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Thomas Myer

Apple® Automator with AppleScript®

Harness Mac OS® X's
built-in automation tools

Automate repetitive or
time-consuming tasks

Write scripts that save
you time and money



Bible

The book you need to succeed!

Apple[®] Automator with AppleScript[®] Bible

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Thomas Myer

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To my divine spouse Hope, for loving me anyway.

About the Author

Thomas Myer is a consultant, author, and developer who lives in Austin, TX. He founded Triple Dog Dare Media in 2001, and since then he's been busy creating applications, training clients, writing books and articles, and helping clients do more with less. His practice focuses on two things: making companies more productive with automation solutions, and helping them adopt social media tools and practices “inside the firewall.”

To find out more about Thomas, you can follow him on Twitter. His handle is @myerman. You can also visit his Web site at <http://www.tripledogs.com>.

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Preface

This book was a lot of fun to write. I've been playing around with AppleScript and Automator for years, and with other scripting languages (notably UNIX shell and Perl) for about a decade before that. I'm positively in love with the subject of Getting Things Done, and not just in a I-need-to-knock-out-this-checklist kind of way.

The world we live in is a wonderful place. Never before have we been so connected to human events, to the brands we buy, to the people we love, to our colleagues. The advent of the World Wide Web and social media tools has added a huge amount of data influx to each of our lives—that on top of all the mainstream media, books, music, film, and other infostuff we consume.

At the same time, computing power has skyrocketed to unthinkable levels. When my father worked for UNIVAC in the 1960s, the story goes, they carted 4KB of memory around in surplus torpedo casings. When you hear stories like that, it makes you wonder if he was just pulling my leg. However, think about this—the iPhone in your pocket likely has more computing power in it than all the computers used by the Apollo 11 astronauts to land on the moon 40 years ago this summer.

So there you have it—a huge influx of tasks on one side of the ledger, and raw computing power on the other. What's needed is an easy, intuitive way to process all the stuff in our lives faster and more efficiently.

Enter Automator and AppleScript, two fantastic automation technologies built right in to Mac OS X. My

sincere hope is that you will come to love these two powerful tools as much as I do, and that you'll use them to not only create innovative solutions to the ever growing tasks on your list, but also to free up more time to do other more productive tasks—like being with family, taking trips, exercising more, or enjoying life.

If any of you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me. The easiest way to find me is on Twitter. My handle there is @myerman. It may take me a little bit of time to answer you, but I do my best to stay in touch.

Acknowledgments

A book is never solely the work of a lone author. In order to get everything done, the author needs a team of dedicated professionals. This book is no different, as without the following people, there's no way I could have finished:

Neil Salkind, my agent, introduced me to the good folks at Wiley. He's a mentor, guide, and coach. Thanks for everything you do.

Stephanie McComb at Wiley helped me flush out the original idea and guided the book through the acquisitions process. She's scary smart, savvy, and disarms you with a wonderful sense of humor.

Chris Wolfgang was my patient, long-suffering editor on this project. Everything good here had her involvement. Anything bad is pretty much my fault. Also, she kept my whining and moaning to a strict minimum with an even hand (and a few slaps to the back of my head).

Dennis Cohen, the technical editor, knows enough about all this to write 5 books on Automator and AppleScript. His advice and enthusiasm throughout kept me going. Without him, I wouldn't have gotten through the upgrade from Leopard to Snow Leopard, which happened just as I was finishing the original manuscript.

My wife Hope gave me room and time to write, keeping my chores to a minimum. She exacted payment at the end of the writing process though, all of which involved tons of yard work, and all of which I richly deserved.

My two lovely pups, Marlowe and Kafka, could frequently be found sleeping on one of the many dog beds in my home office. If you've never had the pleasure of coding to the cadence of snoring dogs, then you're really missing out on the finer things in life.

Introduction

Welcome to the first Automator book in the history of the Bible series. Currently, as I sit here and write this introduction, there isn't another book out on the market that covers both Automator and AppleScript for the Snow Leopard (Mac OS X 10.6) release of Apple's vaunted operating system.

One of the things that makes writing a book on automation so interesting is the time of its release. Currently, we're deep in the doldrums of what some historians and economists call the worst recession in living memory. Every night on the news, the headlines are all about housing and mortgage crises, mass layoffs,

soaring federal deficits, car manufacturers in Chapter 11, and all kinds of other bad news.

It's easy to fall into despair. Millions of us are becoming entrepreneurs, small business owners, and freelancers. Most of them didn't have much of a choice — one day folks are gainfully employed, and suddenly there's a layoff. Established small businesses are also taking their lumps, having to find any way they can to compete. If they can find any way to cut corners, become more efficient, last a little bit longer, do more with less, and all those other clichés, then that's a good thing.

All of that was on my mind when I wrote this book. Yes, it's certainly important to get your hands dirty when it comes to topics like Automator and AppleScript, but all the how-to in the world is worthless without the why-to and should-you that provides the context.

It's never been easier to leverage the power of automation to solve all kinds of problems. The world isn't going to slow down any time soon; tomorrow you'll have more data to sift through than you did yesterday; in the next year of your life, you'll deal with more information than your ancestors did in their whole lives. In many ways, those who are able to cut through all the dross and get to the good stuff, the important stuff, will be those who get ahead.

Who the Book Is For

If you're drowning in boring, manual, repetitive, error-prone tasks, then this book is for you. This covers a whole bunch of territory, but it's easy to imagine you out there, cracking this book open: