

QuickKeys X3 by Startly Technologies

by Ken Christ



At the July meeting, the QuickKeys box on the raffle table caught my eye. I had been using 'KeyQuencer', a keyboard 'macro' program, on OS9. A

macro program lets you assign multiple key-strokes, menu selections and other tasks to a single 'hot key' combination. I had not bought a replacement program since switching to OSX and I knew that QuickKeys just might fit the bill. I was lucky enough to have my number drawn, and the white and blue box was mine!

THE BASICS:

QuickKeys X3 - Productivity - Automate repetitive tasks.

From StartlyTechnologies, their homepage is www.startly.com.

System Requirements: Mac OSX (Panther or Tiger). 20MB of free hard drive space is required for install, but no specific RAM amount is specified, but more RAM can improve performance.

Two versions are included on the install CD. Version 3.1 is for OSX 10.3.9 (Panther) or newer. Some features of QuickKeys X3 version 3.1 require OSX 10.4 (Tiger). If you are running an older version of Panther, QuickKeys X3 version 3.0.2 is compatible with any version of Panther OSX 10.3 and up, including Tiger.

I installed version 3.1 as I am running Panther 10.3.9 on my 17" iMac 1.6GHz G5, with 768MB RAM.

INSTALLATION: A Snap!

The 'install' process is very simple, just 'drag & drop' the version you want from the CD on to any folder in your hard drive. I always prefer this method to running an installer. Many other programs require installers, and I never know just what is being added or modified on my Mac, or

where files are being placed. I appreciate the simplicity of the QuickKeys install process.

After double-clicking the program, it asks you to enter the activation key (the 7 digit SN#). This process seemed just a bit cumbersome, with a few menus to go through on-line. Since this is done automatically from the program, it seems like it could be a more automated process. My CD was current, so no updating was required.

GETTING STARTED: Instant Gratification!

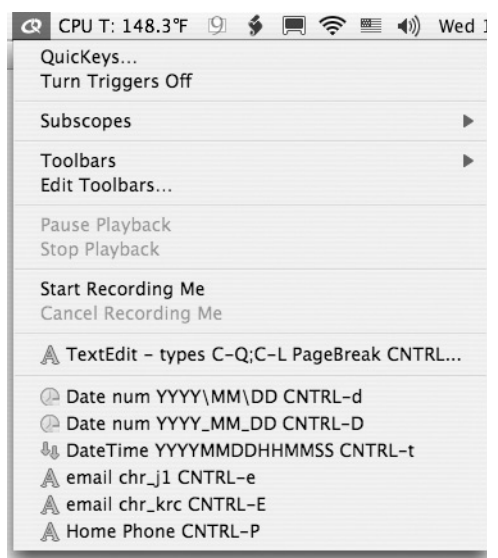
Tutorial 1 in the manual walks you through a simple example. This was a real confidence builder! I was able to create a very useful 'type my email address' shortcut in just seconds. You can assign a key combination to your shortcut (I used CNTRL-e for my email address and CNTRL-E for a second address) and/or have it added to the QuickKeys menu on your Macs menu bar. I added them to the menu bar in case I forget the hot-key. There are 20 predefined shortcuts to get you started. These are good examples to use in creating your new shortcuts.

Over the next few minutes, I created a few more useful shortcuts, one for each of the mailboxes I use and a few for typing the current date and time in different formats, and some for my phone numbers. This is so handy—use it for anything that you type repeatedly and want to avoid making a mistake. And you don't need to dig around to look it up, it is right there in your menu. This is so simple, I never had to go further in the manual. If you just stopped right here and used those shortcuts, QuickKeys would be a great tool, but it can do much, much more.

If you want to get a bit more advanced, you can also set any of these shortcuts to 'trigger' in response to a specified application opening or closing, at a specified day and time, mouse or keyboard buttons, or even to speech input (but it scares my family when I start talking to my Mac!). You can also restrict triggers to activate only dur-

