



Quicksilver is a must-have application, which enables you to track down and manipulate what's on your Mac.

# Get started with Quicksilver

Access and alter almost any item on your Mac with a program that will change your working life!

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Mac OS X 10.4 or later
- Quicksilver 1.0b51 on the DVD
- An hour of your time



You'll find Quicksilver 1.0b51 on the DVD

Wouldn't it be great if you could access, via a handy keyboard shortcut, almost any information or item on your Mac's hard drive? "That's Spotlight," you might say. Well, imagine being able to perform actions on those objects, all from a single interface that's there when you want it to be and gone when you don't.

This, in a nutshell, is *Quicksilver* – a massively extensible and highly configurable piece of freeware that soon becomes indispensable. It has so many neat extras and functions, that it rapidly barges other shareware and freeware applications out of the equation. Want a file and application launcher? Check. How about the ability to access any of your *iTunes* tracks in an instant and control Apple's jukebox, all without bringing *iTunes* to the front? Check. An

interface for adding events to *iCal* that also enables you to set up multiple, in-your-face, on-screen reminders? *Quicksilver* offers that, too, along with dozens of other great features, including a multiple-item clipboard, integration with email clients and web browsers, user-definable system-wide shortcuts, and much, much more.

This application may not be the easiest one to initially get to grips with (hence

**"It has so many neat extras and functions, that it rapidly barges other shareware and freeware applications out of the equation"**

this series), and many dismiss it as a pretty launcher. However, spend a couple of hours with *Quicksilver* and chances are that you'll never go back, and any Mac you use without it will somehow feel naked. Over the coming months, we're going to explore *Quicksilver's* greatest features, some of which will have been touched on in this introduction. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let's spend this instalment looking at how the application works.

## Installation and set-up

When you first launch *Quicksilver*, the application leads you through a few dialogs to define some basic settings, although all of these can be changed later, so don't sit there for hours debating whether or not to click a certain checkbox. Keep hitting **Continue** until

**STEP BY STEP** Discover how Quicksilver works

**01** Pressing [control]+[spacebar] invokes *Quicksilver*. Depicted is the built-in **Bezel** interface, which we prefer to the default, **Primer**, although functionality is mostly the same in both. Start typing and *Quicksilver* filters the results, offering a choice based on the characters you type (so, **ABK** brings up **Address Book** as first choice).



**02** If your choice isn't shown, the down arrow brings up a results list, enabling you to select a different object. *Quicksilver* learns which characters you want to refer to specific objects, speeding up selections. The second pane – the **action** panel – typically shows **Open** as the default option. Hit [Enter] to apply an action to the object.



**03** To select a different action, [tab] to the **action** pane and do another search by typing. Action choices depend on installed plug-ins, and can include **Open**, **Move to**, **Email** to and more. [Enter] activates an action. For some actions, you [tab] to the third pane to choose an argument, like the location for a **Move to** command.

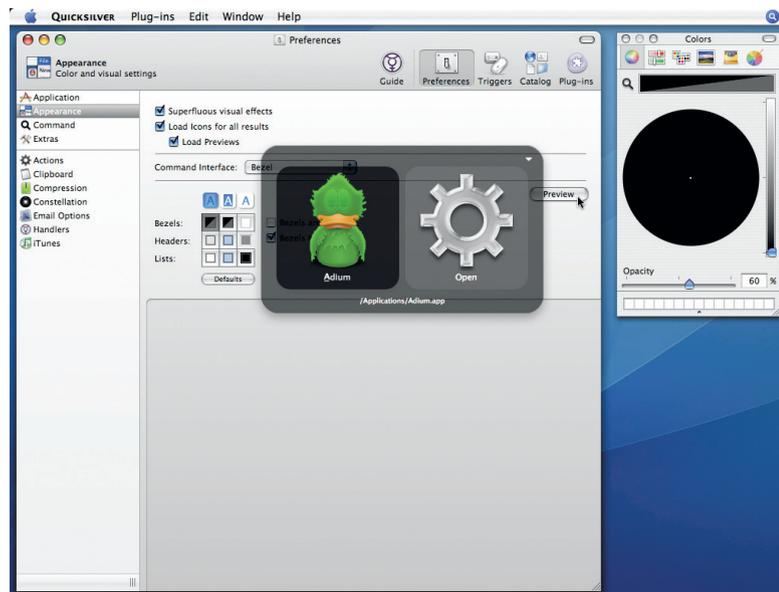
you arrive at the plug-ins list. If you regularly use applications in the list shown, feel free to check the relevant checkboxes and install the plug-ins.

