

Hands-On: FaceTime for Mac

iPhone videoconferencing app adapted for Mac OS X

BY LEX FRIEDMAN

In October, Apple unveiled FaceTime for Mac, which lets you video chat with other FaceTime for Mac users, as well as with FaceTime users on the iPhone 4 or the latest model of the iPod touch.

The software (currently in beta) has a spartan interface. The main window is black, and the left side is filled with your own face, live from your iSight camera. On the right is a list of your Address Book contacts. If you want to add or edit a contact, FaceTime instructs you to launch Address Book to make updates.

Once you've created a record in Address Book for your contact's FaceTime account, calling the person within FaceTime itself is painless. Click the name, and FaceTime places the call.

I successfully placed FaceTime calls to various *Macworld* staffers around the country, from Mac to Mac, Mac to iPhone 4, and Mac to iPod touch.

When your call connects, the black chrome of the FaceTime window fades away, along with your contacts list. You're left with a live video box that looks just like QuickTime X's movie player. If you move your mouse over the window, its title bar reappears, along with controls for muting or ending the call, as well as for entering full-screen mode.

By default, FaceTime for Mac limits your video image to iPhone-esque portrait dimensions—which feels a little odd when you're chatting Mac to Mac. But using the Video menu, you can

switch to landscape mode, which shows more. If your buddy switches between landscape and portrait mode as you chat, the video does too.

I did notice an interesting quirk of FaceTime's video rotation. When you initiate a Mac-to-Mac call, if you rotate your video's orientation, it rotates your buddy's video, too. If, however, your buddy then adjusts his video orientation back to portrait again, you can continue to chat in mixed modes. So whoever switches video orientation first controls both participants' video, until or unless the other person adjusts their own.

For you to call someone on their iOS device, they need to be running iOS 4.1 or later. When I tried to call someone still

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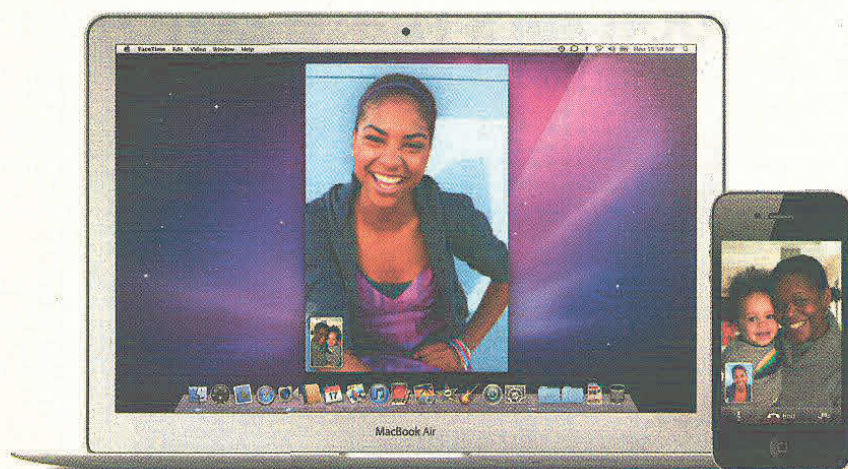
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running iOS 4.0, I got an error saying that the contact needed to upgrade to the latest version of FaceTime.

iChat devotees may miss some of that app's videoconferencing nuances in FaceTime. You can't share your screen or photos, for example. Of course, most of those niceties won't make as much sense

when you're using FaceTime with iPhone users, but the omission will likely seem more glaring should the iPad ever score a FaceTime camera of its own.

As long as the FaceTime software is running, you can't place a Skype or iChat video call, or use PhotoBooth—the other software will alert you that the camera is

already in use. Fortunately, you can quit FaceTime and still receive FaceTime calls. When a call comes in, the app launches and prompts you to accept or reject it. To hide from FaceTime calls completely, you must switch FaceTime off in the software's preferences.

You can't, however, call yourself. When I tried to call from my iPod touch to my Mac (and vice versa), both of which are on my Apple ID account, FaceTime said I was busy. Families that share Apple accounts and want to use FaceTime among various devices will need to create new accounts for that purpose, unless Apple lifts this restriction.

FaceTime for Mac seems deserving of its beta badge. Managing contacts lacks polish, and the software offers minimum functionality. That said, video calls themselves worked great in my early testing. My calls went through without a hitch, and the video quality ranged from fair to great.

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