

CAMP News

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Capital Apple Mac
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Gardiner, Maine

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Bento

Database for the rest of us?

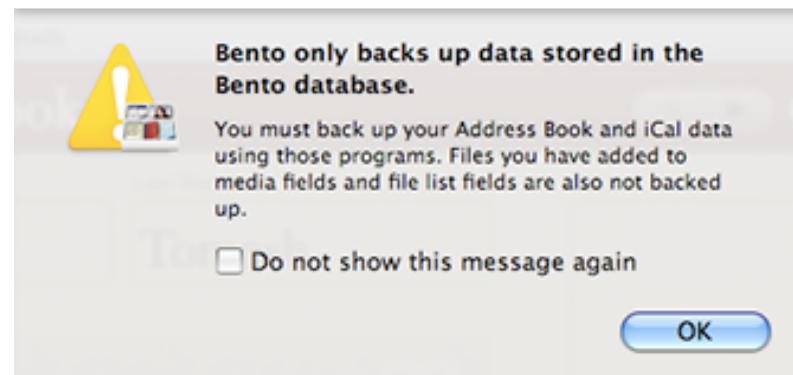
Filemaker, Inc.; \$49

reviewed by director-at-large **Adam Tomash**

Let me sum up Bento very quickly. If the set of tools it gives you manages to cover your database needs then you will be very happy with it because it is easy to create, use and manage databases. If it doesn't have the tools to cover your needs then you are not apt to ever get them in this \$49 program and it will be useless to you. I envision it as the iTunes or iPhoto of databases. Simple on the surface, a breeze to use but the complexity lies underneath in the structure. It has a few quirks and drawbacks which may be deal breakers even at the low price. I will cover them below. But, if your needs are simple it will do a fine job.

One of the quirks that really bothered me was the lack

of a discrete "file" for a given database. The databases you create with Bento are all saved in one file, located in the User/Library/ApplicationSupport/Bento folder. There is a Back Up ... (see below) and a companion Restore menu command but it does not back up all the files that may be in the database.



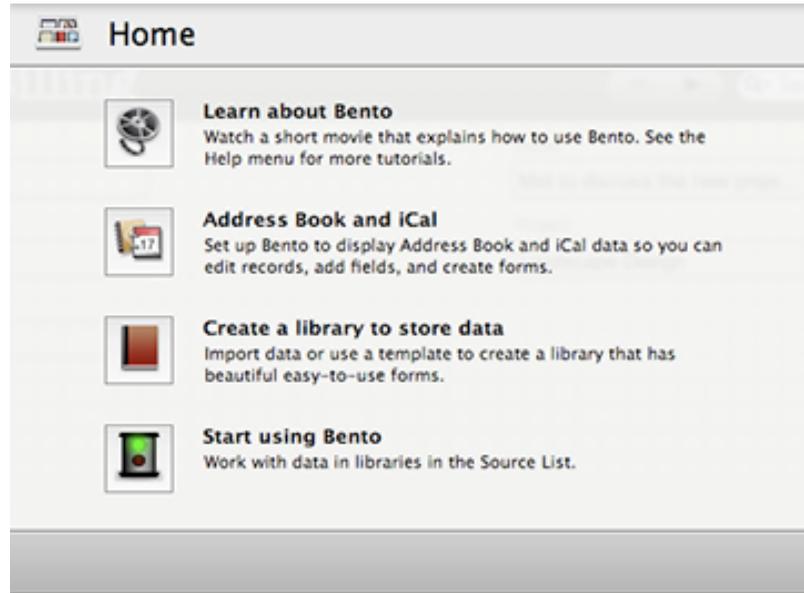
If you had a database with lots of media pictures inserted into records they would not be backed up. Even

if you had the media files backed up elsewhere (using Time Machine, perhaps) I suspect the work that you did to get those media files incorporated into the database would be lost. A serious flaw that will no doubt prove fatal for some.

I also had some problems with the initial install. I had to reinstall to get it to work correctly. There is an alias to the User Manual on the Install CD but it doesn't work until the Bento package is installed. So much for getting a head start before installing it. Many reviews on the net during the period when it was in Beta testing complained about such an untested program working with a users iCal and Address Book files without warning. Who knew?

