What's Leopard Really Worth?

An a-la-carte look at the value of OS X's new features

10.26.07 - Andy Ihnatko - Macworld

I think the way to sum up the correct level of anticipation for Leopard is to compare it to a movie that stars Gene Hackman or Michael Caine. You know that it's going to be worthwhile… but the coin's in the air as to whether it's worth seeing right away.

That's because Leopard, unique from all previous major releases of Mac OS X, lacks that one sledgehammer feature that absolutely insists that you park your butt in front of the Apple Store and subsist on a diet of Orange Julius and Cinnabons all day to ensure that today is the first day of the rest of your Leopard life. No, Leopard might very well be the first edition in which many diehard Mac folks decide to forego the $129 upgrade entirely. Not because it isn't worth the money — it surely is — but because they know they'll be getting a free copy on the Mac they intend to buy next year, and they don't see a need to rush it.

I've been running Leopard for the past year or so while it's slouched rather messily towards Bethlehem to be born. By now, I've fielded the "Should I or shouldn't I?" question often enough that I've got it pretty well rehearsed. Leopard, I'm convinced, is a game of inches. It's not one or two major features that'll convince you to upgrade, but a half dozen or more… and for each person, it'll be a different collection.

I try to picture Leopard as a catalog of shareware and commercial features. If an independent developer had showed me an alpha of Time Machine and told me that he intended to box and sell it as a standalone backup app for $79, would I think he was charging too much, too little, or that he should release it as freeware and be grateful for an occasional case of beer that might arrive from an appreciative user?

Should you upgrade? Just do the math. I can't cover every feature, but I can at least do the Antiques Roadshow appraisal on the highlights.

Time Machine

There are three kinds of backup apps:
1) Intense and punitively-complex network utilities best left to the sort of admins who have had their ears surgically-resculpted into elf or Vulcan points.
2) Utilities designed to help the typical user back up their data in a simple, practical, flexible, and effective way.
3) The "freak" apps. Time Machine is a "freak" app. It's not a flexible tool. It's a specific service that implements a single (but attractive) backup scheme: "infinite undo" for your whole drive. You desperately need a spreadsheet that you deleted months ago? No sweat: open the folder it was in,

activate Time Machine, "rewind" the folder until the missing spreadsheet re-appears, and then drag it from the Folder of Yesteryear into the Folder of Today. Cool. Definitely. But I can't think of the last time I actually needed to do that.

It'll be fab if the next generation of Leopard apps could exploit this sort of mechanism to the extreme, of course. I've just deleted three paragraphs from this section; if later on I decide that I have room for 'em, a Time Machine-enabled version of this word processor would let me copy a paragraph from the past and paste it into the present. That'd make Time Machine into a killer feature. Alas, Apple tells me that even with third-party development, this isn't possible under the current system. You can "rewind" your iPhoto library, your Address Book, and your Mail store, but that's it.

So what does Time Machine do for me as a backup utility? Well, it creates and maintain a single straightforward backup of my entire hard drive and that's it. The backup is freshened hourly, which is nice. But Time Machine can't backup just a portion of my drive; it's all or nothing, so I need to buy a second drive of equal capacity to make full and practical use of the system. And producing multiple backups is cumbersome, which is potentially a fatal weakness in a backup utility.

For my own needs Time Machine is actually inferior to a mainstream, non-freak backup app. I use Shirt Pocket Software's SuperDuper. Once a week, it does a complete backup of my MacBook as insurance against a drive crash. Every evening, it backs up my most important stuff (iTunes purchases, email, and my Documents and Pictures folders) to my iPod, as insurance against everything else. This way, I have two backups, not just one, and because I carry my iPod everywhere, if there's a fire at my office or a break-in at my hotel room, I know that my most important data is safe.

