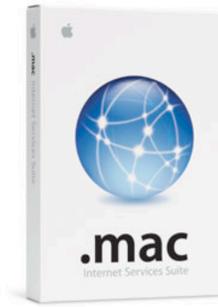**Product:** .Mac
By: Apple Computer
MSRP: $99.00
Street price: Free trail, MUG LE free, 'Net pricing around 79.00
Review date: December 28, 2003

Review by
Daniel M. East, President
The Mid-Atlantic Macintosh User Groups Team (MaMUGs)
info@mamugs.com • http://www.mamugs.org

DESCRIPTION (What's it do? What's it got?): Apple's "in-OS" solution for complete internet lifestyle integration. combine iLife apps, iCal, e-mail addresses and add-on third-party solutions with a nice chunk of storage space and it is all incorporated into OSX in a very simple to use package.

MIN. SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Any OSX capable Macintosh with 128M RAM (with OSX, of course)

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Ok, so I was a longtime skeptic about .Mac. After being on the proverbial fence, I decided that it was time to take the plunge once my daughter had her new iBook and was struggling to upload her photos. I decided to practice what I preach and I was pleasantly surprised by what I found. The integration into OSX, itself, is seamless and easy to use offering a really nice suite of software that would easily cost as much individually as the entire .Mac package. It isn't just that the elements are there, it is really that it all just works and works well.

WHAT I FOUND: Well, it was far more than what I'd heard and it wasn't just Virex and the new Backup2 for my 100 bucks. The added bonus items were also some great sound files for my iLife apps from Skywalker Sound, FreePlay Music and a fun little PhotoStudio application. Other nice (time limited) additions were Contribute2 from Macromedia and a full learning center to help me get going with all of this great stuff. I also love the continuation of the terrific iCards and slide shows that have been a staple for .Mac veterans.

HOW EASY WAS INSTALLATION?: Once I went through the online application, it was just a matter of entering my account info into my OS system preferences. After that, my iDisk appeared on my desktop and it was just a matter of using it like any other drive.

LIKES : You have to talk about ease. Between the software, the iDisk, the "anywhere access" and the simplicity, this is a lot of bang for the buck. I especially like that it works for anyone. Any level of experience can figure anything from photos to backup and it is all right there for you with tons of help if you need it. The improvements in performance are noticeable and, with broadband, the use of all of these tools is fairly quick compared to almost any FTP application. There is also edu pricing. Very well thought out and effective stuff here.

DISLIKES : My only concern with .Mac is in it overcoming what WAS a bad reputation as an empty suite of tools. It isn't. I'd like to see some evidence of secure log ins in the iDisk (although it is) and some sense of what happens on my backups when left on Apple's servers, however, it does just work. The only complaint that I have is regarding those who get a complimentary .Mac account (like User Groups and Apple Consultants Network members) have a limited version. As one who is involved with both, I can say that I was glad to have purchased the full version. The "comp" versions are limited and don't offer the "member exclusives," like some of the software.

HOW DOES THIS PRODUCT COMPARE? : How do you compare Apples to nothing else like it? There are a few third party options, but this is complete integration with easy of use that you will be hard pressed to find elsewhere.

RECOMMEND TO A FRIEND?: I didn't before, but I do now. It is just fun playing with this stuff.

TEST SYSTEM: Apple Titanium PowerBook G4 500 - 1Gb RAM - 10.3.2

FINAL THOUGHTS: I'm convinced. I put it off forever and just had to see it in action first. A great deal when you consider all that you get with this massive suite and you don't even need to get a boxed version (in fact, I don't recommend it since you'll have to update most of it anyway via the web). If you were turned off in the beginning, turn on to .Mac now that Apple has "tweaked" their really fun package of goodies for your Mac. If only to upload family photos, iMovies, iCards or slide shows and even protect yourself from that pesky virus; you'll love .Mac for all of that as well as dazzling your PC friends by accessing your public folders, info and images from their systems as well. I really like this for those who have the unfortunate reality of having PCs in their workplace and Macs at home. This is the "everybody item" that you'll enjoy on your Mac.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5 out of 5 stars
For more information, visit: http://www.mac.com

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