

Access

Newsletter of the Louisville Computer Society
Kentuckiana's Macintosh Users Group

April 2005

Myth

by Lee Larson

For quite a few years the buzz in both the computer and home electronics worlds has been the mythical *convergence box* or *multimedia appliance*. Everybody has a different idea exactly what it ought to be, but everyone agrees it's some sort of combination computer and audio-video thingamajig that'll do a bunch of different jobs for your home entertainment.

In the last few years, several such boxes have come out, most notably from TiVo and Replay, but they've all been encumbered in different ways by the need to keep television broadcasters happy and the fact that they're more or less one-note wonders. For example, although they do admirable jobs shifting television programs, none of them make it easy to rid yourself of commercials, or archive your recordings to DVD. It was inevitable that the most innovative advances should come from open source developers, who aren't shackled by the need to keep the studios happy.

There are two very active Linux-based open source development projects aimed at coming up with *the* convergence box: Freevo and MythTV. Although they're comparable in features, MythTV seems to be a bit more advanced. I'll concentrate on MythTV here because it's the one with which I have the most experience and because there's an active group porting it to the Mac.

Isaac Richards, who started the MythTV project explains why he did

it on the MythTV Web page: "I got tired of the rather low quality cable box that AT&T Broadband provides with their digital cable service. It's slow to change channels, ridden with ads, and the program guide is a joke. So, I figured it'd be fun to try and build a replacement. Yes, I could have just bought a TiVo, but I wanted to have more than just a PVR—I want a Web browser built in, a mail client, maybe some games. Basically, I want the mythical convergence box that's been talked about for a few years now."

Soon, with the help of dozens of like-minded programmers from all over the world, Richards produced MythTV 0.1, a very rough first draft. As with most successful open source projects, it snowballed. New people joined, new features were added, the design was improved, more hardware was supported and the interface was polished. The current MythTV 0.18 is still officially a beta program, but it has thousands of satisfied users all over the planet.

I'd also been wanting the "mythical convergence box" for a while, but lacked the gumption or the skills to design it. Fortunately, Isaac had been working on it for some time before my momentum started moving me forward, and around last Christmas, I finally decided to throw together a Linux machine to run Myth. Armed with a basement full of old computer junk and a credit card to take advantage of the holiday season sales, it didn't take long to get it up and running.

I've been tinkering with computers for a long time, and what most surprised me was the reaction from my family. Instead of the usual blasé attitude, everybody agrees the new Myth machine is an unqualified success. "Live" television has become a rare event in our household, and television commercials almost never appear. At its base, any Myth box is pretty much a standard personal computer. For example, mine is a typical Linux PC based on an Athlon 2400 with 512 megabytes of RAM and a 200 gigabyte hard drive. Setting it apart from the standard PC is that it contains two TV tuner cards, a PVR-250 and a PVR-350, made by Hauppauge. With the Myth software installed, programs coming in over the cable connection can be recorded onto the hard drive for viewing at my convenience on the television connected to the PVR-350. With two cards installed, two programs can be recorded at the same time. (MythTV can support as many tuner cards as you care to install.) The whole thing is driven by the couch potato's best friend, a remote control. The machine is also connected to the Internet, from which it downloads TV schedules supplied by the free ZapIt schedule service.

When the Mac mini was introduced, many in the MythTV community wondered if it might be the perfect little Myth box because it is relatively cheap, small, noiseless and has a built-in television connector and a remote control. The

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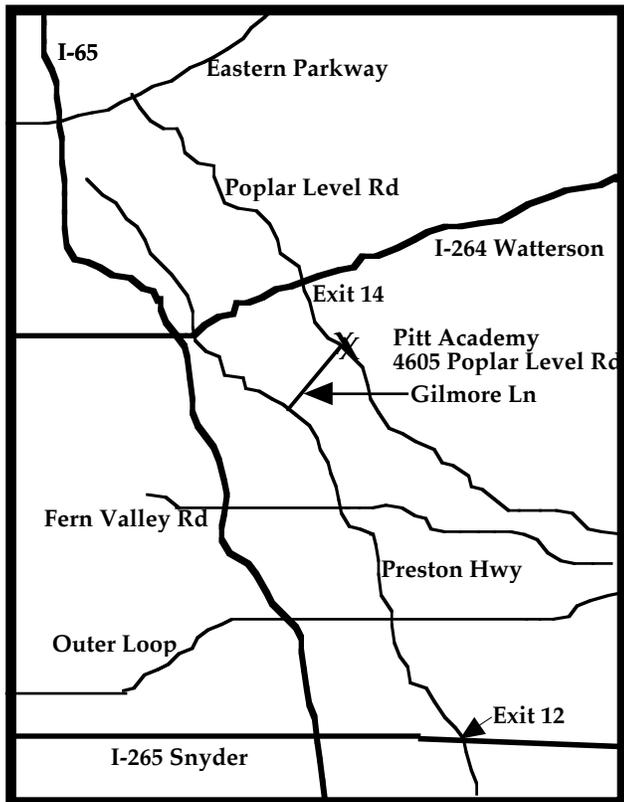
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Come to our monthly meetings

The Louisville Computer Society meets the 4th Tuesday of each month, 7-9 P.M. (except December) at Pitt Academy, 4605 Poplar Level Rd. (Poplar Level Rd. at Gilmore Lane), Louisville KY 40213 (see map below).