Next up is a rather more important setting – the system-wide keyboard shortcut for invoking *Quicksilver*'s main window. By default, this shortcut is [control]+[spacebar], which is eminently sensible, leaving ⌘+[spacebar] for Spotlight (which is still worth having around, since Apple's offering is great for looking inside files). However, click **Edit** if you want to change the default shortcut.

Keep clicking **Continue** and you'll see a **Finish** button – click it and *Quicksilver* launches properly for the first time, showing its default interface (known as **Primer**). To the top-left is a **close** button and to the top-right is the widget for accessing each of *Quicksilver*'s **configuration** window categories: **Guide** – links to *Quicksilver* documentation and forums; **Preferences** – options for amending *Quicksilver*'s behaviour; **Triggers** – for defining system-wide hotkeys for *Quicksilver* actions; **Catalog** – a means of fine-tuning the areas of your Mac that *Quicksilver* is allowed to index; and **Plug-ins** – management for installing, deleting and finding out about *Quicksilver*'s plug-ins. This menu is also available from *Quicksilver*'s Dock item.

**Tweaking Preferences**

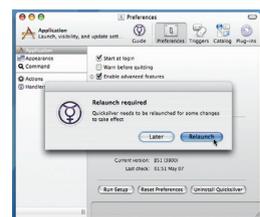
Access *Quicksilver*'s **Preferences**. Categories can be selected via the sidebar, and the first is **Application**. Here, you can set *Quicksilver* to launch at login (via **Start at login**), which is recommended, and clicking **Enable advanced features** is a must, unless you want to avoid many of the application's



The **Appearance** category of *Quicksilver*'s **Preferences** lets you make minor adjustments to the current command interface.

best bits. Options also exist for toggling *Quicksilver*'s Dock icon and menu bar icon (which offers the same functionality as the Dock item).

Next up is **Appearance**, which enables you to deactivate a trio of visual effects options (recommended for old Macs, while recent models should have no trouble with the amusingly named **superfluous visual effects**), and it's here where you define which command interface you want to work with. Two are built-in: **Primer**, the default interface, has panes that display as a vertical list and provides a reasonable amount of contextual information; **Bezel** is the other option, and the one used throughout ▶

**QUICK TIP****Advanced features**

By default, many of *Quicksilver*'s advanced features are not activated, restricting access to some of the more useful plug-ins. So, before you use it, ensure **Enable advanced features** is checked in the **Application** category of *Quicksilver*'s **Preferences**.

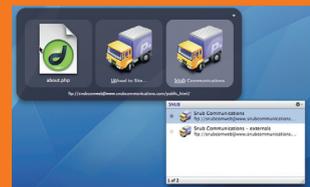
**THE TRANSMIT PLUG-IN**

If you use Panic's *Transmit* FTP client ([www.panic.com/transmit](http://www.panic.com/transmit)) for uploading content to the web, *Quicksilver* can speed things along with the *Transmit 3 Module* plug-in. With this installed, you can select an item in the object pane, [tab], select **Upload to Site** in the action pane, and then select one of your *Transmit* Favorites in the third pane (either by the usual type-to-find method, or by selecting it from the results list).