And if my internal drive goes toes (or some other fleshy protuberance)-up, I can just restart my Mac and boot from my Super Duper backup. I'll be back up and running again in five minutes. I was fairly amazed to learn that Time Machine backups aren't bootable. If I rely solely on Time Machine for backups and there's a major crash, I'm hours away from a functional Mac. Unless of course I had the forethought to partition my Time Machine volume and add a separate boot volume with a functional copy of Leopard on it. (That's a tip, kids: write it down.)

So: $15. It doesn't offer the flexibility or safety of a traditional backup app and it has one new feature that you might like or you might completely ignore for the life of the OS. I'd be advising the developer to undercut the $28 Super Duper! for this initial release, and then bump the price to $29 when it gains some new features.

Spaces

Spaces is such a simple, one-trick thing: it lets you define any number of "virtual" monitors. And like having two or three "real" monitors attached, you can exploit this real-estate any way

Adobe Outlines Its Leopard Compatibility

10.26.07 - Jim Dalrymple - Macworld

Adobe, one of Apple's most important third-party partners, has commented on its compatibility with Mac OS X Leopard. The company said that most, but not all of its applications are compatible with Leopard without the need for an update.

Adobe Photoshop CS3, Flash CS3 Professional, Contribute CS3, Dreamweaver CS3, Fireworks CS3, Flash Player 9, GoLive 9, Illustrator CS3, In-Copy CS3, InDesign CS3, Bridge CS3, Version Cue CS3, Device Central CS3 and Acrobat Connect (Start Meeting) are all compatible with Leopard. Products that will require updates for full Leopard compatibility include Adobe Acrobat 8 Professional and the company's professional video applications, including Adobe Premiere Pro CS3, After Effects CS3 Professional, Encore CS3 and Soundbooth CS3.

Adobe said it expects to publish free Leopard compatibility updates for the video applications in December 2007 and for Acrobat 8 Professional and Adobe Reader 8 in January 2008.

Older versions of Adobe and Macromedia may work with Leopard, but the company warns there could be "installation, stability, and reliability issues for which there is no resolution." Adobe said these products would not be updated for Leopard.

Tonight…

- 7:00 **Help desk** - Tom Davis

7:00 **Magic Time!**
New members - Brian Fountain
Dues ($3) - Ray Kallman
Industry news - Lyle Sanders
Shareware - Ray Kallman
For sale or purchase -

@ 7:30 **Santa's Helper**
Brian

Wrap-up - Brian

you see fit. Put each app in a separate screen? Use one for word-type stuff, a second for number-ish things, and a third for Aperture and Photoshop and other imagey operations? A "boss" screen that absolutely will never contain a Firefox window full of "Babylon 5/Serenity" slashfic?

It's up to you. Spaces is not here to judge. (But Simon Tam getting it on with Bester?!? Really? Come on, now…)

I love Spaces. It's clean, it's simple, and it works fantastically. I find that I tend to create a new Space for every app with a great fullscreen mode, like iMovie or InDesign or Aperture. I also don't think we'll have long to wait before developers start creating "master control panel"-type apps whose sole job is to occupy a slot in your Spaces setup, and fill your entire screen with a nice, black status panel of your entire world (new emails, news headlines, To-Dos, appointments) that you can read from across the room.

So its low price of $19 isn't a reflection of its value. Merely an acknowledgment of how hard it is to get people to cough up more then twenty bucks for a one-trick pony.

New Dock

The Dock has been given a facelift, but not one that everyone will enjoy, and it has new features, but none of any real value. "But what about Stacks?" you say. "Drag your Documents folder into the Dock, and you can select and launch any file directly from the Dock!"

Yeah. Keen. But you've been able to do that for years. It's just that the files were presented as a popup menu instead of a fan (or grid) of document previews. And because I'm one of those mythical power users who has more than a dozen things in my Documents folder, I'd much rather have a huge popup list that scrolls quickly than a panel of a dozen icons that moves more slowly. Nice touch, though, populating the Stack with just the most recently-touched items.

I see this as a free update. One that many people won't bother downloading.

