Variety is ... a cop out

Don't tell anyone. This is a secret known only to writers: When somebody who writes for a living start talking about "several important ideas" a "potpourri", or anything similar, it means that the writer didn't have time to develop any one thought fully and is hoping to obscure that fact with sheer quantity.

Maybe I'm being too cynical. This month's report does contain several topics, each of which could be expanded – but they're all worthwhile topics, hence the brevity.

My little Mac

Back in the mid-'80s I thought I wanted a Macintosh. Then I saw Corel Draw and decided that I didn't need a Mac. I continued to believe that until early in 2001.

Why buy a Mac now? There are two reasons:
- First, I know that Macs don't see websites the same way Windows PCs see websites. Since I'm responsible for an increasing number of sites, it seemed prudent for me to have a Mac around the office so that I can see what Mac owners see.
- Second is my PC-centric view of the world. For somebody who talks about technology on the radio, owning a Mac so that I have some concept of how these computers work seemed reasonable.

So (*Irony alert!*) after spending a week in New York City at PC Expo, I came home and bought a Mac. It's an iBook, the portable equivalent of an iMac.

The good news is that I've now looked at most of my sites with the iBook and they look just fine on a Mac.

A few minor glitches did turn up, though, and I'm working to resolve them now.

Documentation has long been available to guide designers away from using techniques that don't work properly on all platforms, but these

The iBook knows enough to wake up when I open the cover. To put it to sleep, I can use a menu command similar to that used on a Windows machine or just close the cover.

guidelines are easy to ignore when you find some "really kewl effect" that you like.

Some say "*So what if 10% of the visitors can't see it?*" That's a shortsighted and ignorant approach – one I will never use.

Will I abandon Windows?

The iBook comes with an uncommonly powerful and easy to use application for creating CDs.

No. I like the Mac. I'm impressed with what it can do, but I am certain that Windows is the right platform for me. Apple may be the right platform for you and I steadfastly refuse to argue that one operating system is inherently "better".

If DOS or OS/2 suits your needs, that is the better platform *for you*. If you're comfortable with Windows, that is the better platform *for you*. If you think the way the Mac thinks, that is the better platform *for you*.

The computer is just a tool. Choose the one that's right for the job you want to do and you've chosen the right computer.

Webvan crashes, commerce survives

On-line grocer Webvan is no longer on-line. Does this mean e-commerce is dead? Hardly.

Webvan wanted to be *the* on-line grocer, part of the $800 billion-a-year grocery business, but consumers weren't buying. Old habits (going to the store and looking at the goods) die hard. We complain about the time it takes to go shopping, but we're not about to let somebody else do it for us. Not yet, anyway.

Still, patience might have paid off. People who used Webvan liked the service, but the company tried to expand too far and too fast. The cost of customer acquisition was too high to sustain operations.

The technology works. The concept will work. But the race will be won by the company that approaches the market carefully, slowly, methodically, and systematically.

Webvan was started by Borders Books co-founder Louis Borders in 1996 and attracted a lot of smart investors. The company raised $850 million between 1997 and its IPO in late 1999. Webvan built state-of-the-art warehouses, bought delivery trucks, and hired drivers.

After the great dot-com crash, Webvan began warning that it was running low on cash. In desperation, it had pulled out of several big markets such as Atlanta and Dallas.

When it closed, Webvan was operating only in the San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego, Seattle, Chicago, and Portland markets.

You need a DiskOnKey today

Just buy one. IBM.com has them. So does Dell.com. Eventually you'll find them at local computer stores. DiskOnKey is about the size of a highlighter. It can fit easily in your pocket. If you have computers with USB ports, this is the easiest way to transfer files (up to 64MB) between computers.

Let's say you're working on a file at the office. You'd like to take the file home to work on it, but it's a 12MB file. You have a

64MB LIFE SIZE. The DiskOnKey has found a permanent home in my pocket. It's particularly useful to me because my office computer doesn't have a floppy disk drive. I use it even for small files. Learn more at http://www.DiskOnKey.com/.
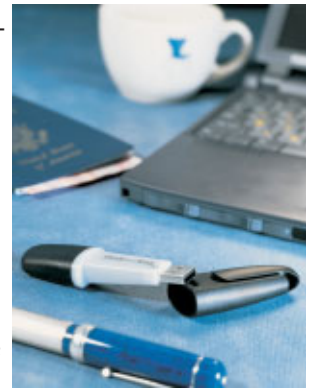
floppy disk drive at home and in the office, but the file is too big for a floppy. You could compress it, but sometimes there are problems with compressed files. You have an Iomega Zip drive at home, but not at the office. You have an LS120 drive at the office, but not at home. You could e-mail the file to yourself, but you're still using a dial-up connection and you know that downloading the file will probably take more than an hour.

Instead, you could plug DiskOnKey into the USB port on your office machine, copy the file to it, take the little device home, plug it in, and copy the file to your PC.

DiskOnKey is a lot more expensive than a Zip disk, but it's a lot less expensive than a Zip disk and two Zip drives (one for each computer). It's also fast and convenient.

DiskOnKey has what the manufacturer is calling an embedded CPU, which means you won't need to install drivers with Windows Me, 2000, or XP or with the Mac OS 9.0 and above. For older machines, you will need a driver.

The 8MB version costs $50, the 16MB version sells for $70, and the 32MB for $100. A 64MB version has just been released and two more are planned: 128MB and 256MB by the end of the year.

Big, fast, & cheap

Speaking of storage, in early July I bought a 40GB hard disk for $115 (including shipping). The first hard drive I bought (not the first computer I owned) was 16MB and it cost $1200. At that price, 40GB (2500 times the space of my original drive) would have cost $3,000,000 plus tens of thousands for shipping.

If you can buy a 40GB drive for $115, why should you pay $300 for a 20GB Iomega Peerless drive? Peerless is Iomega's latest removable drive technology and extra 20GB platters will sell for around $200, extra 10GB platters for about $160.

Iomega's Peerless drive system consists of 3 parts:
1. The electronics.
2. The mechanical parts and storage media.
3. An interface module. You have a choice of IEEE-1394 (Firewire), SCSI, or USB. Or you can purchase multiple modules for use with different computers. The Firewire interface has a data transfer rate of 15MB/second, fast enough for streaming video production.

These make a lot of sense for people who need to store a lot of data or who want an extremely fast and secure backup option. Iomega's Zip disks were a hit because they offered a way to move "huge" 100MB files around. Since then, the company has developed interesting technologies that have frequently been *too little* or *too late*.

The Peerless 10 and 20GB platters (and the promise of 20 and 40GB platters) that are both *removable* and *fast*, should be a winner for Iomega. And for you, too. ß