If you've added sidebar links for a *Transmit* site (which is done in *Transmit* by dragging folders from their stuff to the Sidebar drawer), these are accessible by

clicking the right arrow key after making a selection in the third pane. Hitting [Enter] confirms everything, uploading your chosen object to the relevant web server.

If you don't use Panic's app, Interarchy ([www.interarchy.com](http://www.interarchy.com)) or Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) plug-ins are also available.



## FINE-TUNE THE CATALOG | Define the information that Quicksilver can access

*Quicksilver's Catalog* (accessed via the Dock or via  $\mathbb{A}+[:]$  after invoking *Quicksilver*) is one of the application's most important elements, enabling you to define which areas of your Mac *Quicksilver* will have access to. (Unlike Spotlight, *Quicksilver* doesn't index everything by default, which in theory makes the application quicker and more efficient at finding files.)

The **Catalog** pane's sidebar provides a number of indexing categories. Clicking one shows the sources within each category, including the number of items indexed for each source. Default sources include *System Preferences* panes, installed applications, and the first couple of levels of your *Documents* folder.

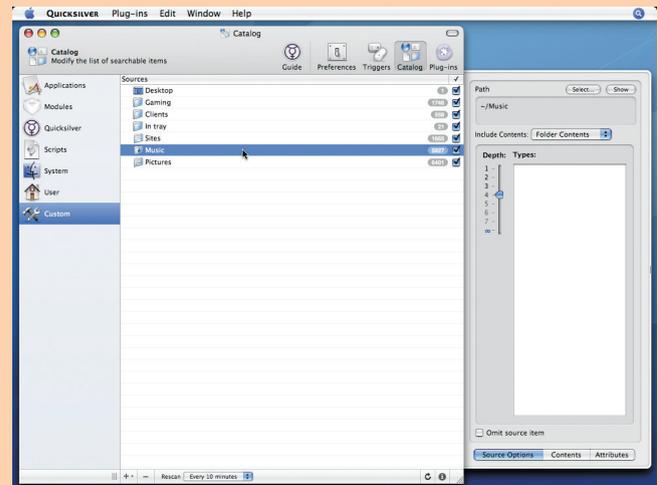
Clicking a source and then the **info** button opens a drawer, providing access to **Attributes** (additional information about the source), **Contents** (a visual overview of scanned objects,

enabling individual items to be deselected), and **'Source Options'**.

The last of those options – greyed-out in the default sources – becomes important when you start defining custom sources. Define one by clicking the + icon, choosing **File & Folder Scanner**, and then selecting an item from your hard drive. If your chosen item is a folder, select **Folder Contents** from the **Include Contents** menu in the window's drawer. Next, define a **Depth** value, which determines how many levels *Quicksilver* indexes in the folder. (Avoid setting this to **infinite**, unless you want an immensely slow *Quicksilver*.)

Should items not show during searches, try amending the rescan rate (via the **Rescan** menu), or choose a source and click the **refresh** button for a force-refresh of that portion of the **Catalog**.

Unlike Spotlight, *Quicksilver* requires you to define a **Catalog**.



this series. The **Bezel** interface is visually appealing, and more compact than **Primer**. In terms of functionality, there's little difference between the two interfaces – the main one is that for **Bezel**, you use the down arrow to access the results list, but if you're using **Primer**, the right arrow brings up the list.

### Your first Quicksilver search

Assuming you left *Quicksilver's* default shortcut alone, hit  $[\text{control}]+[\text{spacebar}]$

and your chosen command interface will appear. Like Spotlight, start typing and *Quicksilver* continually filters the result, trying to find the most relevant object for your input. It doesn't need your search strings to have sequential characters – although **ADDR** would probably bring up **Address Book** in the **object** pane, and so would **ABK**.

If your chosen item doesn't appear, the results list can be accessed (via the down arrow if using **Bezel**; right arrow if using **Primer**; with a short delay if using either), enabling you to select an alternate option. *Quicksilver* soon learns from your choices, so if you want **A** to initially bring up **Activity Monitor**, run the search and choose that item from the results list a few times – *Quicksilver* soon gets the message. Choosing an object is simply a case of hitting **[Enter]**.

