

welcome to Macintalk, my series of monthly interviews with people who make a difference, big or small, in the Mac world and beyond.

Rich Siegel, the President and CEO of Bare Bones Software, Inc., was kind enough to tell us a little bit about his company and two very useful products, BBEdit and the new Mailsmith. Readers should find it very interesting to learn what goes on behind the scenes in a company that makes products to keep our platform viable and growing. What kind of an attitude does it take to run such a company? As Rich says in his email signature, "Between cleanliness and godliness lies... Compulsion."

Check out this month's interview, then email me your ideas, comments, and suggestions for people you would like to see interviewed in an upcoming issue.

[Interview conducted: 18 January 1999](#)

**Ruce Klutchko:** I know that Bare Bones was founded in 1993, but it seems like so much longer ago. It's hard to remember when BBEdit wasn't around. Please tell us about how the company was started and how the idea for BBEdit was developed.

**Rich Siegel:** When I was working at THINK Technologies (the company that created Lightspeed C and Lightspeed Pascal, and which was later acquired by Symantec), my colleagues expressed a desire for a freestanding text editor. I had written a little text editor as a part of a project I was working on, so I beefed it up and thus BBEdit was born. That was in 1989 — the first public freeware release of BBEdit was in 1991, and the company came later, when I decided to form an infrastructure to sell and support the product.

**BK:** Tell us about Jon Hueras, your principle software architect.

**RS:** If you picture Paul Bunyan, but without the blue ox and with a keyboard instead, you'll get the idea.

**BK:** That's a great image.

**RS:** I was trying to conjure up [the idea of] a forty-foot-tall superhuman figure.

**BK:** What is the life of a CEO of a Mac software company like?

**RS:** In reality, it's not any different from being the CEO of any small company — I come to work, write code, read and write email, and participate in the mechanics of the business.

**BK:** But not every CEO writes code. So you are more than just the operations manager...

**RS:** In small companies, everybody works. Among other things, my business partner oversees the day-to-day operation of the business, which makes it possible for me to focus on engineering.

**BK:** Do you ever find yourself wishing that you had the much larger PC market to program for?

**RS:** Never. The additional market size is offset by the disproportionate cost of writing and supporting PC software — it's much more difficult and expensive than writing Mac software. Not to mention that most Windows software developers end up competing with Microsoft at some point.

**BK:** Initially BBEdit was a tool for programmers. Some people who were programming in C were dissatisfied with their editors, and other people wanted a text editor superior to SimpleText (TeachText back in those days). In fact, in one users group for a now-abandoned "visual" BASIC, nearly 80% preferred BBEdit to the default editor. How successful was BBEdit at that time?

**RS:** Back then, pretty successful. When BBEdit 2.5 (the first commercial

release) shipped, the text-editor market was in a decline — most of the other commercial players had pretty much given up and either gone out of business or turned their attention elsewhere.

**BK:** How did you afford to give away copies of BBEdit Lite as a freeware product? Don't a lot of users simply use the Lite version and avoid buying the full version?

**RS:** By the millions. However, the full commercial version of BBEdit provides features and capabilities that aren't available in BBEdit Lite, and so it's of interest to enough people that BBEdit is a viable product.

**BK:** The Web was relatively obscure when BBEdit was first developed. Now, BBEdit is considered one of the premiere HTML coding tools [for those readers who do not know what HTML is, it is the language used to create all of those colorful, dynamic, exciting Web pages you love to browse]. Tell us about how this transition occurred.

**RS:** Purely by accident! BBEdit supports a plug-in architecture — we did this because we wanted to provide an avenue for third-party extensibility. Two independent developers (Carles Bellver in Spain, and Lindsay Davies in the UK) wrote plug-ins to automate HTML markup, and users we talked to kept mentioning them, and we were giving support to the developers themselves. At the time, we didn't know HTML from a hole in the ground, but that changed pretty quickly. Since BBEdit is a text editor, and HTML is just plain text with markup, it's a perfect match.

**BK:** Most HTML tools are of a "visual" or WYSIWYG nature, with pre-coding of many of the basic features of the Web page. Yet BBEdit made its reputation as the tool for those who preferred hand coding. For our readers who don't really know how Web pages are created, please tell us about this difference.

**RS:** Every Web page is constructed using HTML, which is nothing more than plain text which contains additional information or "tags." These tags tell a suitably savvy program, i.e., a Web browser, how the text should be interpreted. Since Web pages are only plain text, the natural tool to create them is a text editor. In recent years, application developers have attempted to automate the generation of HTML by letting the user place page elements graphically, and then producing the HTML necessary to replicate that appearance in a Web browser. Or so the theory goes...

