loaded Folders

Back in the old days of System 7, there were always scores of open folders on my desktop. If I wanted to place a file in a folder that was nested five folders deep, I had to open up all of those folders or hold down the option key so that old windows would close up as I opened new ones. All of this was time-consuming and inefficient. With OS 8, I only have to click on a file and drag it over the desired folder and watch subdirectories just pop open as if they were saying, "yeah, yeah put your file in me!" A related feature offers similar functionality — perform a click and a half on a folder's icon and watch that folder spring open so that you can see its contents. You can go as deep into the folders as you wish, and when you release the mouse button, the last folder opened will stay open.

Contextual Menus

I've heard what people are saying. "Oh, contextual menus, just like Windows." Maybe, but I don't care. This is an incredibly useful feature

that has a fine home within the MacOS. Holding down the control key while clicking on a folder or file will give you a menu of options that can be performed on that item. A great complement to this feature is a freeware package called CMTools by Éric de la Musse. This and other contextual menu enhancements can be found at CM Central

<http://interdesign.ca/cmcentral/software/index.html>. CMTools is a plug-in that allows you to add even more functionality to contextual menus. This freeware allows you to create aliases in or copy items to specific folders, to use contextual menus as an applications launcher, or many other things Personally, my favorite use for CMTools is the contextual menu option to choose which application with which you open a file. For example, I prefer to use SimpleText and GraphicConverter to open up text and graphics files. I put an alias to those two programs in the "Open With" folder that is included with CMTools, and whenever I control-click on a file I can choose exactly which program I want to use to open the file. People with programmable mice (like the Kensington Orbit or trackball series), can even program a separate button to control-click for them. Talk about productivity!

Multithreaded Finder

It is a lot of fun to see six items being copied to a floppy while continuing to mess around with folders, emptying the trash, and writing my Apple

Wizards article. Previously, I would have had to wait eons while everything happened in turn. Granted, if you have 5 files being copied to a disk simultaneously, it is not going to happen very fast, but what do I care? As long as it gets done and it is not interrupting my activities, I have no problems with it.

Improved Virtual Memory

This will be short and sweet. New Virtual Memory = better performance = more applications open = a very happy Daria. Set it to one MB above physical RAM (provided you have at least 20MB of RAM) and let the fun begin.

Third-Party Conflicts and Other Woes

My first month using OS 8, while joyous and fun-filled, was also a time spent patiently waiting for much needed third-party software updates. Some of those updates have been delivered, and I'm still waiting for others.

During the past few weeks, an issue has been discussed on Apple's Performa Discussion Forum <http://support.info.apple.com/tso/tso-performa.html> concerning Performa 6400s. Some users have reported that their hard drives were devoured by OS 8 shortly after installation. In response to these reports, Apple issued an open call for information from affected users. I own a 6400/180 and my hard drive is fine, as are many others' hard drives, so don't panic. From what I have read, the problems start within days of installing OS 8 and are not isolated to the 6400. To help lessen the blow should OS 8 decide to eat your hard drive for lunch, I recommend partitioning your 6400 hard drive (or any drive for that matter) and putting OS 8 on its own partition (300MB is a good system partition size). That way, when OS 8 gets hungry it may only eat the partition with the system and leave your other files alone. As always, backing up important files should be a habit.

As far as third-party conflicts are concerned, there are relatively few. Most of the problems are with shareware programs, although Berkeley System's "After Dark 4.0" (the fix for After Dark 4.0 is at <http://www.berksys.com/>), Connectix's "RAMDoubler," and other popular big name titles are among the incompatible applications and utilities. Apple is keeping a nice list of incompatibilities on their "MacOS Late-Breaking News" page at <http://macos.apple.com/macOS/latebreak/compatibility.html>.

Summary

If you don't have it yet, go get it. You will love it. Unlike other recent

operating system upgrades that shall remain nameless, MacOS 8 brings enhanced performance and a slew of new features, but doesn't require a series of "Computers for Dummies"

books. You already know how to use it.

After all, you bought a Mac, which

makes you pretty smart anyway! I can honestly say that OS 8 has significantly reduced my blood pressure. No longer do I live in fear and anxiety that one extra browser window will bring the system to its knees or that having more than a couple applications open will end with my rousing performance of the "three-finger salute." In fact, I don't even remember what the "three-finger salute" is. Let me look it up . . . Oh yeah, control-command-power key. Anyway, MacOS 8 has added years to my life. I guess it's just reason #54963 why Macintoshes rule supreme!

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