

Get Back to Your Mac Without Paying for It



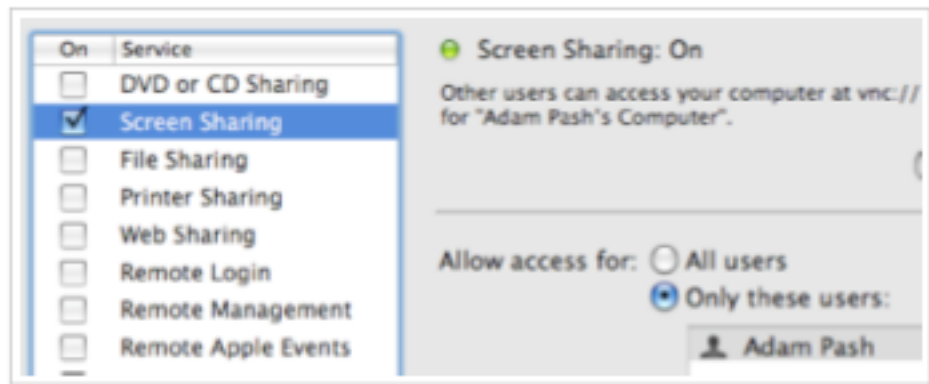
When Leopard was released, one of the most enticing new features was Back to My Mac, a tool that made it possible to access your home computer remotely—including remote control of your desktop and access to your files—no matter where you are. The catch: It requires a \$100 yearly subscription to the lackluster .Mac service. Right now I'm working from my laptop in Austin, and I've got the same full access to my home PC in Los Angeles as Back to My Mac offers, but I didn't spend a dime on .Mac to get it. That's because all of the tools you need to roll your own Back to My Mac are already built into Leopard for free out of the box—you just need to know how to access them.

The Results

Before I step you through all of the work involved, it seems prudent to give you a slightly better idea of the end result. Once you've completed the setup I'm detailing below, you'll be able to remotely control your home computer like you're sitting directly in front of it (if you're familiar with VNC, that's all it is), access any of the files on your computer's hard drive just like you would if you were on the same network (or sitting at that computer), and pretty much anything else (provided it's not too graphic-intensive). The main draw is this: When you're done, you should be able to do virtually anything remotely that you could do sitting in front of that computer.

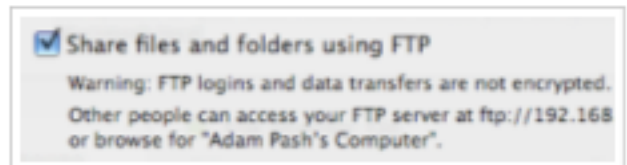
Set Up Faux Back to My Mac Features on Your Home Mac

To get started setting up your faux Back to My Mac, you need to fire up Leopard's saucy new Sharing preference pane from the System Preferences. From here, we'll enable remote screen sharing and set up an FTP server that will allow us to remotely access files on the computer.

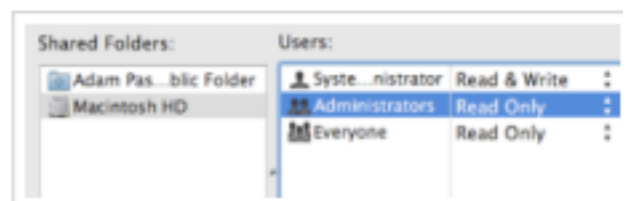


Enable Screen Sharing: To enable Screen Sharing, which is probably My Mac for most users, just click the checkbox next to Screen Sharing in the Sharing prefpane. You could stop there, but I prefer to set up access for "Only these users," and set it to my user account. This means that when you're accessing your screen remotely, you'll log in with the same username and password that you use to log in to your computer.

Set Up FTP Access: First, tick the checkbox next to File Sharing. By default this just enables simple file sharing on your home network, so you've got a few more steps to enable the FTP that we'll be using in our faux Back to My Mac setup. Next, hit the Options button, tick the checkbox next to Share Files and Folders using FTP, and then hit Done. (As you can see, there's a small warning under the FTP option alerting you that your FTP logins and file transfers are not secure. You still need a password to access the files, but the transfer of the files themselves is not encrypted.)