**BK:** Judging by the number of Web page creators who use BBEdit, Web programmers must find it confers advantages over the purely "visual" editors.

**RS:** Yes, I would agree with that assessment.

**BK:** Now BBEdit has incorporated some of the features of the "visual" page editors. What have you added to BBEdit 5.0 that wasn't a part of the earlier versions?

**RS:** Actually, the only visual component that BBEdit has is the Table Builder — it's not intended to be a full-blown HTML table editor, but instead is designed to ease the hardest part of making HTML tables — specifically, generating the table's structure. The Table Builder was introduced in BBEdit 4.5, though it has been enhanced a bit for BBEdit 5.0.

Aside from that, BBEdit 5.0 features completely redone HTML markup tools, including full HTML 4.0 support, a new context-sensitive markup tool that helps you by listing which HTML tags and attributes are valid in the spot where you're inserting markup, much more accurate HTML syntax checking than before, and newly updated site-management tools.

**BK:** Traditionally, BBEdit was known for its ability to run on virtually any Mac, with very low RAM and disk space requirements. Yet we are now increasingly used to running a number of memory-hungry applications, each of which use more RAM than the total RAM many of us had installed on our earlier Macs. How have the memory and processor requirements of BBEdit changed? How important is low memory usage to most users?

**RS:** We've found that memory usage isn't as important to most users as it once was, largely because RAM is so cheap these days. However, BBEdit started off as a low-footprint application, because at its core, what it does is very simple. As the capability of the product has increased, the memory requirement has gone up, though not at the same rate. BBEdit 5.0's memory requirement is 1600K for the whole thing — older versions required about 1000K. We added the extra to allow for more flexible usage of the HTML tools, which are now built in to the application, unlike previous versions.

**BK:** For the casual user who has tried to create a simple Web page in Communicator or another do-it-all program, editing Web pages can seem a slow chore. How fast is BBEdit?

**RS:** Well, there are two facets to this question. The first is purely application performance, and I think there's no doubt that BBEdit is a smaller, leaner

application than any of the all-in-one visual packages. Of course, you do still need a Web browser in order to preview the page, but all of the editing basics work faster in BBEdit.

The other part of the question gets into the larger area of working efficiency: "How fast can I create an HTML document with reasonable content?" There, the answer depends on the individual user. Some people can generate entire Web sites very quickly using BBEdit, while others may find it more efficient to use a graphical Web authoring tool, and then use BBEdit to fine-tune and correct the generated HTML.

**BK:** BBEdit has always featured "Grep" pattern searching. Most of our readers haven't even heard of this, while others vaguely know that this is an old UNIX term. Quite frankly, anything that has UNIX in its genes scares most people. Could you explain how this works in BBEdit, why it is useful, and why it shouldn't send users running to the medicine cabinet for a Xanax?

**RS:** Grep in BBEdit allows you to search for text by describing the criteria that the text should match, rather than by specifying a literal string of characters. So, if you wanted to find all occurrences of the strings "Programmer," "Prompter," and "Painter," you would instead write a Grep pattern which matches any string that begins with "P" and ends with "r". This capability turns out to be very useful for things like transforming sets of HTML tags, while leaving their contents intact.

**BK:** That would also prove useful in searching text documents in general. BBEdit also now includes an FTP client. You mean you don't have to fire up an FTP tool to upload a Web page?

**RS:** BBEdit's built-in FTP tool is most useful for editing pages "live" on a server that is also accessible via FTP, or, for non-Web users, manipulating text files on FTP-accessible UNIX machines. One user is working on Mac OS X at Apple — he uses BBEdit to edit source files that reside on and are compiled on a NeXT box. However, to upload image files, or large batches of stuff, you'll still want a separate FTP client like Transmit, Anarchie, Fetch, NetFinder, or others.

**BK:** What are the other features you think make BBEdit unique?

**RS:** There are lots. Find Differences, which lets you compare text files, or folders full of them, and determine what has changed; BBEdit's multi-file searching still sets it apart, even after all these years; beyond that, it's just

the combination of individual capabilities that help you accomplish whatever it is that you need to do with text.

**BK:** I suspect that most of our programming-savvy readers know about BBEdit. The rest, most of whom are not creating Web sites, are probably asking, "How would I use this program?" How would you answer them?

**RS:** If you ever need to work with plain text files, BBEdit is for you — we have a lot of non-programmer, non-HTML BBEdit users, including engineers and scientists, database managers, and just plain regular folks who use BBEdit for all their writing needs.

BBEdit has an array of features for reformatting and transforming text — the Hard Wrap command is one such: it can reflow a body of text into neatly formatted paragraphs, greatly enhancing the readability of a document. BBEdit's search-and-replace capabilities are well suited for composition, as is the built-in spelling checker.