If you decide that you want to enter a different search string to the one currently shown, wait for *Quicksilver* to reset (a time determined by the **Reset search after** value in *Quicksilver's* **Command Preferences**) or hit **[Escape]**. If no search is active, **[Escape]** closes the *Quicksilver* window.

### The best bit

Although this is a great way of finding applications and documents on your hard drive (take a look at our 'Fine-tune the Catalog' box at the top of this page if desired items aren't being found, because unlike Spotlight, you

need to tell *Quicksilver* what it can index), *Quicksilver's* real power – and the main reason why it's more useful than Spotlight – is its multi-paned approach.

Try another search and select either an application or file. The second pane should show **Open**, which is the default action for many items. However, **[tab]** to this pane and you can start typing to filter the available **actions** list for an action to perform on the object.

Alternatively, accessing the results list while in the **action** pane provides a list of all available actions for your chosen object, and this too can be filtered by typing one or more characters once the results list is shown. Via this pane, you can perform all manner of actions on your chosen object, and for those that require further clarification or an argument, **[tab]** to the third pane to define this. Examples include a target folder for a **Copy to** or **Move to** action, a recipient for an email action, and so on.

Unlike many applications, *Quicksilver* is fairly easy to customise to your needs. Once you get to grips with its basic workings, spend some time

tailoring it to how you

work. Amend the

**Catalog**, so it includes

items you want access to (again, see the box above), and install plug-ins to enhance *Quicksilver's*

Some *Quicksilver* plug-ins are eye-catching – witness this *Visible Applications* constellation menu, used here as an alternative application switcher.

Check **Show children split view** in the **Command Preferences**, and the results list will resemble *Finder's* column view.



STEP BY STEP Managing Quicksilver plug-ins



**01** Much of *Quicksilver's* power lies in its plug-ins. *Quicksilver's* **Plug-ins Manager** is accessed by selecting **Plug-ins** from its Dock item. Choosing **Installed Plug-ins** from the sidebar shows what's already installed; by default, that's just two interface plug-ins – *Bezel Interface* and *Primer Interface* – and *HotKey Triggers*.



**02** Clicking the triangle widget next to **All Plug-ins** provides a list of categories; selecting one shows the available plug-ins. Alternatively, select **All Plug-ins** to list all plug-ins, including version numbers and the date when each one was last updated. Select a plug-in, click the **info** button and a drawer opens, providing more information.



**03** To install plug-ins, just click the checkboxes next to them and a bar displays the download progress. Installed plug-ins can be deleted by selecting them in **Installed Plug-ins** and choosing **Delete Selected Plug-ins** from the pop-up menu at the foot of the window. Restarting *Quicksilver* removes them from memory.

capabilities, enabling you to control or access information from the likes of *iTunes*, *iPhoto*, *Entourage* and *Transmit*, or to add useful additional actions (see 'Managing plug-ins' above).

