Running Solar Fire and Other Windows Programs on the Mac

We do not officially support Solar Fire on the Mac, but we have a lot of customers who successfully use Solar Fire on a Mac equipped with an Intel chip, Windows, and a Windows emulation program like Bootcamp, Parallels, Virtual PC or Virtual Box. In addition to doing emulation, these various options isolate the Windows environment from the Mac environment so viruses can't jump from one side to the other.

Putting Windows on Your Mac

All of the Windows emulations on a Mac require that you have a Windows disk and a license key (serial number) for Windows that you are not currently using somewhere else. An old disk from an old derelict computer should work. Solar Fire will work on any Windows version from Windows 98SE onwards, so you can use an old version of Windows with Virtual Box or Parallels. See below for details about the Windows requirements of the various emulator programs.

Here are notes on using each emulation program, and also on getting the Mac keyboard and mouse to function more like the way they do in Windows.

Using Virtual PC

The main problem we have had is with printers, especially Epson printers made for the Mac. I think that there are fixes for those problems on the Virtual PC website.

When the Windows software says you need to control-click, in Virtual PC you have to instead press control-option-click.

Using Bootcamp

The Bootcamp method runs much faster than Virtual PC, but has some drawbacks. If you want to use Windows you have to restart your computer in Windows mode, and it might be more difficult or impossible to share files between the Macintosh part of your computer and the Windows part. However, Astrolabe has Solar Fire and Windows running on a Macbook laptop using Bootcamp, and it works great. Windows on Bootcamp runs as fast or faster than it does on a regular PC. Here's more info on Bootcamp: http://news.com.com/FAQ+Windows+on+Macs/2100-1016_3-6058163.html?tag=nl

Bootcamp is included on new Intel OS-X Macs, and there are installation instructions in the Macintosh help (search for "Bootcamp") and also here:
http://manuals.info.apple.com/en/Boot_Camp_Install-Setup.pdf
(It's easy to make a Windows partition, and you can change your mind later and easily take Windows off again in a couple of minutes.)

With Bootcamp you need to load a full version of Windows XP or Vista. If possible, I'd recommend getting XP rather than Vista. If you are installing an upgrade version of Windows, you can't eject the upgrade CD when you are asked to insert the older Windows CD. (However, if you have an external CD drive you can insert both CDs at the same time and it will work. Put the older Windows disk in the external CD drive and just press Enter when the Windows install program asks you to insert the old CD.)

By the way, Bootcamp will make a Windows partition and format it for you, but you still have to let the Windows install program format it again or it won't install properly. If you don't use Windows much, then let it make the default a small-sized Fat32 partition (which OS-X can also use). If you use Windows a lot, you might want to make a bigger partition and let Windows format it with ntfs.

Using Parallels

Parallels lets you run Windows inside a window on the Mac desktop, and you can run other operating systems on the Mac without rebooting. From what I hear, Parallels also is fast. You can find more information on Parallels at http://www.parallels.com/ and http://news.com.com/Windows-on-Mac+software+gets+virtualization+update/2100-1012_3-6162485.html .

If you use Parallels, you will need to shut off File Sharing. I've never used Parallels, but customers have confirmed that you need to turn off the shared options, shared folders, shared applications, and (especially) shared profile, which is the setting most likely to cause a problem. Solar Fire Gold 7 puts its charts and other user files into a folder in My Documents, and if the sharing options in Parallels are not turned off, Solar Fire isn't able to find these files.

Here's more info about this issue:
http://alabe.com/SmarterTicket/Customer/KBArticle.aspx?articleid=270
And here's a page that shows how to get to the necessary settings in Parallels:
http://www.otakatik.com/optimize-parallels-desktop-configurations/

Using Virtual Box

Sun Microsystems sponsors a free emulation program called Virtual Box. Virtual Box lets you set up Windows inside a file on your hard disk, thus enabling you to run Windows on the Mac desktop. It is fairly fast, and it also works on Linux. I have tried it on the Mac. Compared to Parallels, it's only a little harder to set up, and it works quite well. You can find more info on Virtual Box at
http://www.virtualbox.org/

The Virtual Box emulator wants to work with Windows XP or Vista. It will work with older Windows, but it doesn't have drivers for hi-res video. I used the following video driver to load Windows ME and Solar Fire on Virtual Box: http://www.geocities.com/bearWindows/vbe9x.htm .

Using Crossover or Wine

Nova Chartwheels will work on a very limited Windows emulator called Crossover (aka Wine). However, Solar Fire will not--probably because Solar Fire makes such extensive use of all of the graphics, font, and internet capabilities of Windows.

Adapting the Mac's Mouse and Delete Keys

Adapting the Mouse

If the wireless mouse made by Apple doesn't work in Windows, you might have to use a wired USB mouse instead. Most of the time I plug in a PC USB mouse, simply because I love my mouse wheel. If you just want to make the Apple's mouse work like a PC's 2-button mouse, here is a link to a free program that should allow you to simulate a right-click by using the Mac's Option (Control) key:
http://www.geocities.com/pronto4u/applemouse.html
This works unless you need to control-click and drag all at the same time.

Adapting the Delete Keys

On the Windows keyboard, the **Delete** key deletes the next character, and the **Backspace** key deletes the previous character. On the Mac keyboard, there is only a **Delete** key, and this deletes the previous character. If this bothers you, I recommend that you get a keyboard hotkey program and reprogram the Mac's right-hand **Command** key to be a **Delete** key that works like the **Delete** key on PCs. (The **Command** key on the Mac is the same as the Windows key in Windows, but you need only one of them.) Here's a link to a free hotkey program I used called Keytweak:
http://webpages.charter.net/krumsick/
If you use this program, then click on button #62 and change it to say 'Del'