When you return to the Sharing pane, you'll notice that you're able to choose which folders are shared. You can set it to share the root of your hard drive if you want to share everything on your computer, or you can just go through and choose a few important folders you want to make sure you've got access to. Again, you can choose which users are able to access your files, as well as what kind of access each user-type has (read and write, read only, and write only). Choose whichever makes more sense for what you want. With that, you've completed most of the setup on the computer you want to access. But before this faux Back to My Mac is ready for primetime, there are a few more steps you'll probably want to take.



Enable Access from Outside Your Network

If you connect your computer to the internet through a router (which most likely you do), you need to do a couple of things to enable easy access to your setup from outside your home network. The VNC (screen sharing) and FTP (file sharing) portions of our setup both work by accessing certain ports on your home computer. This means you need to set up port forwarding on your router so that whenever you need to access your computer from outside your home network, your router knows

which computer to send the requests to. If this sounds intimidating, don't worry—it's really not that difficult.

#	Service Name	Start Port	End Port	Server IP Address
1	VNC	5900	5900	192.168.0.11

We've covered port forwarding several times before, so I won't go into detail on how to tackle port forwarding. Instead, I'll just focus on what ports you need to forward. For Screen Sharing, the default port is 5900, and for FTP, the port is 21. NOTE: If you haven't already, I'd highly recommend setting up a static local IP address for the computer you want access to. Routers assign IP addresses to the computers on your local network, and when these addresses expire, there's a chance your computer may be assigned a different IP address—which would break your port forwarding. Finally, to really ease the access to your faux Back to My Mac setup, you should do yourself another huge favor and assign a domain name to your external IP address. Doing so will allow you to access your setup through an easy-to-remember domain of your choosing like `backtomymac.selfip.com` rather than remembering a series of numbers like `76.123.456.789`.

Using Your Faux Back to My Mac

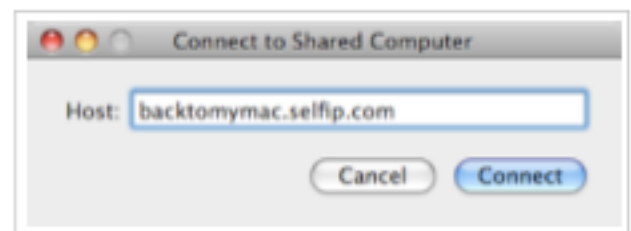
So now that you've done all the legwork, how do you make use of it all? If you've followed all of the setup, screen sharing and file access is simple.

Access Screen Sharing:

Let's assume, in true Back to My Mac fashion, you're working on your Mac laptop away from the desktop Mac you want to access. To connect to your Mac, you need to find the Screen Sharing app on your laptop (this is the very same Screen Sharing app that Back to My Mac uses when it does remote screen sharing). It's not installed in the Applications directory, so you should head to `/System/Library/CoreServices` (where it's located by default) and copy `Screen Sharing.app` into your Applications folder for easier access.

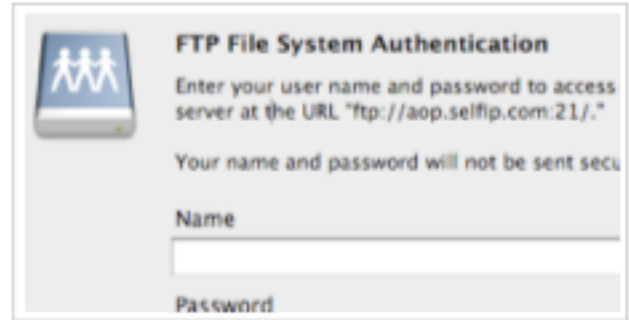
When it's time to access your home PC, run the app, then enter the address of your home computer (either the external IP address or the domain you set up above). After a second, Screen Sharing should display an exact replication of your home desktop, and you can use programs or check an email on your home computer just like you would if you were sitting in front of it.

NOTE: If you want to add a bit more functionality to the Screen Sharing app, like an advanced toolbar that isn't available by default, here's how. UPDATE: As one reader pointed out below, you can also launch the Screen Sharing app directly from Finder by opening Finder's "Connect to Server" dialog (Go -> Connect to Server, or `Cmd-K`) and entering `vnc://backtomymac.selfip.com` [or whatever your domain is].



