Bonus Chapter

Communicating with That Bluetooth Guy

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In This Chapter

▶ Using Bluetooth for wireless connections

▶ Adding wireless keyboards and mice

▶ Moving data among devices with iSync

▶ Printing over a Bluetooth wireless connection

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*T*ime to talk cordless. Your MacBook is already pretty doggone all-inclusive because everything that most other computers string together with cords has been integrated into the laptop's case, including the monitor, pointing device, speakers, and video camera. Depending on the connection options that you choose when you buy your laptop (or what you added since), the only cord that you absolutely need might be your AC power cord.

For most of us, this introduces an entirely new realm of possibilities . . . and that results in more questions. Exactly how do other wireless devices communicate with your MacBook? Can you really share the data on your laptop with your cellphone?

In this chapter, I describe to you what's cooking in the world of wireless devices. I won't delve into wireless Ethernet networking between your MacBook and other computers; that's covered in depth in the confines of Chapter 11 of *MacBook For Dummies,* 3rd Edition. I also don't discuss the Apple Remote in this chapter; that's covered in Chapter 12. However, I *do* cover the wireless Bluetooth connections that you can make with devices other than computers.

Bluetooth: What a Silly Name for Such Cool Technology

Originally, wireless computer connections were limited to IR (infrared) and 802.11b (the original Wi-Fi specification for wireless Ethernet networks). This was fine; after all, what were you gonna connect to your Mac laptop besides other computers? Ah, but progress marches on.

A little Danish history

Enter the explosion in popularity of modern cellphones and personal digital assistants (PDAs). In 1998, a consortium of big-name cellphone, PDA, and computer laptop manufacturers decided that their products needed a method of communicating with each other. This new wireless standard needed to be inexpensive and consume as little battery power as possible, so designers decided to keep the operational distance limited to a maximum of about 30 feet. Plus, the idea was to keep this new wireless system as hassle free as possible. Everyone agreed that you should simply be able to walk within range of another device, and the two would link up immediately and automatically. Thus, *Bluetooth* was born!

Bluetooth has been incorporated into a range of peripherals and devices, including

- ✔ Cellphones
- ✔ Tablet computers like the iPad
- ✔ Laptops and many desktops
- ✔ Wireless computer peripherals, such as keyboards and mice
- ✔ Printers
- ✔ Headphones

Is your MacBook Bluetooth-ready?

Weird name aside, you still need to know whether your MacBook is ready for a Bluetooth connection. At the time of this writing, all Apple laptops come with internal Bluetooth hardware. If you're using an older Mac laptop without Bluetooth built in, though, you're currently out of the Bluetooth loop.

However, you don't need to pitch your faithful laptop if it doesn't yet talk to the "In" crowd! You can add Bluetooth capability to your computer with a simple USB Bluetooth adapter. The USB Bluetooth adapter from Belkin

(www.belkin.com) sells online for about $30. It includes automatic data encryption, which is necessary only if there's a hacker within about 30 to 60 feet of your computer (although more security is always better in my book). The adapter can link with up to seven other Bluetooth devices simultaneously. (Come to think of it, there were a lot of people within 30 feet of my MacBook Pro during my last LAN party bash. I guess this stuff really *is* important!)

Snow Leopard and Bluetooth, together forever

You'd expect a modern, high-tech operating system like Mac OS X to come with Bluetooth drivers. You'd be right, but Apple goes a step further: Snow Leopard comes with a System Preferences screen and a utility application to help you get your laptop connected with the Bluetooth devices that are likely hanging out in your coat pockets.

Click the System Preferences icon in the Dock. From the Bluetooth pane, you can

✔ **Set up new Bluetooth devices:** Click the Set Up New Device button to run the Bluetooth Setup Assistant, which configures Bluetooth devices for use with Snow Leopard.

Follow the device-specific on-screen instructions to set up a number of common Bluetooth toys (including keyboards, mice, cellphones, and printers), or you can work with other types of devices by choosing Other. Setup Assistant searches for your Bluetooth device and makes sure that it's ready to party with your MacBook.

Make sure that your Bluetooth device is in range and *discoverable* (available for connections with other Bluetooth devices) before you run the Bluetooth Setup Assistant. Check your user manual to determine how to set your Bluetooth device as "discoverable," and make sure that you're about 20 feet away (or less) from your MacBook.

✔ **Configure Bluetooth connections:** Click the Advanced button to create, remove, enable, or disable your Bluetooth connections, using them as virtual serial ports (for the simple transfer of data) or virtual modems (for bidirectional transfers, such as using an Internet connection through a Bluetooth cellphone).

These openings to the outside world are presented as individual connections in the Serial Port list, and you can toggle them on and off individually. You can also specify whether a Bluetooth port is encrypted. Figure BC-1 shows an active Bluetooth virtual modem that's set up to allow my MacBook Pro to sync with my Palm Pilot, using the Bluetooth-PDA-Sync service.