Back To My Mac and Screen Sharing

Finally. Finally! Apple finally figured out that it's the architect of both the Mac OS and a massive online service. I don't know if there's been some sort of gas leak in the .Mac team's offices all these years, but why did it take so long for them to do something more ambitious than simple email and file hosting services that anybody can get anywhere for free?

If you have a .Mac account (and you will want to have one, now), the service acts as the go-between for your Mac and the rest of the world. Pop open your MacBook in a hotel room and glory be… your desktop iMac appears in the Finder (assuming that both Macs are running Leopard). You can access its hard drive as though it were locally attached. Access your shared iTunes library. And this works with any Mac running Leopard. You're at your friend's Mac, you're at an Apple Store… it doesn't matter, so long as you can sign in to .Mac.

Combine this with Screen Sharing and you suddenly have a very very very very intensely useful thing. Your connection to the other Mac is encrypted via IPsec, which means that in a sense, .Mac now comes with a free VPN tool.

You're out and about and using an open WiFi access point. You don't dare do your online banking or transmit any other kind of sensitive information because you can't trust open WiFi (yes, it's possible to establish a sham proxy that makes you "think" your browser has a secure connection).

Okay, so instead of connecting to GreedySelfishBastardBank.com via the copy of Safari on your MacBook, connect to your bank via the copy of Safari located on your iMac at home. Use the secure Back To My Mac feature to establish the connection, open your iMac's screen, and then launch the browser from THAT desktop.

Or how about this? You have an old Power-Book G4. It doesn't have much by way of a CPU or memory or a hard drive, but it's way too good to toss. Fine: use it as a terminal for your home iMac. Let your new iMac have the big muscle and the terabyte of storage and host a hundred apps. No matter where you are in the house or the world, your 1 GHz G4 with its 60 gig drive can easily handle the simple tasks of shuttling pixels, keystrokes, and mouse events across your WiFi connection.

And to anyone who suspects that Apple will release a dirt-cheap "slim" Mac sometime next year…well, now you have a lot of things to think about, don't you?

(Truth be told, I haven't been able to get this feature working as I write this. I trust that all of the infrastructure will be switched on shortly. Apple? I'm right to trust that all of the .Mac infrastructure will be switched on shortly, right? You're aware that you've shipped this thing, right?)

The bottom line is that this is a useful pair of features for anyone who can't count on being in front of the same Mac in the same place at all times. And it's precisely the sort of feature I love: it's really a big box of possibilities that you're willing to exploit in any way you wish. So hell, yeah: I'd pay $99 for this feature as a third-party shrinkwrapped DVD at an Apple Store.

Core Animation

When I think of Core Animation out there on the street trying to raise cash on its own, I think of Growl. On its own, it does nothing. It's just a resource that developers can use to enhance their apps. Normally, when my FTP client wants to tell me that it's finished uploading 110 megabytes of files to a project server, it lets me know by bouncing its icon incessantly until I do something to make it stop annoying me. If I've installed Growl, a smoky translucent window shimmers into view, displays an acknowledgment, and then fades back away.

Core Animation is like that. It provides built-in services for lighting objects and moving them around the screen. "Big deal," you shrug, but I encourage you to imagine the sort of apps that will start appearing soon. Beauty is a true, valuable feature in user-interface design and from now on, developers will be able to have their apps look and behave the way that objects do in the real world, all with a minimum amount of heavy lifting involved.

If you doubt me, take another look at the iPhone. It's really just a wrapper for an enormous pile of Core Animation routines.

Call it $29. And most of these copies would be "sold" the first time the user happens to sit next to someone with Core Animation installed. They'll spend an entire 3 hour flight stealing increasingly shameless glances and by the time their plane touches down in Dallas/Fort Worth, their own desktops will seem as slick and powerful as Jerry Stiller.

Mail, iCal, and Address Book

I wonder if Apple knows something about Microsoft's future that we don't. Or maybe Steve Ballmer keyed Steve Jobs' Mercedes once, or something. Because Apple continues to try to nudge Microsoft apps away from the center of the Mac experience. It's slow work, like wiggling a fridge out so you can mop underneath it, but you can't ignore the progression. Safari eliminated Internet Explorer. Keynote took out PowerPoint. Pages got off to a slow start and seems eons away from truly challenging Word, but the '08 edition of iLife clearly came to play and it brought a great spreadsheet app with it.

