

Folders of fortune

Don't be scared to use AppleScript. With its new 'folder actions' it's easy, even for novices, to automate tasks. Cliff Joseph takes five.

AppleScript is one of the less well known features of the MacOS but it can be incredibly useful for automating those routine, everyday tasks. Steve Jobs recently highlighted the importance of AppleScript to the design industry during his speech at the Seybold publishing conference.

But writing scripts is a little too close to programming for many Mac users, so AppleScript tends to be overlooked much of the time. It is mainly used by publishing professionals who are prepared to take the time to master the scripting process. Many use it to automate tasks such as squirting text files into page layout templates or performing regular file backups.

MacOS 8.5 may soon change that. AppleScript is much faster in OS 8.5, as it is now entirely based on native PowerPC code and includes many new features. Some of these improvements still require some knowledge of scripting, but there's one particular feature that will appeal even to Mac novices.

Piece of the actions

AppleScript now includes a new type of script called "folder actions". These are scripted commands that are executed automatically whenever you perform certain tasks relating to the contents of a folder. Folder actions can be triggered whenever you open or close a folder, add or remove items from it, or when you move or resize a folder window that is open on-screen. You can use folder actions to handle many standard housekeeping tasks such as performing backups, opening your current work files or simply tidying up your Mac's desktop. Apple includes a selection of ready-made folder actions with OS 8.5, so you don't have to learn scripting to use them.

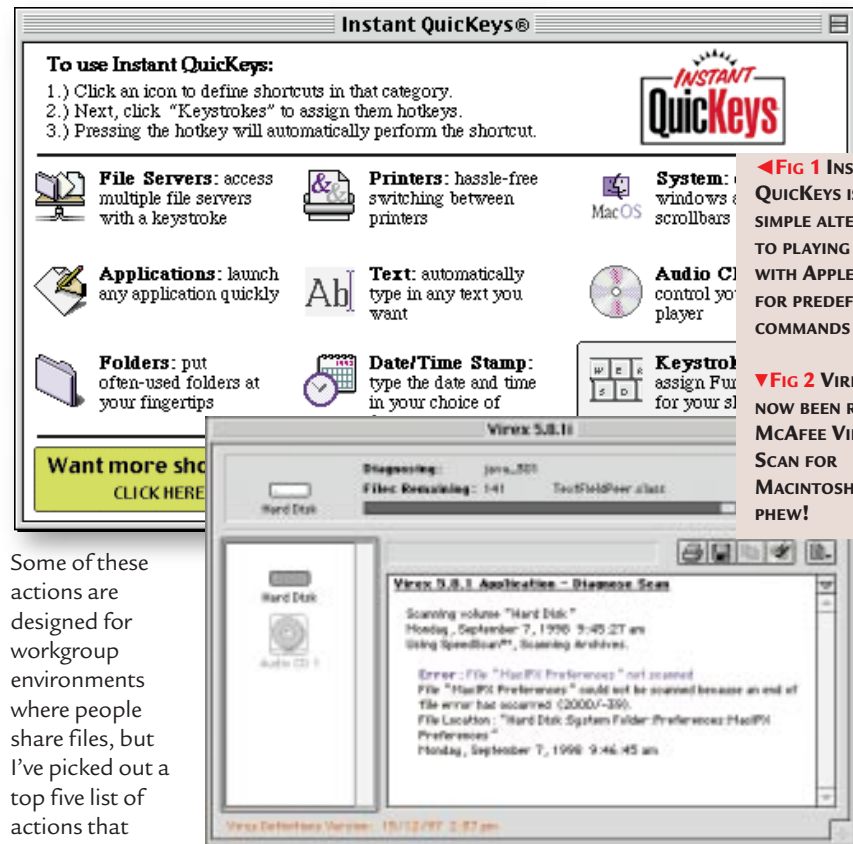


FIG 1 INSTANT QUICKKEYS IS THE SIMPLE ALTERNATIVE TO PLAYING AROUND WITH APPLESCRIPT FOR PREDEFINED COMMANDS

FIG 2 VIREX HAS NOW BEEN RENAMED MCAFEE VIRUS SCAN FOR MACINTOSH — PHEW!

Some of these actions are designed for workgroup environments where people share files, but I've picked out a top five list of actions that should appeal to individual users and workgroups:

- 1 Close Sub-folders.** When you close a folder window, this action will also close the windows of any other sub-folder within the main folder. This is a good way of quickly clearing a lot of open windows off your desktop.
- 2 Keep Folder Open.** This will keep a particular window open all the time. I use this one on the folder where I keep all my current work projects (see p308).
- 3 Open Labelled Items.** The MacOS allows you to attach coloured labels to any file. Attach this action to a folder, and any files carrying the "Essential" label will automatically be opened whenever you open the folder.
- 4 Set View Preferences To Match.** When you set the view preferences for a folder, such as the icon size or list order, those preferences are applied to any other folder that you place inside it.
- 5 Copy Items To Folder.** Whenever you add an item to a folder, this action will also add a copy of that item to a second, specified folder.