Figure BC-1:
You can
add, delete,
enable,
or disable
Bluetooth
ports
from the
Advanced
sheet.

TIP

I recommend that you select the Show Bluetooth Status in the Menu Bar check box. The Bluetooth menu lets you conserve power by turning off your Bluetooth hardware until you need it. You can also conveniently toggle your laptop's discovery status as well as set up a device or send and browse files. (You can even see what devices are connected to your Mac with the click of a menu icon. 'Nuff said.)

TIP

If you know you won't be using Bluetooth devices while you're on the road, disabling a Bluetooth service on a laptop can help conserve battery power.

The other Bluetooth resource that you can use is the stand-alone application *Bluetooth File Exchange.* (Yes, you can call it *BFE* if you like. I do whenever possible.) You have to launch BFE the old-fashioned way; it's located in your Utilities folder, inside your Applications folder. Much like a traditional FTP (File Transfer Protocol) application, double-clicking the Bluetooth File Exchange icon presents you with a file selection dialog, where you choose the file(s) you want to send to the connected Bluetooth device! You can also elect to browse the files on a networked Bluetooth device so that you can see what the owner of that device is offering.

You can also set up your defaults for file exchanges from the Sharing pane in System Preferences. Click the Sharing icon and then select the Bluetooth Sharing check box to display the settings shown in Figure BC-2. Here you can control what Snow Leopard does when you receive files or Personal Information Manager (PIM) data with BFE. For instance, with these settings, Snow Leopard can

✔ Prompt you for permission to receive each file or PIM item.

✔ Accept all files and PIM items without restriction or prompting.

✔ Save all incoming files and items to the folder that you specify.

✔ Offer only the files and items in the folder that you specify when other
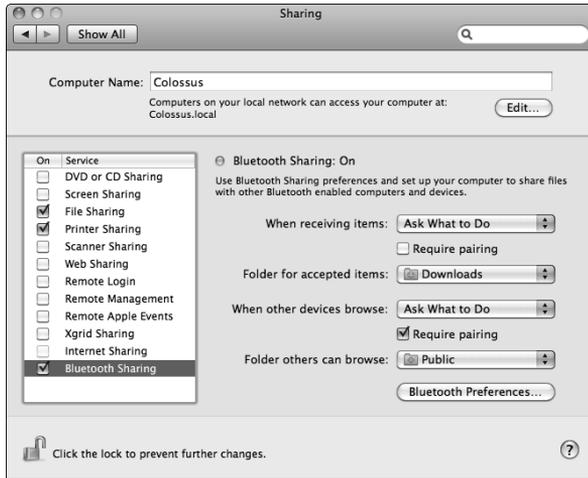Bluetooth items browse your MacBook.

Personally, I'm all for the defaults in Snow Leopard for file exchanges:

✔ I want to know when someone's sending me something.

✔ I want anything I receive to be saved in my Downloads folder.

✔ If I turn on File Transfer, I want to allow others to browse the contents of
my Public folder.

However, feel free to adjust, enable, and disable to your heart's content.

Adding Wireless Keyboards and Mice to Your Laptop

The current crop of Mac laptops arrive at your doorstep in a fully wireless
configuration. Apple throws in an internal Bluetooth adapter and an internal
AirPort Extreme wireless card. Everything's already included for you.
Therefore, you can indeed work keyboard and mouse magic from across the
room from your laptop, using a wireless keyboard and mouse that you can
buy separately. (Or perhaps you just want a full-size keyboard and external
mouse to use when you're working from your home or office.)

A number of wireless Bluetooth keyboard/mouse packages are on the market, and any one of 'em should work fine with your Mac. In fact, you can buy Apple's wireless Bluetooth keyboard and Magic Mouse separately, for a total of about $150. Other offerings from Logitech and our old buddy Microsoft run about the same amount, while the excellent BTKey keyboard from Macally is significantly cheaper at about $70 (www.macally.com).

When shopping for a Bluetooth keyboard/mouse desktop, keep these facts in mind:

✔ **Some keyboards are created more than equal.** Many of today's third-party keyboards are encrusted with extra function buttons that do everything from opening your e-mail application to searching your kitchen cabinets for another can of spray cheese.

I like these programmable function keys — they can bring up your favorite applications with a single keystroke while you're relaxing 20 feet away — so look for the keyboard that offers the most programmable keys in your price range.

✔ **Rodents crave energy.** Does the wireless mouse come with its own recharging stand? If so, that's a big plus. Depending on how much you use your laptop, a mouse that runs on standard batteries can go through a set in as little as a month's time! (Not surprisingly, many computer owners use rechargeable batteries in their wireless mice.) In fact, some wireless mice include an on/off switch to help conserve battery power.

