

OS 10.9 Mavericks - December 2013

The tenth major revision of OS X, Mavericks, marks an attempt to bring Apple's desktop and mobile closer together. Mavericks introduces new features, updates and speeds up components, and overhauls the system's branding. Big cats are out, and California locations are in (Mavericks is a Monterey surfing spot). Like the past few OS upgrades, it is that it is more evolutionary than revolutionary. And it is free!

Apple quipped that "no virtual cows were harmed in the making" of the new Calendar app, so you'll see less fake wood and pretend leather. Makes the interface much more clean and modern and feels a lot more open. Calendar offers useful additions: week and month views have infinite scroll, rather than snapping to a predefined start date. The new Event Inspector can add a map, weather and travel time when you create an event and add the address.

Contacts and Notes also received much-needed facelifts. Contacts now looks more like an email client, with a column of names on the left and detailed information in a larger window on the right — an improvement over past versions' book-like design. Click on an address in Contacts and like in Calendar, Maps open to show directions. Notes has lost its fake yellow-lined paper, replaced with a subtly-patterned off-white sheet —an ultra-simple app that syncs with your Mac with your iPhone and iPad.

Apple is importing iBooks from the iPhone and iPad and bringing it to the Mac. It's hard to get excited about reading novels on a full-fledged laptop or iMac, but Apple's execution is pretty much all you could ask for, with a built-in store and a really nice interface. Apple Maps has also come over from iOS and is built into the Mail, Contacts, and Calendar apps, too. So any time you see an address, you can quickly find it on a map and switch to Apple Maps for a better view and to get directions. Everything is now synced through iCloud, so if you have your phone or tablet within reach, you can dictate a Reminder or Note that will show up everywhere. iCloud sync is a nice new feature of iOS7 and Mavericks.

Apple hasn't tried to reinvent the game with its latest version of Safari. Instead, it's spent the last year working to speed up the browser, and the results of that effort are noticeable. Safari feels quicker, lighter, and more responsive in Mavericks and in fact is 40% faster.

I've been using 1Password for years, and I don't know what I'd do without a secure and convenient password manager. iCloud Keychain is a built-in replacement for this \$50 app: it's a system-wide password manager, complete with a secure password generator and the ability to auto-fill credit card information (you add the security code manually).

Recent releases of OS X have sought to minimize the amount of time users have to spend managing files in the Finder. From the Dock to Spotlight to Launchpad, Apple has invested a lot of effort into offering Finder alternatives. But Mavericks Finder now is more useful with an organization system of Tags and Tabs. The color labels for files have been rebranded as Tags, allowing users to easily view all files or documents within an assigned category. There are six tag colors, and users can write their own labels. Finder now supports Tabs, just like Safari, allowing users to cut the Finder clutter when navigating through numerous directories.

The Mavericks update gives OS X a noticeable improvement in speed and performance, flying through files and folders and waking up from sleep much more quickly. MacBook battery life seemed like one of the most obvious reasons to upgrade to Mavericks — just by upgrading, your laptop will instantly last longer. There are a variety of reasons, but one is particularly clever: in order to conserve power, Mavericks puts any app that's not currently being used in slow motion mode — "App Nap". This is a smart move for Apple, ensuring fast performance even for users who never quit out of their apps.

One of the handiest improvements in 10.9 is interactive, synced notifications, a feature sadly still missing from iOS. Users can respond to Messages directly from the notification alert, and reply to or delete emails without leaving their current app. And it's a little nerdy but improved multiple-display support will be a major selling point for the new desktop OS for power users as will Enhanced Dictation which allows you to dictate in full paragraphs instead of short bursts as it operates offline.

And here's an earth-shattering feature to end on: If you like to use those smileys (emoji), Apple can add them to text messages and email in Mavericks, just like in iOS7. See my Keynote presentation for details.

Bottom line is that everyone should upgrade to Mavericks. There's no good reason not to — it's free, it's faster, and has some great new and improved apps.