If you just don't fancy playing around with AppleScript, there's a simpler alternative. CE Software has released a cut-down version of its Quick Keys macro program, called Instant QuickKeys [Fig 1]. This provides a variety of predefined commands that you can assign to the function keys on your keyboard. Commands are grouped into categories; there are commands for opening frequently used files and folders, selecting printers or file servers on a network, rearranging windows on your desktop, and printing standard pieces of text such as your name and address.

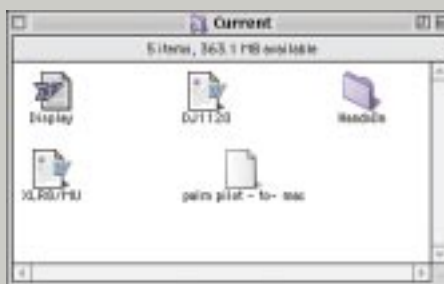
Graphic detail

The program's interface is completely graphical and no programming is involved. It presents you with a graphical view of your keyboard and a list of the available commands. To assign a command to a key, you just use the mouse to drag the command from the list onto the appropriate key. The thing to remember is that you really

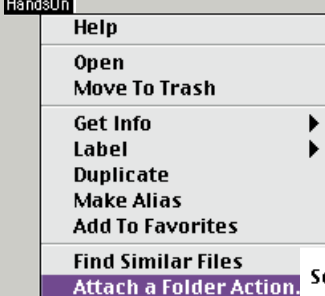
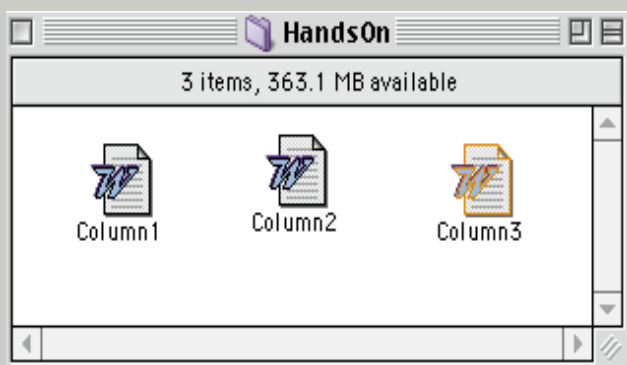


How to add an action to a folder. It's simple — just follow these steps:

1 Here's the folder where I keep all my current work files. I'm going to **attach a folder action** to the Hands On folder where I keep the files for this column



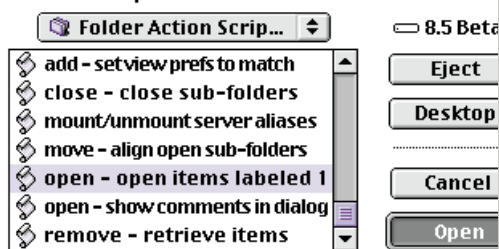
2 This article is "column number three", so I've used the coloured "Essential" label to **mark that particular file icon** inside the Hands On folder



3 Go back to the Hands On folder. Select it and then press the Control key to activate the contextual menu. Then select the **Attach a Folder Action** command

4 Choose the action you want from the Attach dialog. I'm going to use the action that **opens labelled items**

Select a Script to Attach:



5 The Hands On folder now has a little **script icon** attached to it, to indicate the use of a folder action. From now on, the Column3 file will automatically be opened whenever I open this folder



need a keyboard with a separate set of function keys. Apart from that, Instant QuickKeys is quite simple to use.

Virus update

There has been a fair amount of Mac-related virus activity since we looked at the Autostart worm a couple of months ago. Autostart has been cropping up all over the place, and there are rumours of a Trojan Horse program similar to the Windows-based Back Orifice (a program that allows other users to hack into your computer across the internet). So, this seemed like a good time to catch up on the current state of anti-virus software. One long-time favourite, the shareware Disinfectant program, seems to have bitten the dust. The developers no longer have time to keep Disinfectant up to date, and there's no news of an update that can tackle Autostart. That just leaves the two mainstream commercial programs, **Virex** [Fig 2] and **SAM** (Symantec Anti-Virus for Macintosh). Both have seen some changes. Virex was bought by Dr Solomon's, which was then bought by Network Associates, the company that also owns the McAfee label. Virex has now been renamed **McAfee Virus Scan for Mac**, in line with the PC version of Virus Scan. There have been no major changes to the program, though. SAM has changed its name and had a minor upgrade. It's now at version 5.0 and has been renamed **Norton AntiVirus for Mac**, or NAM. Both programs provide the same basic set of features, with the ability to scan disks and remove all currently known viruses. They also allow you to download virus updates from the internet to combat new viruses as they come along. There are scheduling options so you can perform regular scans at specific times. Both programs will automatically scan files sent to you via email or floppy disk or those downloaded from the internet.

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Instant QuickKeys £29 (ex VAT) from Computers Unlimited 0181 358-5857.

Norton AntiVirus for Macintosh £69 (ex VAT) from Symantec 0171-616-5600

McAfee Virus Scan for Macintosh £99 (ex VAT) from Network Associates 01753 827500