

PC to Mac? **What a writer should consider before switching - 1**

by Vanessa Kier

Okay, so you've decided it's time for a new computer. You're currently using a PC but you've heard that the Mac is the computers for cool, creative people. Since you're a writer, you're thinking of switching. Should you?

Maybe. Maybe not. The Mac is not perfect and PCs are not evil.

Before you switch, make a list of all the tasks you perform in the course of your writing career. Then write down what programs you're currently using to complete those tasks. Check to see if the same or an equivalent program exists for the Mac. Make certain all the features you like and need are present in the Mac version. If not, you do have the option to run Windows on a Mac.

Here are a few of the key elements to consider before switching:

1. Does your writing software exist for the Mac? Will you easily be able to convert your current manuscript to Mac format? Will the Mac program be able to save your manuscript in a format appropriate for submission?
2. E-mail. If you're using Outlook you'll need to transfer over your data. To save time, I suggest buying one of the inexpensive mail transfer programs to move the contents of Outlook over to your new computer. Or let the folks at the Apple store do this for you. The Mac comes with Mail, which looks and operates differently than Outlook. For example, Mail is just e-mail. Your contacts and calendar get stored in separate programs, so make certain if you transfer the data over yourself that the transfer program can move all three types of data from Outlook. If you don't like Mail, research ahead of time what mail/contact/calendar programs exist for the Mac. If you're not using Outlook, research how to set up your Mac to work with your current program.
3. Do you send out mass mailings that require mail merge from a database or spreadsheet? How will this work on a Mac? If you send mass e-mails, make certain your mailing list transfers over and is compatible with the e-mail program you choose for your Mac.
4. Do you use a program that has hundreds of clip art images for creating book signing flyers, newsletters or thank-you cards? Does a version exist for the Mac?
5. How will you handle updating your website from a Mac?
6. Do you need to be able to track your writing income/expenses separately from your other income/expenses? Can you make do with a personal finance software or do you need a business software? Will you be able to download data directly from your financial institutions into a Mac-based program?
7. What about tax time? Do you use a tax preparation software that is also available on a Mac?
8. Are you adaptable? There's a steep learning curve when switching from a PC to a Mac. Something as simple as the keyboard shortcuts being different can take a while to adjust to. If your day job uses PCs and you'll be using a Mac at home, or vice versa, get ready to have moments of brain freeze when you can't remember how to complete the simplest of tasks on the computer you're working on. Four months after I switched I still screw up all the time.
9. Are you patient? Setting up any new computer takes time and patience. Don't switch if you're in a hurry or expect everything to work perfectly from the get go. One option is to take both your

PC to Mac?
What a writer should consider before switching - 2

PC and your Mac into an Apple store and let them transfer all the data for you.

10. Will your current hardware— keyboard, printer, scanner, etc.— work with a Mac? Check the manufacturer's website for drivers compatible with Mac OS X v 10.6 Snow Leopard.
11. Are you willing to pay the cost? Yes, a Mac still costs more than a PC. And you'll probably need to buy new software on top of that.

If you answered yes to most of the above, before you take the plunge find a friend with a Mac and try it out. Go into an Apple store and ask questions. I highly recommend making an appointment with an Apple Personal Shopper. My Shopper answered my questions for an hour and a half!

If you decide to switch to a Mac, congratulations! Welcome to the world of Mac. If not, I commend you for recognizing that what you currently have works best for you.

This article first appeared in the *Tech Talk* column in the January 2010 issue of *Heart of the Bay*, the San Francisco RWA newsletter.