**BK:** While most of us started out using the email programs like those in early versions of Navigator or the freeware Eudora Lite, there are now some very sophisticated email clients available for the Mac. One of the best and most popular was Claris EMailer. Unfortunately, EMailer is not being developed further. Claris doesn't even exist. Additionally, it is not certain what Qualcomm is doing with its program, Eudora. Mailsmith is your newest program. What can it do for us that our free email programs can't?

**RS:** Lots. When you pay for software, you get something for your money: a physical package with a CD-ROM and printed documentation, real customer service from the company that sold you the product, and real tech support. Functionally, Mailsmith lets you apply the raw text-processing power of BBEdit to mail composition, and features a mail store architecture that lets you organize and search for mail in ways that just aren't otherwise possible.

**BK:** Filtering is an important part of Mailsmith. Please explain how filtering could help with the spam problem.

**RS:** Mailsmith's powerful filtering lets you easily create and adjust your spam filters. For example, my personal spam filter consists of just three simple terms, and catches about ninety percent of my incoming spam.

**BK:** If the mailboxes of Mailsmith are rearranged, do the filter rules change

to accommodate the new mailboxes?

**RS:** Yes. Individual filters are attached to mailboxes, so as you rearrange your mailboxes, the filters travel with them, and that preserves the integrity of your filtering setup.

**BK:** That can save one big headache. What are the advantages of using Mailsmith in sending mail?

**RS:** The advantages lie primarily in the fact that Mailsmith incorporates BBEdit's text-editing engine, basic text-munging abilities, and plug-in architecture. So it's easy to use Mailsmith to write email messages that are easy to read and get your point across — very important, given the limitations of the email medium.

**BK:** Searching is also a big feature of Mailsmith, so much so that mail takes up a bit more disk space just to accommodate unique information for searching. Does this mean that I could use Mailsmith to look through last years email to find a misplaced letter that I know I got from Steve Jobs offering me a seven-figure salary? (Could I still find that letter even though we know he really never wrote it?)

**RS:** You could — Mailsmith allows multiple criteria in a search, and you can use the same Grep pattern-matching to look for text, as well as a new technology which we refer to as "fuzzy" searching, which allows you to specify the level of accuracy of a literal match. So you could search for any message from "Jobs" whose body also contains the Grep pattern "#####," i.e., seven digits, to find that missing job offer.

**BK:** Are there any plans to allow bulk customizable emailing with Mailsmith? Could it be used to create spam?

**RS:** Although there are legitimate uses for automated bulk emailing, we don't feel it's an appropriate use for a single-user email client such as Mailsmith. There are other products that serve that need already.

Mailsmith can be highly automated through the use of AppleScript or Frontier, and a suitably motivated user could employ it to generate bulk email, but producing spammer-type volumes of mail with Mailsmith isn't really feasible.

**BK:** Some of your competitors died before your product was released.

Things seem to be changing very quickly in the Mac market. How do you see the overall software market, given the resurgence of the Mac?

**RS:** In fact, things are changing quickly in every market, and the Mac market is no exception. Given that, conditions are good right now, and I think we'll continue to see both existing and new companies bringing new products to the Mac.

**BK:** Can lean/mean companies hope to compete in the era of the software behemoth? (Microsoft, to name one. Microsoft, to name another). What will happen to new and innovative programs if they can't?

**RS:** Those are eternal questions; it seems to me that there will always be a place in the world for a lean, well-run software company that produces good products. The software behemoths can't do everything, so there's plenty of room for smaller developers to do what the behemoths don't want to, or can't see.

**BK:** I recently saw Jobs introduce a new series of blue G3 desktop machines. On the outside, they resemble an iMac on steroids. Gorgeous bodies, but huge. How do you see them from the technical point of view — what will all this extra computing power mean for the rest of us?

**RS:** The new machines look great — tremendous computing power at reasonable prices. I think this is part of the natural progression of things: speed gets cheaper, but the actual price points don't change. The end result is that two thousand dollars today buys a faster and more capable machine than two thousand dollars did a year ago.

**BK:** And finally, what goes best on top of a pizza?

**RS:** Potato chips!

Thank you, Rich, for sharing your insights with us. Your efforts and those of your company to be accessible to us users helps to define one of the great qualities of the Mac platform.

Readers who wish to check out BareBones Software can visit their website at <http://web.barebones.com/> . If the only text editor you have is SimpleText, download the freeware text editor BBEdit Lite while you're there. It could



really open your eyes to another aspect of your Mac.

If there is a someone in the Mac community that you are dying to learn more about, please let me know. We would love to hear your suggestions and your comments about my column.

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