Gift of the gab

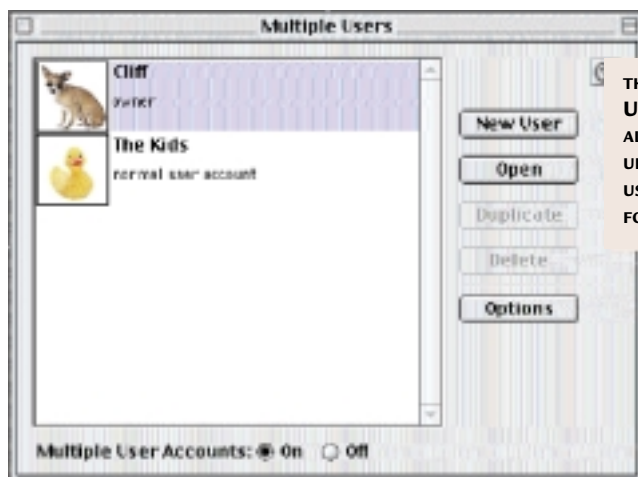**Cliff Joseph gets all excited at the prospect of telling his computer what to do using MacOS 9.**

Apple's been very cagey with review copies of OS 9, so we haven't been able to take a close look at it until now. However, this is a fairly major upgrade for the MacOS and includes a lot of interesting new features, so it's still worth catching up on even if it's a little later than we would have liked.

There's been plenty of coverage for Internet-oriented features such as Sherlock 2 and the new QuickTime Player so we won't repeat what's been written elsewhere. Instead, I want to take a look at some of the features that have received less attention.

If you're one of the two-million-plus people who have bought iMacs for use at home, you'll be interested in the ability to create multiple user 'accounts' on your machine. You can create accounts for up to 40 separate users, and you can specify the way each person is allowed to use the machine. So if you've got kids and you don't want them surfing the Internet while you're not there to supervise them, you can create an account that will prevent them from launching

> *I like the ability to use a voiceprint – rather than a typed – password in OS 9*

applications such as web browsers.

If you look at the new Multiple Users control panel, you'll see there is already an account set up that specifies you as the owner of the machine. As the owner, you have full access to the entire Mac system and can configure accounts for all other users.

The first thing to do is to activate the Multiple User Accounts option shown at the bottom of the screen. You can then create new user accounts and specify a password for each account. Each new account gets its own Documents folder on the Mac desktop, where the user can store personal files and documents. You don't have to use this if you don't want to, but access to this folder is denied to other users of the machine, so it provides a reasonable level of security for your personal files.

There are then three

levels of access you can assign to the various user accounts you create. Normal Access allows you to see the Mac desktop and the contents of the hard disk as normal, and merely prevents the user from opening the 'documents' folders that belong to other users.

The Limited Access option also allows the user to see the Mac desktop as normal, but will only allow them to open programs that you specify.

The final option is called Panels, and this changes the entire appearance of the Mac desktop, splitting it into a series of panels that display only the applications and documents you want the user to see.
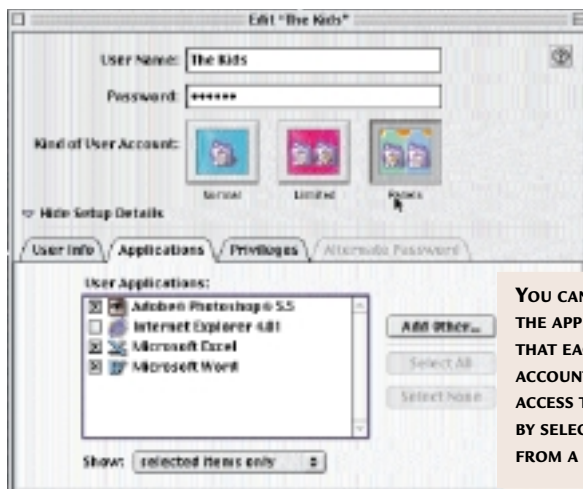
When creating Limited Access or Panels accounts, you use the Edit dialog box to specify the user's access privileges. The dialog box includes a list of all the applications on your hard disk, and you simply click on a button to allow or disallow use of specific programs. You can also prevent people from using your printer, CD-ROM or DVD-ROM drive. These are useful options for people with children, as they can prevent them from accidentally printing out a million pages of rubbish or being able to watch DVD titles that are unsuitable for youngsters.

Another feature I really like is the ability to use a voiceprint – rather than a typed – password to gain access to your Mac. The Multiple Users control panel includes an option called Voice
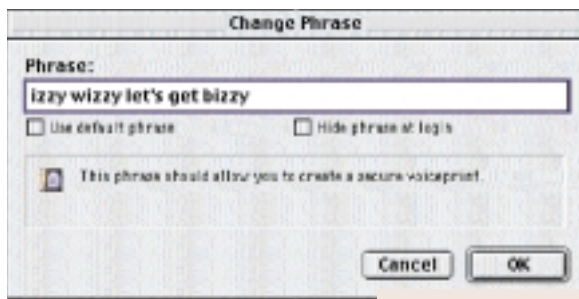
Verification, which allows you to record a spoken password. You'll need a microphone connected to your Mac of course, but these days all Macs are sold with this peripheral included – with the exception of the new iBook – so this isn't a problem for most people.