And now we have the de-wussification of Mail. Mail was once a candy-apple red Mazda Miata. Now it's a Ford pickup with a gun rack and a rear-window decal of a cartoon Calvin peeing all over the Microsoft Entourage icon.

It's truly a whole new app; Mail finally understands how modern folk use their mail client. A single email can represent a new contact, an appointment, a new item on my To-Do list, and a note. And now Mail can articulate all of that subtle content without my having to buy lots of third-party software or create a whole bunch of AppleScripts or Automator workflows. iCal, too, understands that calendars aren't just about keeping track of the kids' soccer practices and that Events are often a soup that many people contribute to.

I dig Mail's new support for RSS subscriptions. I don't know if I'll use it, though; Bloglines is pretty hardwired into my daily routine. But I like the idea of having an app that serves as a one-stop answer to the question "What happened in the past 15 minutes that I need to know about?" Leopard Mail has the sort of features that people will pay good money for; with a nudge, Mail, iCal and Address Book could become a new $59 iPackage. I think Apple could get away with charging that kind of dough.

iChat

10.5's iChat is in the same category as Mail: it's really been moved to the next level. It's still a fun, casual app — and I am steeling myself for endless video chats with friends who aren't sick and tired of having the extended "Peter Vs. Giant Chicken" fight from "Family Guy" running behind them at all times. But now it's entered that category of power where the thing suddenly becomes, you know…tax-deductible. The ability to run presentations and do live screen sharing, as well as the ability to record chats, will encourage people to reach for their wallets. $39.

Safari and Web Clip

This really feels more like a free download than anything else. The ability to create a "live" clipping as a Dashboard widget (so you can keep an eye on an eBay auction without having do download and configure a special new widget) is neat and represents something I might pay $9 for as shareware.

As for the improvements to security and searching… well, those I expect to get for free. And speaking of widgets…

Dashboard

Dashboard probably sits as the biggest disappointment of Mac OS X. It sure seemed interesting but truly, the only times I ever find myself looking at my Dashboard is when I aimed for the Delete key and hit F12 by accident. And then I had to wait a minute while all these useless trinkets loaded in and populated themselves with data.

I am encouraged by the arrival of DashCode. Like Core Animation, it's a feature for developers and not users, but it makes it very very easy to create new, "real" widgets. So it's entirely possible that a new "killer widget" will appear that turns my head around on Dashboard completely. Like a new football stadium, I'm not opposed to it but I ain't paying for it. Free.

Finder

Yup, I'm one of those people who's getting increasingly antsy for a true revolution here. Apparently, Apple thinks it got the Finder perfect with System 1.02, because we haven't seen a true fresh take on this in more than 20 years. But we've seen steady evolution, and I suppose that's enough. The Sidebar, for example, makes more sense now than it ever did, organizing volume and directory resources in a way that you can "get" immediately.

And speaking of getting things immediately, it's about time that locating and using shared volumes was as easy as using shared libraries in iTunes. My mouth goes a little dry when the subject of "a more iTunes-like Finder" comes up, but here but having used the iTunesy Finder for a few months now, I will have nothing but kind things to say as I pay my $39.

You can't get more iTunes-like than inserting a new Finder view based on Cover Flow. I scoffed. I sneered. I snickered. And when people got tired of hearing me go on about how lame that idea was, I moved to another state and got new friends just so I could start all over again.

Okay, I was wrong. You see, I'm not Felix Unger. (If you're ten years younger than me, "I'm not Carlton from 'Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.'" If you're ten years younger than that, you don't watch television so I'll say that I'm not an uptight anal-retentive who obsessively organizes his stuff into folders.) I have a big blob of stuff marked "Documents" and another marked "Pictures" and once I double-click on it… it's like a game show or something and there's a 50-50 chance that it'd be faster for me to just recreate whatever I'm looking for from scratch than to actually try to locate it.

