

Software Review

Parallels Lets You Run Windows or Linux with the Mac OS 10.4 or Later

By Maria Argiello

Product: Parallels Desktop 4.0 for Mac

Company: Parallels Holdings, Ltd

URL: www.parallels.com

System Requirements: Any 32- or 64-bit Intel-based Mac; 1GB of RAM; 100 MB free disk space; Mac OS X 10.4.11 or later.

Test System: MacOS 10.5.6, MBP 2.53 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo, 4 GB RAM.

Price: \$79.99

Rating: 4.5 out of 5 apples

You have a beautiful new Intel Mac but you need Windows for those apps that cannot run on a Mac. Not a problem. Buy a copy of Parallels Desktop 4.0 plus Windows XP or Vista or Linux. By the way, Windows 7 is due to come out this summer (2009). If you are a new Windows-on-Mac user and have licenses for apps that you have run on a Windows machine, you can continue to use those software licenses rather than spend money for a Mac version.

Since my last review of this very essential application for Mac users who need to do work in Windows and still enjoy their Macs, there are many new features. Its remarkable virtual operating system density plus low virtualization overheads and outstanding management, makes this app worthy of its awards and I highly recommend it. Running Windows on your Mac without rebooting is its best feature. But it's also fast due to its new improved virtualization engine. It supports 64-bit Windows with up to 4 CPUs and 8GB of RAM.

Compared to Parallels 3, for which installation was a truly horrible experience, installation was refreshingly easy. You can install Windows XP or Vista without any fuss. I installed Windows XP. I immediately liked the interface but changed the background wallpaper to one of my favorites—a beautiful island scene surrounded with clear blue water.

I copied and pasted text and shared files easily between Mac OS X and Windows. When I connected my GPS, Parallels asked whether I wanted to attach the device to my Windows environment or my Mac environment. When my system detected the iPhone, it popped up a window to ask me whether I wanted to attach the iPhone to Windows or the Mac. I chose the Mac, and the iPhone automatically started synching normally with iTunes on the Mac.

Parallels also asks if you want to share a device between two environments such as is the case with a thumb drive.

There are several ways to access Windows and the Mac OS—Full Screen, Window, and Coherence. All of these modes existed in Version 3. Version 4 adds another mode called Modality in which the Microsoft OS desktop can be made very small, and partially transparent, while completely preserving all the details of the full desktop. This is designed for operations that can run mostly unattended, but which you need to keep an eye on (such as installing the latest Windows Service Pack). It may come in handy at times.

To secure your data, you can take snapshots of your Windows configuration and roll back to those images if necessary. You can also program half-hour intervals to take them automatically. This is a sort of Time Machine Lite, a way for windows to preserve statuses.

Another feature is Safe Mode. When activated, Parallels takes a snapshot. You can make changes and then can save or revert to the snapshot.

With this version you get one free year of Parallels Internet Security by Kaspersky. I installed it. You also get Acronis Disk Director Suite for disk management, and Acronis True Image Home for backup. The included User Manual is very helpful.

I did not do any scientific speed tests, but from my experience with older versions, this version has a significant speed bump. There were fewer spinning beach balls when using apps.

If you're a Mac user running Leopard, use Spaces. Keep Parallels in one Space and your Mac OS in another. With a key combination you can switch workspaces and you don't have to worry about minimizing windows or hiding applications.

There are other choices to run virtualization software on your Mac: VMWare Fusion (\$80), and VirtualBox 1.6.2 (free).

My recommendation: If you're a power Mac user, this is not going to satisfy you at all. You cannot run Windows games. If you do, they will run slowly. A better solution to have the full benefit of your Mac hardware is to install Windows via Boot Camp. And no matter what you need Windows for you have to worry about viruses. I spent a lot of time running the Anti Virus program when it indicated that I had 3 security risks.