

More About System 7

by Craig Savage

Apple recently introduced a new Macintosh operating system called System 7 (see "Mac's System 7," *State-of-the-Art Contractor*, 1/93). It has since been upgraded, and the new version (System 7.1) contains some changes that really give you the opportunity to create a desktop that is "builder friendly" — in other words, a customized system of tools that lets you get to your office work and get it done efficiently, quickly, and accurately.

All the parts of System 7 — the folders and files that combine to give your computer its personality or interface — "live" in the System folder on your hard drive. Let's take a look at several of the more important folders, including Apple Menu Items, Startup Items, Control Panels, and Fonts.

Apple Menu Items

Formally called Desk Accessories, the Apple Menu Items are small applications that can run at any time, regardless of the application you are working in. For instance, you can open the Calculator program from the Apple Menu and use it during a take-off operation in MacNail. Some of the most useful items I keep in this menu are:

- Alarm Clock, which keeps track of my daily schedule;
- Acta, an outline processor;

Apple Menu Items		
16 items	66.5 MB in disk	9.7 MB
Name		
☒ 1 Savco Ltrhdstationary		
☐ 2SavcoEnvelope		
☒ Acta		
☒ Alarm Clock		
☒ Battery		
☒ Calculator		
☒ Chooser		
☐ Contacts Works 3.0 alias		
☐ Control Panels		
☒ Fast Find		
☒ Key Caps		
☒ KeyFinder		
☒ On Location		
☒ Scrapbook		
☒ SimpleSpan		
☒ Smartscrap		

Figure 1. The first two listings in the author's Apple Menu Items folder are documents he uses to merge names and addresses in his database with letterhead and envelopes. Using a number as the initial character of a document name forces it to be listed first.

- Fast Find, a program that locates files on my hard drive;
- Scrapbook, which holds my logos and commonly used text;
- Simple Span, an elegant beam calculator; and
- On Location, a database search engine for my entire hard drive.

The Apple Menu Items folder is not new to System 7, but the ability to put documents and applications in it is. I keep two documents at the top of the list of Apple Menu Items: one called *1 Savco Ltrhdstationary*, the other, *2SavcoEnvelope* (see Figure 1). These documents are blank Savage Company letterhead stationery and envelopes, and because they're in the Apple Menu, they're always at hand no matter what application I am working in. When I want to write a letter, I select the recipient's name from my rolodex database, and open the *1 Savco Ltrhdstationary* document. The name and address are automatically merged and appear at the top of the letter. I use the *2SavcoEnvelope* document to print my logo and the address on an envelope. What could be simpler?

Startup Items

One feature that is completely new to System 7 is the Startup Items folder. Any program you put in this folder automatically starts up when you turn on the computer. I have two items in the folder, Microsoft Works and its companion database, Contacts Works, because I always need my rolodex for phone calls and letters. But I could just as easily have it open to an estimating or accounting program.

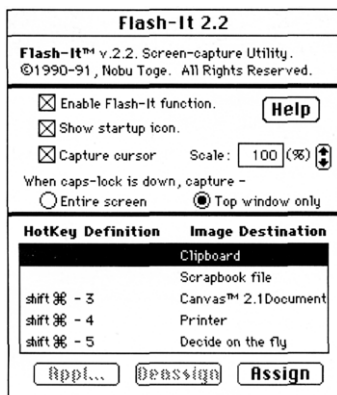
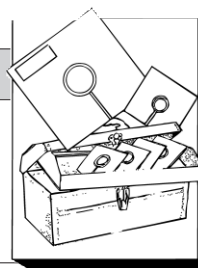


Figure 2. A screen-capture utility called Flash-It lets you choose how much of the screen to capture, which hot key activates the program, and where to send the image.



Control Panels

The Control Panels folder lets you customize the computer interface. For instance, programs like *Color*, *Brightness*, and *Monitors* let you customize the screen image, *Numbers* sets the format for the way numbers are displayed (with or without commas, the number of decimal places shown, and so on), and *Labels* allows you to "tag" files so you can sort them using the labels. I used a screen-capture utility called *Flash-It* to create the images you see in this article (see Figure 2). There are hundreds of control panel documents available from software distributors, and as shareware and freeware from on-line services like Compuserve (see "Shareware: Try Before You Buy," *State-of-the-Art Contractor*, 10/92).

One new feature of the Control Panels folder is that it can hold documents. For example, the File Sharing Monitor document lets you make your hard disk available to others on a network and determine who shares which folders and documents. It also lets you enable "program linking," a feature that allows some applications to share information with each other. Another handy document is called "Stationery Pads." It lets you create forms that you can then use over and over (like the letter-writing documents, but without the address merge). When you open a document that has been saved as stationery, it creates a new copy and asks you to save it with a new name. Stationery Pads works in any application, so you can create separate, ready-to-use sets of standard forms in any application folder. For instance, a set of forms for starting a job might include subcontracts, releases, checklists, and so on. Another set for job wrap-up might include lien waivers, warranties, and thank you letters.

Sights and Sounds

The ability to change the way characters look when they're printed isn't new to the Mac. But System 7 makes type design sets (called "fonts") a lot easier to install. All you do is drag the icon representing a font from the floppy disk into the Fonts folder on your hard drive. My font folder is rather sparse compared to those of many Mac users, but there are over a thousand fonts available.

You can also install sounds just like fonts. In fact, with the micro-

phone that comes with the new Macs, you can easily record your own sounds for playback. The digital recording is uncannily real. My 9-year-old modified my computer to say "Duh Dad!" instead of beeping when I make an error, but you can use the Mac's audio capabilities to attach a voice note, for example, to a spreadsheet, explaining how a sum is arrived at. Many applications, like Excel 4.0 and Word 5.1, allow you to do this kind of thing.

Audio capabilities are the tip of the new multi-media iceberg that System 7 offers. *QuickTime*, the System 7 multi-media extension, allows application programs to integrate graphics, sound, video, and animation into documents. Instead of using a paper clip to attach a photograph of a site to a spreadsheet development analysis, a click of the mouse can bring up an animated 3-D flyover with the proposed buildings superimposed on an actual video of the land with, say, the theme from *Rocky* in the background.

A.K.A.

System 7 also allows you to create and use a copy of a document or application called an "alias." The one I use most often is *Microsoft Works 3.0 Alias*. In reality, the alias is just a place-holder or address for the real thing, but it acts just like the original. Clicking on an alias launches the original no matter which folder it's in on your computer. This can really come in handy on a network. When you move from computer to computer, you can carry in your shirt pocket a floppy with your customized desktop listed as an alias, load it into the floppy drive, and away you go with your unique files and applications instantly available, just as if you were on your own machine.

Hardware Requirements

System 7 is not for every machine. The newer Macs, with Motorola's 030 or 040 processors, will naturally run System 7 faster. A bare minimum of 2 megabytes of RAM is recommended, but 4 megs is really the low limit in my book, and you should have at least 40 megabytes of hard disk space. The System 7 folder itself takes up over 10 megs, and System 7 applications like Excel and Word can easily consume over 5 megs each. There goes 20 of the 40, and you haven't stored any data yet! If you're interested in multi-media, then you had better have 8 to 64 megs of RAM, a gigabyte of hard disk space, and the dollars to match. ■

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