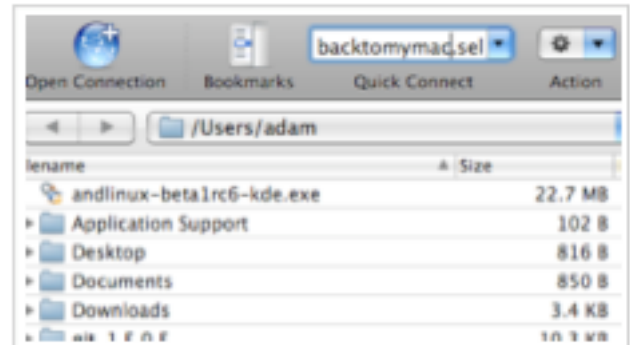
Access Your Files:

To access any of the files on your home computer, you've got a couple of options. If you're really interested in using Finder so that you're really rolling with true Back to My Mac style, you can; just open Finder, click on Go -> Connect to Server, enter in the address of the FTP server you set up above (for example, `ftp://backtomymac.selfip.com:21`), and then enter your login information. It even handles Quick Preview on those remote files.



In reality, Finder isn't the best way to connect to and browse your filesystem over FTP. You're better off using an FTP client like the very popular freeware Cyberduck (<http://cyberduck.ch/>) . Just give it the address you set up, your username and password, and you're there.

It's all the accessibility of Back to My Mac with none of the cost. Plus, after you've put in the legwork setting it up, it's super-simple to connect to remotely connect to your home computer. UPDATE: Several readers have offered excellent alternatives and suggestions to significantly beef up this setup. Here's the rundown:



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If you'd prefer to use AFP (which is enabled by default) instead of FTP, you can do so. You just need to forward port 548, and then when you connect to your server, you'll want to change your address to something like `afp://backtomymac.selfip.com`.

If you plan on accessing your computer on a public network, you should seriously consider setting tunneling your traffic through SSH.

The much easier solution for securing your connections and setting up your faux Back to My Mac, as It_Figures points out, is to create a virtual private network with Hamachi. I (and at least one of my co-editors) have had trouble with Hamachi on Leopard, so I didn't take this route, but if Hamachi is working for you, it's an excellent option.

Keep in mind that this set up doesn't do absolutely everything that Back to My Mac does (namely, this simple setup doesn't have the advanced encryption simple setup doesn't have the advanced encryption options and clearly isn't a zero configuration setup), but the idea here is that after taking a few simple steps, you can enable most of the best features of Back to My Mac. To one-up Back to My Mac, you may even want to set up Wake-on-LAN with your Mac so that your computer only turns on when you need to use it, saving money and energy.

ProSafe VPN Summary

All other configuration details should follow the ProSafe Owner's Manual or the ProSafe VPN Client Owner's Manual.

Additional Resources

Here are some additional resources you find useful.

Netgear

The network products manufacturer (<http://www.netgear.com/>)has some tech support notes and White Papers on their VPN/Firewall devices and some tips for achieving basic interoperability. They also host a user support forum (<http://forum1.netgear.com/>)ontheir various products where users can post questions and get answers from their peers.

SafeNet

SafeNet (<http://www.safenet-inc.com/>)is one of the largest OEM providers of VPN client software to VPN/firewall manufacturers. SafeNet has a tech support area (<http://support.safenet-inc.com/>)listing tech notes on their products with various VPN gateways including some individual interoperability examples. SafeNet is the OEM supplier of the Netgear ProSafe VPN Client software.

VPNC

The VPN Consortium (<http://www.vpnc.org/>). VPNC has various writings and White Papers on many manufacturers VPN devices and tips for achieving interoperability.

Practically Networked

Practically Networked (<http://www.practicallynetworked.com/>)has various writings on many manufacturers VPN devices and tips for achieving interoperability. They also have a section dedicated to VPN issues (http://www.practicallynetworked.com/support/VPN_help.htm).

HomeNetHelp

HomeNetHelp (<http://www.homenethelp.com/>)has various writings and White Papers on many manufacturers VPN devices and tips for achieving interoperability. They also host a user support forum on VPN Routers where users can post questions and get answers from their peers.

Disclaimer

Both ProSafe VPN/Firewall Routers and ProSafe VPN Client have several ways of setting up and configuring VPN tunnels. The settings may not be the best for your situation and some settings are situation specific.

This case study is published to guides you to setup your VPN Tunnel and VPNCASESTUDY.COM do not held any responsibility of any mistakes or errors.

Please contact us at info@vpncasestudy.com or visit our site at <http://www.vpncasestudy.com>