Whenever you start up Bento you get the Welcome splash screen. (See "Home" next page) Always! At this juncture you can choose to learn more about it via a short movie. There are also more tutorials available from the help menu. One can also set preferences for iCal

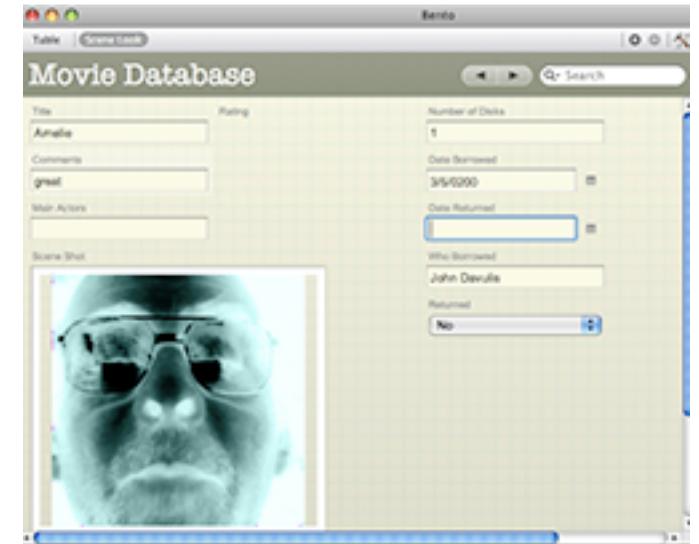
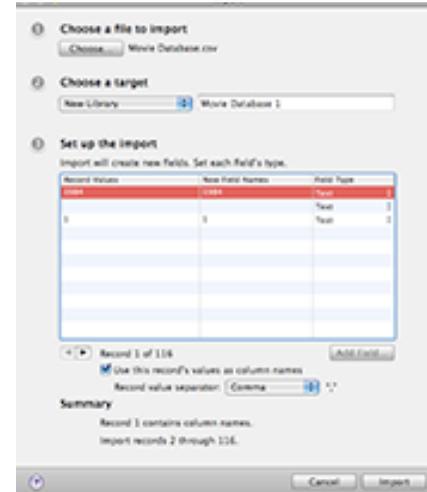
and Address Book and whether you want Bento to “shadow” data that is entered in either iCal or Address Book.



The last two buttons on this screen allow you to actually create a database by importing from a file or using the abundant templates to create your own. (See above right) Each type of database is called a Library and you can have subsets within that template style called a Collection. For example, one Library template style is called “Home Inventory.” You can then have a multitude of Collections covering different homes and their inventories like Town House, Lake House and Gram’s House. Each collection in the Library is based on the same template. Importing from a file is pretty easy if the file is prepared properly in a comma separated value or CSV file.

Getting started in Bento

You can import data from an existing file (near right), use one of the many pre-made templates (far right) or roll your own (See “Time Billing” in text).



The most important tools for database production reside in the main window after you dismiss the welcome splash screen. (See “Time Billing” below) The main window has the ability to hide or show various parts of the database depending on what you are trying to do. The User Interface is very similar other iWork programs. On the left is the “Source” window or Library and Collection pane where you can select previously created databases and then work with them.

In the middle is the Form window where you can “build” different

forms to display data in different ways or choose to see it in the List view. In this tool bar above the Forms window you can add or delete or rename a form and customize the form with a variety of tools. The forms can be build from scratch or made quickly by using a template. Below the tool bar is the form title and a search bar to search the selected database or move from one record to another one at a time. Clicking the search bar allows for an advanced search that actually adds a lot of power to Bento.

To the right is the Fields Pane. What you see



there depends on the template you selected when you clicked the plus (+) button at the bottom of the Source Pane or the finished database (Library or Collection) you have showing. Drag a new field into a form when it is in form view and drop it where you want it. Fields not yet placed in the form have a special marker on the left of the title and currently placed fields do not. Different templates give you different field types. You can also click the plus (+) button at the bottom to create a new field and choose from a variety of types and then just drag the created field onto the form that is showing. (See “Create a Field” below) Most of the advanced features

Clairvoyance to fill it in for you. As long as 5 secs! Some Field Types like “Date” have neat little features like Calendar popups where you can choose the date by a mouse click. Currency has several dozen currencies from all over the world including Vietnamese Dong! Useful. Filemaker has done a lot to make creating and using this database fast and easy.