When you select Voice Verification, you will be asked whether you want to use the default password (which is 'my voice is my password'), or create a new password. You type the new password in first and then you will be asked to speak the password into your microphone four times.

Your password won't sound exactly the same each time you say it, as all sorts of things can affect your tone of voice during the course of the day. Repeating the password four times therefore gives the software some idea of the variations in your voice that it may have to deal with.

Voice recognition technology is still pretty crude, but we found the voiceprint feature worked very reliably, and if all else fails you can fall back on your original typed password to log in to your Mac.

It's a pity that this method of processing voice commands is only available when specifying a voice-password. The MacOS has included voice commands for a couple of years, but they're not widely used, simply because voice-recognition is still not reliable enough for everyday use.

The Star Trek computer that understands your every word is still a long way off

If you look at the main Apple menu you'll see a folder called Speakable Items. In OS 9, this folder includes a new set of voice commands, for controlling specific applications such as web browsers or for altering settings such as your desktop wallpaper.

VOICEPRINT RECOGNITION ALLOWS YOU TO USE A SPOKEN PASSWORD TO GAIN ACCESS TO YOUR MAC

We've covered the Mac's voice-recognition features in this column before, so we liked the idea of new voice commands that would allow us to control a web browser. However, to be honest, they didn't work terribly well.

So don't throw your keyboard away just yet, because that *Star Trek* computer that can understand your every spoken word and command is still quite a long way off.

I'm afraid this is the last dedicated Mac column in *PCW*, but don't worry as the magazine will continue to cover Mac products in the reviews section and issues relating to Mac users in feature articles. In parting I'd like to thank those Mac enthusiasts who wrote in over the years and gave life to this column.
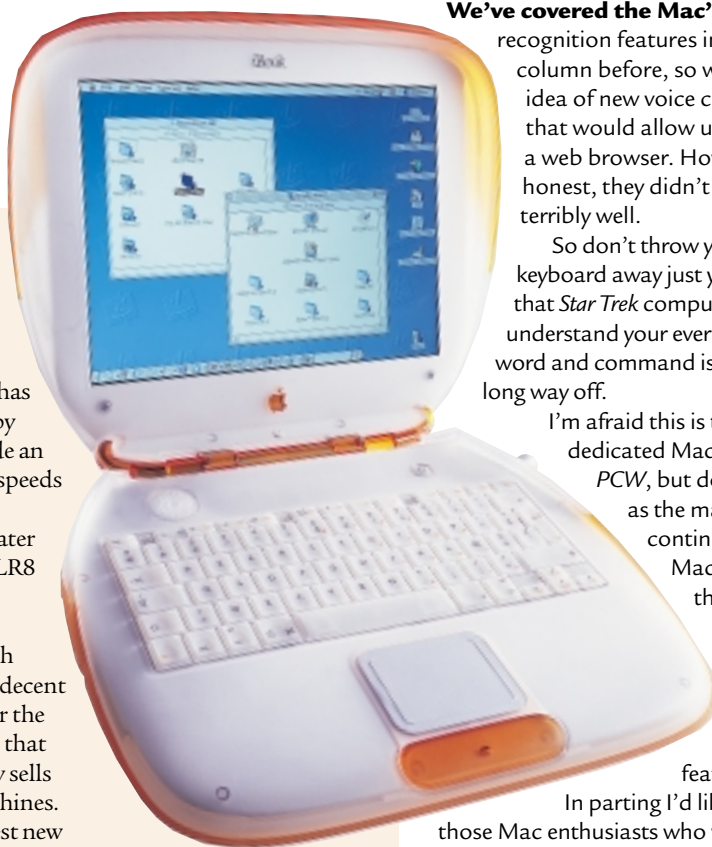
It's not all talk

Most of this month's column focuses on new software features in the MacOS, but there are some interesting hardware products scheduled for release by Apple over the next couple of months.

We're particularly intrigued by the G4 upgrade cards, coming from companies such as XLR8. It was thought there were technical problems which prevented the 350MHz and 400MHz G4 Macs from being upgraded to use the new G4 processor. However, it seems that XLR8 and one or two other companies have sorted these problems out and are about to release the first G4 upgrades. The company even has an offer whereby you can upgrade an old Mac to G3 speeds now and get a discount on a later G4 upgrade. XLR8 is also about to release a USB keyboard, which should make a decent replacement for the lump of plastic that Apple currently sells with all its machines.

But the coolest new product to hit the Mac scene comes from Apple itself. The Airport base station unit provides wireless networking to all new Macs, iMacs and iBooks. It has just been approved for use in the

UK by British Telecom. Apple has set a UK price of about £230 for the base station, which brings wireless networking right down to mass-market price levels.

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