CAMP News

Capital Apple Mac Performa User Group

☼

APRIL 2012
JEFF FRANKEL, EDITOR

Augusta, Maine
www.campug.org

Back to Your Mac

Since the debut of Leopard (OS 10.5) in October 2007, Apple has offered a non-geeky way for Mac users to access their files and desktops from afar. It's called Back to Your Mac, and the iCloud version available under OS 10.7 is the best iteration yet. With just a smidgeon of setup you can not only transfer files, but can also control a remote Mac over the internet just as if you were sitting at it— and see the screen of the remote Mac on the Mac you *are* sitting at. Watch Jeff Frankel get back to his Macs at our April 11 meeting. The fun starts at 7:00 p.m. at Buker Community Center, 22 Armory Street, Augusta.

VirusBarrier X6

Intego (www.intego.com)
$49 for up to two Macs, $99 for up to five Macs; includes one year of virus definitions and program updates

Reviewed by Jeff Frankel

Earlier this year, I was looking at Apple's web site when a dialog box popped up to inform me that the site's certificate had expired and did I want to proceed anyway? With a touch of annoyance I clicked OK and moved on. Later I read that some new malware was masquerading as a phony expired certificate notice.

Oops.

A week or so afterwards Adobe Flash installer popped up to suggest that I update the program. Without much thought I did so. Then I found out that a fake Flash installer was tricking Mac users into installing malware.

Oops again.

In neither case did I actually infect a computer. But I realized that when it comes to such trickery I'm not as smart as I used to think I was. So I bit the bullet and purchased Intego VirusBarrier X6.

VB X6 is a full-featured antivirus and network security suite for Macintosh. VB X6 packs a lot of power, but using it efficiently is somewhat like learning to drive a stick: getting up to speed may be a little rough until you get the hang of it. I'm thankfully past those early days and have come to appreciate the usefulness and versatility of this program. The following observations will focus on the antivirus component of the package.

The Orb interface shown on the next page is the VB X6 command central. For those who prefer a more subdued presence, the floating Mini Scanner, also shown on the next page, is especially convenient for drag and drop

The Orb: Virus Barrier X6 command central

VB X6 offers three principal ways of checking your Mac for viruses and malware: real-time scanning, scan on demand and scheduled scans. Real-time scanning is enabled by default and is designed to chug away in the background while you and your computer are doing other things. Set it and forget it. But be aware of the load this may impose on your CPU. On my 3.06 Ghz Intel Core 2 Duo iMac, Activity Monitor shows that real-time scanning consumes upwards of 5% of processing power. On my 1.8 Ghz Intel i7 MacBook Air, the load is a more manageable 1.5%.

If you only want to scan now and then, scan on demand is for you. Simply click the Full Scan button below the Orb to initiate a full scan of your entire computer. Option-click the button to launch a quick scan of locations where virii are most likely to turn up. Or click the Select tab below the Orb to specify the volume(s) or folders for a full scan or quick scan. This latter capability is extremely important, because the default full scan of your entire computer includes not

only the startup drive, but also any external drives, backup drives, Time Machine volumes and mounted network shares. If you don't restrict the scope of a full scan by clicking the Select tab, the entire process will take hours. You can further shorten scan duration by designating known good files and folders as "trusted," which excludes them from a scan, and by configuring VB X6 to not scan any number of archive formats (e.g., .dmg, .zip).

Scheduled scans are the least obtrusive of all because they can take place at times when you're not normally at your computer. You can limit the source volume(s) for a scheduled scan as described above for full scans. Be aware, though, that a scheduled scan will not start if the computer is asleep. To make sure the computer will be awake at the appointed hour, go to your Energy Saver preference pane, click the Schedule button, and enter a wake-up time. A 12:59 a.m. wake-up time for a scheduled 1:00 a.m.daily scan works fine for me. (Note: My Air will only wake up on schedule if the lid is open.)

VB X6 can check for new virus definitions at a user-specified interval and can download and install updated definitions in the background. Intego seems to be staying on top of things; in the five weeks I've owned VB X6, they've updated virus definitions eleven times. If a virus is found, the program can take a number of actions, including sending you notice via email. In a nutshell, if the Orb turns from green to red or

Eye in the sky:
the Mini Scanner

scanning of selected files or folders. In addition to the controls on the Orb, many of VB X6's functions can be triggered via dropdown menu and keyboard shortcut, or be configured to run automatically. Those who don't want to fiddle with any of this can opt instead for one of three preconfigured security settings at time of initial setup.But that wouldn't be any fun, now, would it?

orange or an alert box comes on screen—Houston, we've got a problem.

VB X6 also sports a number of other useful goodies. For example, you can always pull up a log file to make sure that scans are actually taking place, review your scan history, check the number of files scanned, and get a bead on scan times. A most unexpected bonus is a true signal strength meter for wireless network clients that gives far more detail than the standard Airport menu bar icon.

I ran into one annoyance and one incident when using VB X6. The annoyance occurred during initial setup on my iMac. VB X6 asked if I wanted to run my first scan immediately after installation. That made sense; after all, concern about possible infection was one reason I bought

the program. However, when the scan was well underway I noticed that the virus definitions VB X6 was using were 155 days old! It would have helped if the program phoned home for up-to-date definitions before running the first scan.

The incident was far more serious. I'm a little hazy on the details at this point, but when I was running a scan on my Mac Mini…well, I think that's what I was doing…I was also bouncing back and forth between user accounts. During the scan and afterwards, the Mini became extremely sluggish to the point of catatonia, even after restart. Disk Utility reported that the hard disk could not be repaired, at which point I reformatted the hard drive and loaded everything back on. Did VirusBarrier cause or contribute to the hard disk corruption, or was it mere coincidence? I can't

say, but I'm darn well sure that I'll never switch user accounts again when a scan is running.

Intego Virus Barrier X6 is a mature, well-thought-out program that has eased my anxiety about virii and malware. Some users may feel overwhelmed by all the options. But if you're the type that doesn't mind—or even enjoys— sifting through them, VB X6 may be right up your alley. ☼