With Appleworks one needed to align all the fields just so to get printing to work correctly. That does not seem to be an issue with Bento. The fields are self aligning and snap to a grid when dragged. The list view prints as it should with no futzing and the print dialog box has a bunch of convenient options to get your data onto paper looking like you want it to.

I still have not forgiven Apple for withdrawing support for Appleworks 6.2.9 which worked all the way up to OS 10.4.x. This insult had injury added when Apple gave the job of fleshing out the iWork series with a database to its sister company, Filemaker. Then they had the gall to charge more money for this missing component which by rights should be part of the Numbers, Pages and Keynote series. Then to really fry you they made it run only on 10.5 to “take advantage of system improvements”. We lost accessibility so that the privileged few who could run 10.5 could have a database with nice eye candy and a modern interface. I for one am quite upset with this new direction at Apple. The old Apple Human Interface has stood the test of time. I don’t think this new interface will. ☹

Adam will demonstrate Bento at the April 9 CAMP meeting. 7:00 p.m. at Room 117, Gardiner Area High School, Gardiner, Maine.

Eliza Returns!

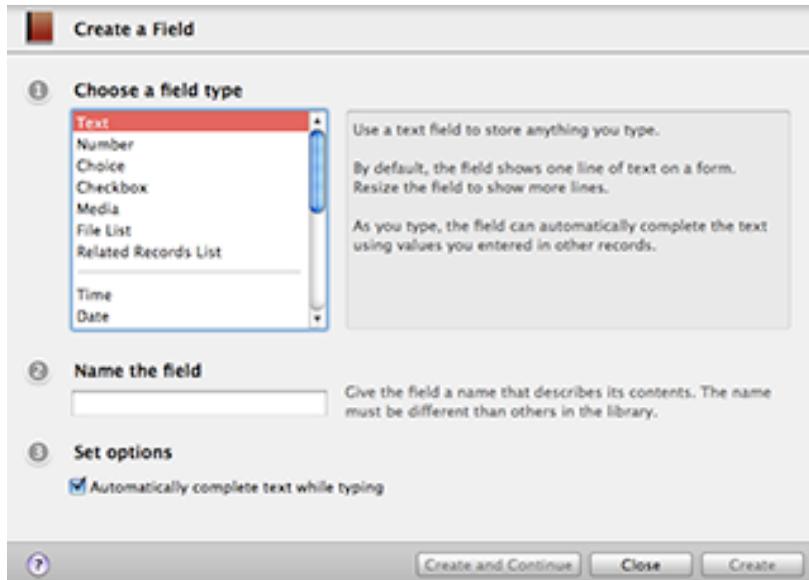
Do you remember Eliza, the computer psychotherapist? “Eliza” was the eponymous name of a classic application that would ease your tortured soul with loopy responses to your keyed-in angst.

Eliza has now set up permanent shop in OS X. Adam forwarded the following Tip of the Week from Matt at Mac vendor www.smalldog.com:

If you’re feeling blue, or need someone to talk to, you need only launch Terminal for a productive session with a psychotherapist named Eliza.

While in the Finder, select Utilities from the Go menu. Inside you’ll find Terminal. Double-click this to open it. Once open, type “emacs” (no quotes) and then hit return. Now, while holding down the Shift key, press Escape, and then let go of both. Type “xdoctor” (no quotes) and then hit return. You’ll then see a message: “I am the psychotherapist. Please, describe your problems. Each time you are finished talking, type return twice.”

If you follow these simple instructions, you can save quite a bit on therapy. Eliza is very good at what she does. ☺



that Bento offers are located in this section. Specialized fields like “Related Records List” and “Calculation” are accessed here. Special features and options like “Clairvoyance” and “Choices PopUp” are also set here. It seems faster to type the entry than to wait for