✔ **Wireless doesn't always mean Bluetooth.** Just because a keyboard or mouse is wireless doesn't automatically make it a Bluetooth device. Plenty of wireless RF (radio frequency) devices are out there, too. These toys need their own transmitters, which are usually USB-based as well, so things can get confusing. Therefore, read the box or technical specifications carefully to make sure that you're buying Bluetooth.

✔ **Bluetooth stuff isn't self-cleaning.** Sure, your new wireless keyboard and mouse can hang out with you on the sofa, but that doesn't mean they're happy sharing your nacho puffs and grape soda. Look for an optical mouse (which doesn't use a ball), and check whether a prospective keyboard can be easily cleaned and maintained before you buy it.

Most Bluetooth devices are controlled through the Bluetooth pane in System Preferences. However, wireless keyboards and mice are a special case because they're monitored through the Bluetooth section of the Keyboard & Mouse pane. (You can even add a new wireless device from this tab. Geez, those Apple designers give you a dozen roads to the same spot on the map, don't they?)

Getting Everything in iSync

No jokes about boy bands, please. *iSync* is the data transfer and synchronizing utility application that ships with Snow Leopard, and it works fine with both wired and wireless Bluetooth connections. The difference between Bluetooth File Exchange and iSync is a matter of intelligence:

✔ BFE merely transfers files and dumps them in the folders you specify.

✔ iSync copies and updates your Address Book, Safari, and iCal information among devices. iSync compares the information on both your laptop and your devices and makes sure that they end up the same.

iSync also allows you to synchronize data among multiple computers and devices by using your MobileMe membership so that the contacts, bookmarks, and calendar data on your MacBook match, for example, the data on your Mac Pro. You can control what gets sent from the MobileMe pane in System Preferences. (For more on MobileMe, visit Chapter 9 of *MacBook For Dummies,* 3rd Edition.)

REMEMBER

Just because your phone or PDA supports Bluetooth *doesn't* mean that iSync is guaranteed to work. I know a few Mac owners who are still seething over incompatible devices. For a complete list of the Bluetooth phones, PDAs, and other devices that work with iSync, visit www.apple.com/isync/devices.html.

After your supported Bluetooth device is linked to your Mac, follow these steps to add the new device to iSync and synchronize your data:

1. **Click the Finder icon on the Dock.**

2. **Click Applications in the Finder window Sidebar and double-click iSync.**

3. **Press ⌘+N.**

   iSync displays the Add Device dialog.

4. **Click Scan to display any Bluetooth devices in range.**

5. **Double-click the device that you want to use.**

   The window expands to allow you to specify what data is to be synchronized. (Other settings might appear as well, depending on the device.)

6. **Select the check boxes for each data type that you want to exchange.**

7. **Click Sync Devices.**

Never disconnect a device while a synchronization is in progress. You risk corrupting the data being transferred, or your MacBook could lock up. Wait until iSync indicates that the synchronization is finished; the application displays a message when the process is complete.

Deleting a calendar event or a contact on either your laptop or the Bluetooth device deletes that same data from the other machine! For example, if you decide you no longer need your personal contacts on your Mac at work and you delete 'em, *they'll be deleted from your PDA when you synchronize.* When I say that iSync creates a mirror image on both sides of the connection, I'm not lying: Additions appear, and deletions disappear.

The Magic of Wireless Printing

To your Mac laptop, a wireless Bluetooth printer is just another Bluetooth connection — but to you, it's the very definition of convenience, especially if desk space is limited next to your Mac. Just set that paper-producing puppy up anywhere in the 30–40 foot range, plug it in, set up the printer in Snow Leopard, and let 'er rip.

Not all printer manufacturers produce Bluetooth models that communicate properly with your Mac. Make sure that the Bluetooth printer you buy supports HCRP. (Another jawbreaker acronym. This time it stands for *Hardcopy Cable Replacement Protocol.*)

You have two options when installing a Bluetooth printer:

✔ Whenever possible, use the printer manufacturer's software. A printer might require a driver that a typical Bluetooth device doesn't need.

✔ You can usually successfully set up a printer via the Bluetooth Setup Assistant, which you can run from the Bluetooth pane of System Preferences (as I discuss earlier in the chapter):

   a. *Make sure that your printer is set as discoverable.*

      Check your printer manual to determine how to switch your printer to discoverable mode. This mode allows other Bluetooth devices within range (including your laptop) to recognize and make a connection to your printer.

   b. *Click the Set Up New Device button.*

   c. *Choose to install a printer.*

   d. *Follow the on-screen instructions.*

Luckily, after you successfully set up a Bluetooth printer, you can just press ⌘+P to open the Print dialog box and choose that printer from the Printer pop-up menu. No big whoop . . . and that's the way it *should* be.