Mac OS X Tiger Wizardry

Preferences, Packages, and getting "under the hood" of Mac OS X

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This is a preliminary version of presentation. Final version will include graphics and movies.

Some material may also be omitted to keep the session within its time limits.

Preferences [.plist] files: What are they?

- They store the change you make in an application's Preferences dialog.
- But they also store many settings that you cannot access from Preferences.
- They can also get easily corrupted.

Preferences [.plist] files: Where are they?

- The main ones of interest to us are almost all in ~/Library/Preferences.

- They have names like com.apple.Finder.plist

- Others are in /Library/Preferences.

- Others are in various other locations, including application packages.

Preferences [.plist] files: How do you view them?

- Apple's preferred method is to use Property List Editor.

- Alternative is similar third party utilities such as PlistEdit Pro.

- Final alternative is Terminal: `defaults` command.

- Can't use TextEdit or other text editors.

  - In Tiger, .plist files now in binary!

Preferences [.plist] files: How do you edit them?

Property List Editor:

- Open file and click Root disclosure triangle

- Edit text in Key, Class and/or Value columns

- Can Add new properties via New Sibling/New Child button

- Can Delete via Delete button

- Save

- Terminal:
  - defaults [*command*] [*plist file*] [*key*] [*class*][*value*]
  - Class is optional in most cases
  - defaults write com.apple.Finder AppleShowAllFiles True

Example: Make invisible files visible

- **File**: com.apple.Finder.plist

- **Property**:
AppleShowAllFiles Boolean Yes

  - Instead of Yes/No; Can use:
  True/False or
  String: 1/0

- Relaunch Finder

- "Hidden" properties:
  - How do you find out about them?
    - Directly from developer
    - Then to Web sites
  - Why do these properties exist?
    - Developer wants them to have limited use; just for developers, power users etc.

The automated alternative:

- One trick ponies:

  - e.g., InVisibles

- Multi-function utilities:

  - e.g., Cocktail, TinkerTool

- Pros and Cons of automation:
  - Pros:
    - Simpler and easier, less to remember
    - Supplies all Value options!
  - Cons:
    - Limited to options utility provides
    - May need multiple utilities that all cost money

Preferences [.plist] files: Just Do It!

Super-enlarge Dock icons

- Select "Turn Magnification On" in Dock menu
- File: com.apple.Dock.plist
- Property: largesize Number 512
- Relaunch Dock

Change Screen Capture Format

- **File**: com.apple.screencapture.plist

- **Property**: type String TIFF

- Logout and Login again

Eliminate the Desktop

- **File**: com.apple.Finder.plist
- **Property**: CreateDesktop Boolean No
- Relaunch Finder

Put a Widget on the Desktop

- **File**: com.apple.dashboard.plist

- **Property**: devmode Boolean Yes

- Logout and Login again.

- Activate Dashboard.

- Click-drag widget to Desktop.

- Press F12 and let go of mouse.

Disable Dashboard

- **File**: com.apple.dashboard.plist

- **Property**: mcx-disabled Boolean Yes

- Force Quit Dock via Activity Monitor

Disable Guest Access

- File: com.apple.AppleFileServer.plist
  - This file is in /Library/Preferences
- Property: guestAccess Boolean No
- Need root access to save changes!
  - Use Pseudo (or sudo in Terminal)
- Need to Restart Mac for change to take effect

Eliminate need for Password Authorization

- This file is not even in a Preferences folder:
  - Use Go to Folder command: Go to /etc
- File: authorization
- Property: rights>desktopservices
  - Change class key's value from user to allow
- Save with root access (using Pseudo).

Troubleshooting .plist files

- Key points:
  - Relatively speaking, .plist files are easily damaged because of frequent saves.
  - If symptoms suggest problem with a .plist file: remove or delete it. New file will be created.
  - Remove is better than delete: Because can return file if it is not culprit.
  - Can use a separate account as one way to test for likely .plist file trouble.

Using Preferential Treatment:

- Preferential Treatment is one of several utilities that can assess for possible .plist file corruption.

- However it only assesses for syntax errors. Some problems may not be syntax-related.

- These utilities based on Unix `plutil` command. Can use this via Terminal instead.

Tiger's Safe Relaunch:

- After first crash of an app: Unexpected Quit has a Reopen button.

- Click it. If you crash again, Reopen is replaced by Try Again.

- If you click Try Again, a Safe Relaunch is initiated.

  - This disables .plist file and replaces it with a default copy.

- If you quit normally from a Safe Relaunch, you are given choice – via a dialog – to keep default or revert to original.

Modify Unexpected Quit dialog

- **File**: com.apple.CrashReporter.plist

- **Property**: DialogType String Developer

- Will show crash log instead of normal message

- Can use Apple's CrashReporterPrefs (in Developer folder) instead of PLE or Terminal.

Packages wizardry

- They are folders disguised as single files.

- Most are designated by .pkg extension (such as Installer files) or .app (for applications).

- The .app extension is typically not shown in Finder, but it is there.

Packages: How do you open them?

- Use the Show Package Contents command in Contextual Menus or Finder window Action menus.

- Delete the .pkg or .app extension from the file's name.

- Use a utility such as Pacifist.

- Use Terminal.

Packages: How do you search them?

- Searchlight does not search packages.
- Can open a package and use Search text box however. Otherwise...
- Use a utility such as Locator.
- Use Terminal's locate command.

Packages: Just do it

Add a Disk Images System Prefs pane

- Go to /System/Library/PrivateFrameworks/ DiskImages.framework/Versions/A/Resources

- Double-click the DiskImages.prefPane.

Change text of dialogs

- Example: Unexpected quit dialog.

- Using TextWrangler's Open Hidden command with "All Files":
  Go to /System/Library/CoreServcies/Crash Reporter.

- Navigate to Contents/Resources/English.lproj and open the Localizable.strings file.

- Edit as desired, unlocking file when asked.

- Save changes.

Modify Spotlight's defaults for Command-F

- Type Command-F; Set up search the way you want.

- Click to Save. Name file default_smart.plist and save it to Desktop. Delete .savedSearch extension from name.

- Go to /System/Library/CoreServices and open Finder.app package.

- Go to Contents/Resources. Replace default_smart.plist file with the copy you made. Authenticate when requested.

- Relaunch Finder (via Dock).

For more help and info:

Ted Landau's Mac OS X Help Line
www.macosxhelpline.com

MacFixIt:
www.macfixit.com

Mac OS X Hints:
www.macosxhints.com