Pitt Academy is 1 mile south of the Watterson on Poplar Level Rd. If coming from the Snyder Freeway, Gilmore Ln is 5 miles north of I-265 on Preston Hwy. Turn right and when you get to the end (Poplar Level Rd), Pitt Academy is directly across the intersection.



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one serious flaw is the lack of an interior television tuner.

Here is where the nature of MythTV comes into play. Like many open source programming projects, Myth was conceived as a modular project—built in pieces so many different small groups could each work on their favorite parts. Different groups have contributed modules ripping and burning CDs and DVDs, grabbing weather forecasts—including animated radar—Web surfing, headline news, Internet telephony, iTunes-like music libraries, iPhoto-like still picture galleries and more. In order to do this, MythTV is divided into two programs, a back end and a front end. The back end's job is to handle the recording of programs and the schedules. The front end handles showing things on the television and giving access to the other modules.

The beauty of this technique is that the back end and front end don't have to run on the same machines. Many Myth users have a back end server stuffed with tuner cards and hard drives hidden away in the basement or garage, and a small machine running only a front end connected to the television in the family room. Within a few days of its release, the Mythers had the front end running on the Mac mini, and by most accounts, it makes a fine front end machine, as long as you don't expect it to drive a high definition television.

For more info see: <http://www.mythtv.org/>

From TidBITS#775/11-Apr-05: Mac OS X 10.4 Easter Egg Found and Lost by Matt Neuburg <matt@tidbits.com >

This story comes from Littleton, MA, where TidBITS reader Nancy Kotary writes:

"Recently the weather here turned very cold (again!), and right about the same time, I noticed my 15-inch PowerBook G4 was acting up. I'd come home to find all sorts of weird windows open, or new folders on the Desktop with names like "ag899uiogheo". I was about to take it in for repairs when I accidentally discovered the cause: I'd been leaving the computer open, and my cat had taken to lying on the warm keyboard.

"I didn't have the heart to close the computer after that, and besides, it was sort of fun to see what sort of random havoc the cat would cause. Yesterday, though, I got surprise when I peered over the cat's curled-up form at the PowerBook screen and saw that Software Update was running and some huge download was in progress. It took four or five hours to complete, and when it was finished, it turned out to be the golden master installer image for Mac OS 10.4! I was able to burn the disk and install that same day - for free!"

Our conjecture is that there must be some secret combination of keys which causes Software Update to "see" the Mac OS X 10.4 installer as an available download. Perhaps this was put in as an Easter Egg (all this happened surprisingly close to Easter), or maybe it was just a convenient way for the Apple folks to obtain the latest build during development. There's no way to learn what combination of keys and buttons the cat may have pressed, so, like the Lost Chord, this feat of downloading a free Mac OS X 10.4 installer will probably never be repeated.

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If you wish to be added, contact cartwrig@aye.net

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And a reply from: Lyle D. Gunderson

This could be my PowerBook and cat you're writing about.

He's brought up web sites I've never heard of, done all the things Nancy describes, and makes extensive use of the Help key. One day, he sauntered across my keyboard. This is not at all unusual, as any cat "owner" would tell you. But this time, he stepped on the power key, long enough to bring up the dialog box asking me if I really wanted to shut down the PowerBook. Before I could do anything, he then stepped on the return key (using a hind paw, just to show off), which of course told the PowerBook that yes, I did want to shut it down. Then there wasn't a thing I could do but watch it shut down.

On the plus side, his tail is great for keeping the screen dusted.

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Upcoming Programs 7 P. M. at Pitt Academy (see map on page 2)

April 26 LOJIC on the Internet, by Jane Poole, Products Specialist at LOJIC
 This will highlight the LOJIC Interactive Maps, showing Development Review Information, Voter Information, Geodetic Control Information, Current and Historical Aerial Photography, and Online Map Products.
 LOJIC stands for the Louisville/Jefferson County Information Consortium

May 24

Future programs according to interest of members will probably deal with iPod, Palm, Genealogy, and other topics which I can't remember. If you have any special requests, please contact Bill Rising at braising@louisville.edu.

