

## Solving the OS X mystery

David Frith, The Barrow

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DAVID POGUE is a professional magician, a former Broadway musical conductor, and a very highly paid writer for *The New York Times*.

He doesn't write in that journal about music or magic but computers - his Circuits column appears weekly in the newspaper that offers All The News That's Fit To Print.

Pogue no longer just writes about the Apple Mac, though for 10 years he was the back-page columnist in Macworld magazine, and it's still his favourite PC.

For the NYT he covers a much broader beat. But he still gets to the Mac trade shows, and that's where this story gets interesting.

A couple of years ago, when they were still staging Macworld Expo shows in Boston every July - spread irritatingly between two halls on opposite sides of the city - Pogue took one of the buses that carried Mac fans from one hall to the other.

The bloke in the seat beside him had no idea who Pogue was. But he decided to let loose with a complaint, just the same.

He'd just bought a copy of Microsoft Office for 400-odd dollars - and he was spitting mad.

"Look at that," he told Pogue, waving his hand at the Microsoft packaging.

"Four hundred bucks and they don't even give you a manual any more ... just a lousy couple of discs." Offers of online help were not really useful.

"There's no pictures, no page numbers and you can't find anything.

"The stupid Help program covers up the program you're trying to learn.

"And you can't read it in the bathroom!"

Instant inspiration.

Pogue had been writing books - most notably the best-selling *Macs For Dummies* and the offbeat *Magic For Dummies* - for various publishing houses and had been paid peanuts. He was keen to start his own publishing venture. As he listened to the aggrieved Mac fan, an idea crystallised: the Missing Manual series.

It's not just Microsoft.

Almost every major software company, including Apple itself, has given up on supplying user guides (one honourable exception: Adobe, whose manuals for programs like PageMaker and InDesign remain as thick, juicy and helpful as ever).

Printed manuals are costly and time-consuming to produce. So they don't do it any more.

Before he got off the bus, Pogue knew what he was going to do.

He would launch a publishing project called The Missing Manuals.

Slogan: "The book that should have been in the box."

And that's just what he's done.

In a joint venture with the O'Reilly publishing group, Pogue has so far produced Missing Manuals for Mac OS 9 and X, iMovie, AppleWorks 6, Office 2001, Windows Me and 2000, and DreamWeaver 4.

Windows XP Home Edition is due in April.

They are everything manuals should be: thick, informative, friendly, well illustrated, crammed with tips and written with flair and humour.

The Barrow's favourite - and one for which we shelled out money at the recent Macworld Expo in New York - is Mac OS X, The Missing Manual.

If you're making the switch to Apple's all-new Unix-based operating system, or planning to - and that includes almost every Mac user, since Apple's future is inextricably tied to this software - you need this book.

OS X is a wonderful system, arguably the best in the world.

It's fast and powerful, virtually crash-free, and has a gorgeous, shimmering interface that charms pretty well everyone who sees it.

But its Unix underpinnings mean it is nothing like the traditional Mac system.

For instance: when you start up a Macintosh under OS X, you're confronted with the icon of a hard disk.

Under Mac OS 8 or 9, you'd click on that to find the programs and documents you want.

But try that in OS X, and you're confronted with a list of folders you didn't put there with names like Library and Users, and which make little sense when you click on them.

Instead, Mac OS X users begin each day by accessing an all-new Home folder: reached by clicking an icon, or by hitting the Command-Option-H keys.

Almost everything is different in Mac OS X, and you'll certainly need help in the early days - and probably well beyond.

Apple Computer does little to provide that help. Its 32-page printed guide which

comes with the box or a new Mac is just a starter that leaves many questions unanswered.

Mac OS X: The Missing Manual runs to just under 600 pages, and it covers pretty well any question you might ask.

Best single feature is a 16-page appendix dubbed the "Where'd It Go Dictionary".

Alphabetically arranged, it's a guide to which of the classic Mac features live on under OS X; which have been moved around or given new names; and which have bit the dust forever.

(Among the latter are the control panels and system extensions which were such a distinctive part of OS 9, and are now gone forever - blessedly in the case of extensions, since extension conflicts were the major cause of crashes and frozen screens).

There's a full and welcome chapter on the mysteries of the underlying Unix structure of OS X, and how - should you care - you can master the dreaded command-line to tap powerful computing possibilities and explore arcane corners of the system.

You can find Mac OS X: The Missing Manual in Australian bookstores for something in the \$50-60 range.

Or you can order it from an online bookstore such as Amazon.com where - believe it or not - it is the number-one best-selling computer book.

Last week, Amazon was charging \$US17 (\$32.70) for the title.

Depending on whether you're ordering other books, and how fast you want it delivered, you'd probably get it delivered to your door for something like \$45.

Want more information? Pogue's home page at [www.davidpogue.com](http://www.davidpogue.com) is a good starting point.

Apart from data on the Missing Manuals, you'll find links to his Macworld and New York Times columns, a "virtual CD" of shareware - and an offer to join Pogue, Apple founder Steve Wozniak, and Mac gurus such as Adam Engst and Bob LeVitus on an Alaskan cruise and floating Mac seminar in late May.

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