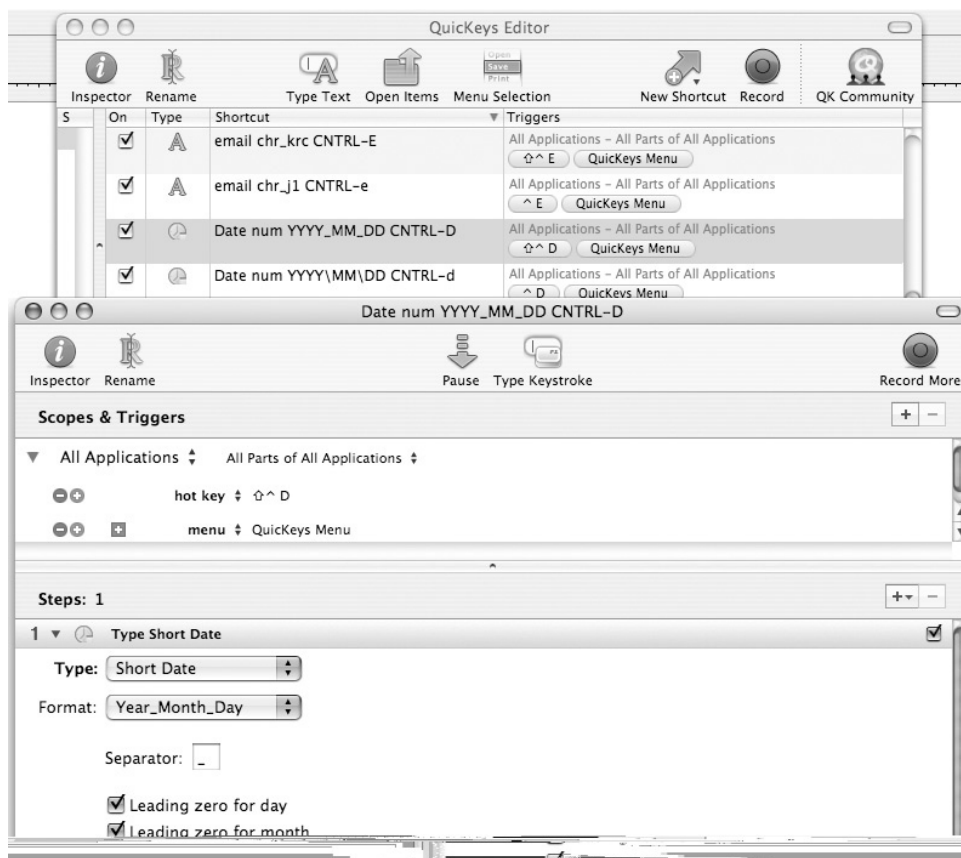
ing certain times. And you can also enable or restrict a shortcut for specific applications. This really allows you tweak the tool to fit your needs.

Some other examples of shortcuts I created—I set up a shortcut to automatically open my "Finance" folder in the Finder whenever I open Excel. And I also solved something that really bugged me in TextEdit—for a page break, you need to type 'Control-Q' and then 'Control-L! Certainly not very 'Mac-like', and there is no menu item in TextEdit for this, you are expected to remember this odd key sequence. No more. I created a shortcut for a page break in TextEdit, so now I just hold the 'Control' and the 'PageDown' keys to get a page break—and it's in the QuickKeys menu, so I can't forget. I always like to see the 'Paper Tape' when I use the built in Calculator, but there is no preference for this, and no menu key. So I created a shortcut to select 'Show Paper Tape' whenever I open the Calculator application. You can set QuickKeys to record your actions as you do them, but I found selecting each step very easy to do. And I set up one of the date formats to type the current date/time in YYYYMMDDHHSS format. When you



save a new revision of a file, just put the cursor at the end of the filename and hit the

QuickKeys X3 continued Review



ing many tedious steps into a single keystroke. QuickKeys can interface with AppleScripts, link several actions together, make decisions based on results and even use variables in the scripts.

SUPPORT:

The 216 page manual is well organized with plenty of graphic 'show me' figures to walk you through the product, and it has a complete index. The manual is also provided in pdf format which is handy for searching. I found some good info on their website, and they have a fairly active support forum.

SUMMARY:

I found QuickKeys to be an extremely useful utility. Installation was a breeze. Getting started creating useful shortcuts is easy, and you can build more advanced shortcuts as you gain experience. This makes it great for both casual users who just want to simplify a few repeated tasks, to professionals that need to automate critical business operations. Is it worth the \$99.95 price tag? Well, only you can answer that for yourself, but if you use your Mac as part of your business, I'd bet you would find many ways that QuickKeys could save you time and improve the accuracy of some repetitive processes. For home use, you just need to decide if the added convenience is worth the purchase price. A 30 day trial version is available—I would recommend that everyone try it out. I am definitely glad that I grabbed it in the raffle. I keep only a few utilities loaded on my system, but QuickKeys has earned a place in my menu bar.

hot key and you will get a unique sequential name (like Bank_Balance_20050831104609). That may look a little funny, but when you look in the Finder by 'Name', they will all be sorted chronologically. I find that I'm much less likely to grab an old version of a file by mistake by using this naming convention. Give it a try.

BEYOND SHORTCUTS: A more powerful (but not so simple) Clipboard.

I can't count the times that I wanted to copy a few items from several different web pages and then paste them all into the one document that I'm working on. The back-and-forth process is time consuming and error prone. I almost always lose my place (and my patience) half-way through.

QuickKeys has a solution for this too—a multiple clipboard. However, this process was not as easy as I hoped. Every time you add a clip, you need to enter a name for that clip. When pasting, you need to go through the list to select the item from the list. It ends up requiring several steps and keystrokes. I'd like to see the option to just have them added sequentially.

As you delve deeper into QuickKeys and learn more of its powers, you could use it to manage complete work-flows, automat-