Cover Flow and Quick Look

These underscore how correct I was not to give a damn about organization. I open my Pictures folder in search of a good photo of my iPod with its anti-skid tape on the back. I (literally) flip through stacks of pictures and quickly see the picture I want. Quick Look lets me view the picture at full-screen without having to drag it into Preview or something to confirm that it's good enough to print in a book. A huge array of document types are supported already, and it's infinitely extensible with developer plugins.

I've said nothing but positive things about the Finder and there doesn't appear to be another place to put this, so I'll use this final paragraph to state that the new translucent menubar is a big Costco-sized box of Suck. And look! There's a free prize inside: a travel-sized tube of Fail.

It's ugly and makes a critical part of the UI harder to see and use. That's not what we've come to expect from Apple. When I first saw it, I didn't simply assume that it was a bug… I knew it was. Oh, well.

TextEdit and Preview

When I imagine the people who are in charge of these apps, I picture a couple of developers who have so much seniority at Apple and are such masters at the game of corporate survival that they can't really ever be fired and they know it. Higher-ups have stuck them in a bad little office out of the way, assigned the team a project that's so esoteric that (it's figured) they can't really make any trouble.

TextEdit and Preview are insignificant apps. Or at least they're supposed to be. "We need an app that can display RTF files, so users can read the 'Read Before Installing' docs that come with most software," these people were told. "Oh, and a JPEG and a PDF viewer that comes up when people double-click on stuff in the Finder."

Left to their own devices, they've decided to make real damned software and make it a free part of the OS. The team's goal seems to be to explore just how far they can go before the iWork and iLife product managers throw a fit.

TextEdit is, frankly, a real damned word processor. If Pages does about 85 percent of what Microsoft Word does, then TextEdit is 60 percent as good as Pages. And it's still enough word processor for 100 percent of the needs of 60 percent of all Mac users.

(Hang on… I think I have a pie chart or something here.)

It falls short on the Freestyle part of the competition (no page layout features, no comments or version tracking) but nails the compulsories. It supports all modern word-processor formats, it supports styles, lists, and tables, and adds grammar checking to the mix.

Preview is not yet a real damned image editor but it's still ambitious. It's not just a utility for peeping PDFs. It has a full array of markup, document management, and image-adjustment tools. Just the ability to zap the background from a photo leaving behind a clean outline has made Preview an indispensable app whenever I'm preparing a Keynote presentation.

I love them both, to the tune of $19 apiece.

Spotlight

What happened to Spotlight in Leopard is what ought to happen to every major new feature after its debut. Clearly, the Spotlight team listened carefully to users and was willing to throw away their vision of how people ought to use system-wide search and instead gave them what they actually want and need.

Mind you, the new Spotlight isn't revolutionary by any means. Its improvements are more a case of shrewd edits. Search results appear in a new Finder window, not in a special Spotlight interface. Which makes perfect sense; it's natural to want to "drag" a search into the Sidebar so you can use it again and again. Search language is now more Google-like. Not only can you do compound searches, but you can also do calculations and other forms of search-fu.

And it's been made more relevant by adding more data types to the mix. It indexes the pages you've viewed in Safari, so when you do a Spotlight search on "awesome life-size X-wing model rocket" the number-one result will take you to a bookmark file in Safari's "History" folder, buried deep within your "Library" folder. Because that's the URL of the webpage where you read all about that three months ago.

It's also a lot faster than its predecessor. So while the original Spotlight was a little shaky, the new edition is clearly something you'd pay cash money — namely $29 — for.

Speech

It's easy for most of us to forget just how important Speech is. To people with vision problems, it's not a cute little toy…it's what makes a Mac usable. Even if you don't "need" good, clear speech, it's still useful: for years, I've been converting emails, webpages and documents into ad-hoc synthetic podcasts so I can have my news read to me while I drive to meetings and such.