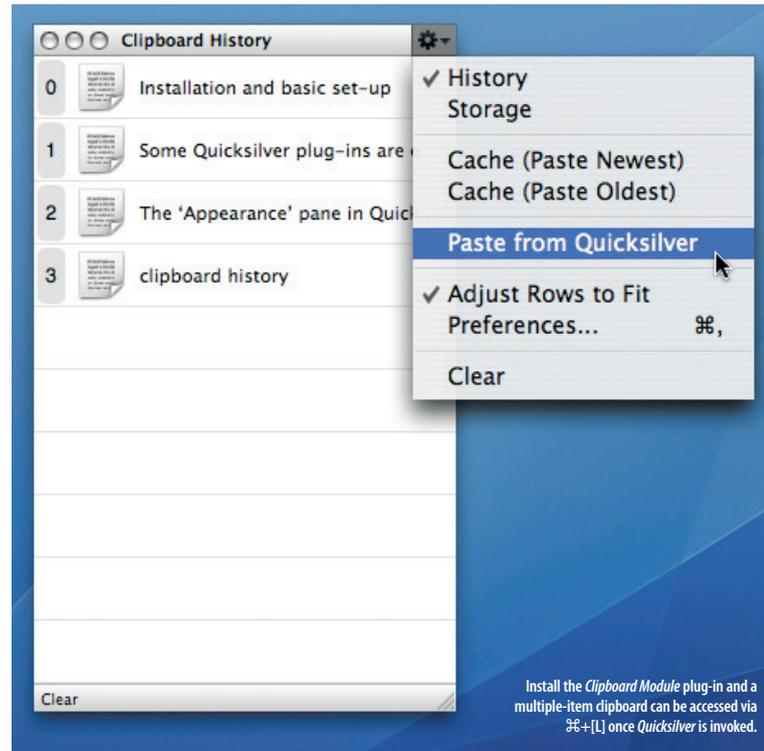
Back in *Quicksilver's* **Preferences**, use the **Command** pane to define how the main window functions. Along with those things we've already mentioned, you can set **Show other matches** to **Immediately** to show the results list as soon as a search is started. In **Actions**, you can toggle available actions, disabling those that you never use and making *Quicksilver* even more efficient.

In **Handlers**, you can choose which applications are used for certain functions. For example, if you've installed the *Path Finder Module* plug-in and want *Quicksilver* to open *Path Finder* rather than *Finder* when you ask for an item to be revealed, choose **Path Finder** from the **File System Browser** menu in **Handlers**.

Once you're familiar with *Quicksilver's* workings, you can also speed things up further by using triggers to automate *Quicksilver* actions – something we'll discuss later in this series.

**Thinking ahead**

Ultimately, the best way to get to grips with *Quicksilver* is to experiment with it. The **Reset Preferences** button in the **Application** Preferences provides a single-click method of reverting *Quicksilver* to its default state if your set-up goes wrong. And while, sadly, there's no simple way of saving a set-up, you can always take backups of the *Quicksilver* folders in **Library/Application Support** and **Library/Caches** from your **Home** folder, along with **com.blacktree.Quicksilver.plist** from **Library/Preferences**



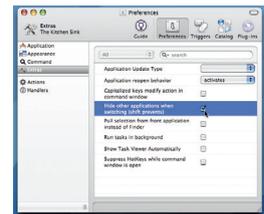
Install the *Clipboard Module* plug-in and a multiple-item clipboard can be accessed via **⌘+[L]** once *Quicksilver* is invoked.

**"Install plug-ins to enhance Quicksilver, enabling you to control the likes of iTunes or iPhoto"**

(again, in your **Home** folder). Quitting *Quicksilver* and copying your backups to their original locations will make sure your settings reappear when *Quicksilver* is next launched.

Over the next few issues, this series will build on the basic skills outlined this month. You'll find out how to use *Quicksilver* to navigate your hard drive, rapidly collate files for email, improve your *iLife* and create triggers. In the meantime, have fun learning to use the application. You may soon find that your Mac experience has changed forever, due to you suddenly having so much power and control – all via the simple starting point of pressing **[control]+[spacebar]**.  
**Craig Grannell**

**QUICK TIP**



**Reduce clutter**

Check the **Hide other applications** when switching box in the **Extras** category of *Quicksilver's* **Preferences**, and switching to an application will now hide all the others. The **⇧** key can be used as a quick override for this function, on those occasions where you want more than one application visible simultaneously.

**QUICK TIP**

**Further information**

**i** *Quicksilver's* **info** button will be mentioned throughout this series of tutorials. It opens the configuration window's drawer, which typically offers further information about the currently selected item.



**Next month**  
We'll be look at manipulating files and folders with *Quicksilver*.  
Don't miss issue 185 of MacFormat, on sale 25th July!