SIG's Special Interest Groups

SVI-SIG is Still & Video Imaging - Special Interest Group. This SIG is devoted to manipulating pictures, both photos and movies. It meets the second Tuesday of each month, 7 PM at Pitt Academy. The first meeting was held April 12 and meetings are very informal and open to anyone who shares our interests. For more information contact Bill King at bk0413@insightbb.com

**Louisville Computer Society
 Macintosh Users Group
 Membership Application**

Please send your \$26 check for a year's membership, made out to Louisville Computer Society to:

Louisville Computer Society
 P.O. Box 9021
 Louisville, KY 40209-9021.

Thanks! See you at the next meeting.

Fill out the following ; clip on the dotted line (or copy to another piece of paper) and send in with your check .

New or Renewal Membership

Name: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip+4: _____

Home Phone: () -- _____ Your E-Mail: _____ Your Home Page: _____

How did you hear about LCS' _____

**iPod and iTunes HACKS:
Tips & Tools for Ripping,
Mixing, and Burning.**

by Hadley Stern O'Reilly 2005.

(Library call number: 006.5/STE, 2005).

Another book of hacks. #1 is to get your iPod looking as good as new. getting clean and getting rid of scratches.

For cleaning the recommended product is Plexux Plastic Cleaner available for around \$10 by Googling for Plexux Plastic Cleaner.

To apply, you'll need microfiber towels. The ones the author likes best come from Tacoma WA called Griots Garage. Their three-pack goes for \$16. (www.griotsgarage.com/index/jsp)

Spray the cleaner directly on one of the towels. Use a que-tip to shove the towel down in all crevices.

After cleaning work on the scratches: To get rid of the scratches (not gouges) you must sand down some of the microscopic bumps that reflect light unevenly. You will just be removing a small amount (microns) of the plastic. According to this book, the most effective iPod plastic polish: Brasso! Put a small dab of Brasso on a microfiber towel twisted over the end of a finger and press hard rubbing back and forth; not in circles. Why not in circles? When you polish in a circular motion you leave tiny scratches in a circular pattern that will catch the light from all directions and be visible from a "mile away." (Now I find out why I can't polish glass!)

Lots of other hacks are organized under various headings. **iPod Hardware:** Turn Your iPod into a Universal remote Control, Use your iPod as a Dictaphone; **Non-iPod Hardware:** Control iTunes from Your Palm, Run iTunes on an Old mac; **iPod Software:** Publish a Web Page from Your iPod, Dial a Phone with Your iPod; **iTunes:** iTunes Keyboard Shortcuts, Bulk Rip CDs, Clutter Your Desktop with Music; **AppleScript for iTunes:** Tame iTunes with AppleScript, Search for Lyrics on Google, Play Snippets of Each Track in a Playlist; and **Beyond iTunes:** Stream Your Music Collection over the Web, Get Your Record Collection into iTunes; all together a total of 100 hacks.

**Tiger, Mac OS X 10.4
is coming April 29
On sale at 6:00 PM
Check your favorite Mac
store**



Mac OS X v10.4 Tiger, the latest and last (?) of the cats comes with more than 200 breakthrough new features.

In the Box you get the Installation DVD, Xcode 2 developer tools, Installation and setup guide, Welcome to Mac OS X Tiger user guide.

Applications included: Address Book 4, Automator, Calculator 4, Chess, Dashboard, Dictionary, DVD Player 4.5, Font Book 2, iCal 2, iChat/AV 3, Image Capture 3, Internet Connect, iSync 2. iTunes 4.7.1, Mail 2, Preview 3, QuickTime 7 Player, Safari 2, Sherlock, Stickies, System Preferences, and TextEdit. Also a whole slew of utilities.

Automator: "Making macros" Convert time-consuming, repetitive manual tasks quickly, and effortlessly with Automator Workflows. It's simple to create custom Workflows just by dragging items, pointing and clicking. You don't have to write any code. Automator comes complete with a library of hundreds of Actions and you can expand your library by downloading new Actions from third-party developers.

Dashboard: Check the time, watch the weather, track flights, view stock prices and find a local restaurant. Instantly. Desk Accessories available with a single click. Dashboard zooms across your Desktop, giving you fast access to nifty widgets designed for fun as well as function. Dashboard is home to widgets: mini-applications that let you perform common tasks and provide you with fast access to information. With a single click, Dashboard appears, complete with widgets that bring you a world of information — real-time weather, stock tickers, flight information and more — instantly. Dashboard disappears just as easily. Tiger includes a suite of widgets to get you started, and you can add more anytime. With so many widgets at your disposal, the Widget Bar comes in handy. Click the plus sign and Dashboard launches a Widget Bar displaying every available widget. Drag widgets from the Bar to the Dashboard and watch as they appear with a cool ripple effect. Once you have your widgets where you want them, just close the Widget Bar with a single click.

Compatibility: With Tiger you can Use more than 12,000 applications. including Microsoft Office. America Online. and Quicken. Open, edit, save, and print documents in their native file formats.

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