There's a new speech system and a new addition to the chorus of synthetic voices. "Alex" delivers speech that's so clear and natural that it's actually a little bit off-putting. You've been able to purchase voices as good as Alex from Cepstral.com for a good while…but it would have cost you $29. Now, it's built-in.

Personally, I value this feature at… let's see… roughly 2800 times what normal users would pay. That's because Leopard's speech dictionary has been hardwired to pronounce my name correctly. It would probably cost me $82,197 to launch a massive PR campaign to inform everybody that it's "eh-NOT-ko," not "Ick-a-notto" and it'd be cheap at double.

I'm also factoring in a couple grand for the "nyaah nyaah nyaah" factor. It isn't how my relatives in other parts of the country or the world pronounce it… it's how I pronounce it, having been born and bred in New England. 1,000 years of Russian ancestry are trumped by 10,000,000 computers. Whee! I'm not looking forward to this year's family Christmas letters.

Adding it up

So if each and every one of these features seems like a big deal to you — and if you're unwilling to contribute to a general fund to promote the correct pronunciation of "Ihnatko" throughout the seven continents — then by my tally you're getting a Newlywed Game prize package worth $409.

Wait, I've just received my official copy from Apple via FedEx and there's a way-cool 3D holographic nebula on the cover of the package. So let's kite that up to $420; a hologram like that would cost you an easy $10 plus tax down at the mall.

But this is an imprecise science. Figuring out the value of Leopard isn't as easy as cracking open the DVD and counting the number of memory modules inside. Only you can figure out which features are important to you, so only you can do the final math. Plus, there are plenty of little features I haven't even discussed.

Leopard would have cost me $236 ($247, including hologram). Because though I'll be buying a new MacBook over the winter, I don't want to wait to get the new Finder ($39), iChat ($39) Mail, iCal and Address Book ($59), and Back To My Mac/Screen Sharing ($99).

(Er…assuming that Apple hadn't just now sent me a comp copy, of course.)

No matter how you work the numbers, though, it's pretty clear that Apple has yet again crammed way more than $129 worth of value into its latest OS update. It's the magic number: just low enough that most people

Leopard

regard it as a reasonable expense without needing to resort to a lot of operatic hand-wringing over the decision.

Compare and contrast this with Microsoft's roll-out of Windows Vista. It's available in multiple distributions of varying features, and the only truly affordable edition is the one that offers the user practically nothing that he doesn't have already with Windows XP. Result: the community of Vista users is growing only about as fast as new PCs (with Vista pre-installed) are being sold…whereas Leopard will certainly be the dominant installed Mac OS by this this time next year.

Microsoft plunged its users deep into the Wring Cycle of upgrade decisions… and now it's possible that the fat lady's finally singing.

I agree that I probably owe each of you a dollar for that horrible pun. Let's just chalk it up to my excitement of finally having a shipping copy of Leopard and move on as though nothing had happened, all right?

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OSX.RSPlug.A Trojan Horse Targets Mac OS X

11.06.07 - Jeff Carlson - tidbits.com
Read the article at: db.tidbits.com/article/9278

Security software firm Intego is warning Mac OS X users about a Trojan horse that targets the Mac. OSX.RSPlug.A is showing up on pornography sites disguised as a video plug-in. When someone clicks the link to watch certain video clips, a Web page states that a new Quick-

Time codec must be installed. Opening the disk image that downloads results in the installer asking for an administrator password (which is the first serious sign of trouble); if the option to Open "Safe" Files After Downloading is enabled in Safari, the disk image opens automatically *(you should disable that feature in Safari; see "Significant Safari Exploit Discovered," 2007-09-07).*

read Intego's security alert: www.intego.com/news/ism0705.asp

and Tidbits alert at: db.tidbits.com/article/8436

Once given root access, the Trojan horse changes the computer's DNS settings to point to phishing sites or ads for other pornography sites. Even if the DNS is reset manually, a background task added by the Trojan horse changes the DNS again automatically.

Rob Griffiths at Macworld has written up instructions for removing OSX.RSPlug.A manually; Intego's VirusBarrier X4 with updated virus definitions for 31-Oct-07 also identifies and removes the Trojan horse. Griffith writes: "This is really bad. Really. And even though it's targeted at porn surfers today, the malware could easily be associated with anything else, like a new viral video site, or a site that purports to show commercials from the upcoming Super Bowl."

read Griffiths article at:
www.macworld.com/2007/10/firstlooks/trojanhorse/

As always, the best defense against such attacks is to avoid installing third-party software with which you're unfamiliar, especially any that requires an administrator password. Although the Mac has proven remarkably resilient to the threat of viruses and other malware, it's not immune.

Leopard App Casualty List Grows

11.05.07 - Lisa Vaas - eWEEK

The list of applications that Apple's new Mac OS X Leopard operating system cripples or kills is growing.

Heise Security—which on Oct. 29 warned that Leopard's firewall is deactivated upon installation—on Nov. 5 reported that maybe it's a good thing it's deactivated by default, given that the firewall is tripping up programs by digitally signing applications on launch and can hamper program integrity as a result.

At this point, users are complaining that the VOIP (voice over IP) application Skype and the online game "World of Warcraft" are breaking after being activated from within the firewall. Some Adobe Creative Suite users on forums have also complained about performance under Leopard, with InDesign not launching, Photoshop running but occasionally crashing on launch and Illustrator running but crashing on quit.

On top of those problems, users had already been complaining for some time on Apple forums about wireless shriveling up and dying after Leopard installation. "When you connect to your wireless network, your transmit rate will be 54 (if you're using the 54g standard). If you start up a download or something that occupies your bandwidth (even LAN traffic), you will notice that the transmit rate drops to 11, then to 3, then to 1 until finally your downloads will drop, your ichat connections will fail and your browser will not load pages," a user with the handle of "nunofgs" wrote on an Apple forum on Oct. 26. Scores of users have since posted similar tales of wireless problems.

eWEEK Labs takes a look at Leopard. Check it out. As far as the firewall's crippling of programs goes, security consultant Rich Mogull said in a Nov. 1 posting that enabling the firewall in the "Set access for specific services and applications" mode causes Leopard to digitally sign applications on launch that

aren't already signed via Apple's mechanism.

"If that application happens to change during run-time, as Skype seems to, the signature no longer matches and the application won't run," Mogull said. "There are no dialogs or warnings—the icon just dances on the dock for a few bounces then disappears."

Heise Security's Juergen Schmidt said in the Nov. 5 posting that the reason behind Leopard's firewall misbehaving is that, in contrast to Tiger's firewall, it's no longer operating at the packet level but rather is working with applications, permitting or denying applications to perform specific network activities.

At issue is a new firewall feature that was introduced in Leopard: the identification of applications via code signatures.

Apple signs certain applications that are automatically allowed to communicate with the network past the firewall—a fact that's not shown in the user interface—even with the firewall configured to block all incoming connections.

When applications without signatures try to open a network port, Schmidt said, the firewall will block it when set to block incoming connections. In restricted mode, the firewall will prompt the user for permission to start the service and then will record to an exceptions list whatever choice the user makes. If the program is subsequently changed, previously granted permission is withdrawn.

It gets sticky when applications perform their own self-integrity checks and decide that the file on the hard disk has been changed. Skype gets into trouble running on Leopard because the operating system's firewall signature process changes the VOIP application binary on disk, Schmidt said. If a user tries to start it up from the command line, he or she gets a "Check 1 failed" message, meaning the system can't run Skype. Those who start Skype from the GUI merely see a dancing symbol that then disappears without further comment, as happened to Mogull. Heise says that reinstallation is required to restore the application to normal function.

A similar problem is keeping "World of Warcraft" players from their online role playing, with the only current workaround being complete reinstallation, according to Schmidt.

Apple did not reply to a request for comment.