Of Macs and PCs

You may know already that I own a Macintosh computer. Just one and it's an iBook, one of the little notebook computers. I use it mainly for looking at websites that I've created to make sure that they look right on a Mac.

The Mac's operating system was ahead of the PC at first, but Windows 95 matched or surpassed most of the Mac's capabilities. Windows 2000 built on the lead. Windows XP delivered what some might think is the final punch. But wait …

Watch out for the kitty

When I bought my iBook, OS X had just started shipping. Most applications still ran on OS 9, which meant that I had to run the iBook in what Windows users would call "compatibility mode" most of the time. The first release of OS X wasn't particularly impressive and OS X 10.1 added only a few new features.

In September, though, Apple released OS X 10.2 (code name "Jaguar"). The upgrade price (more than $100) riled more than a few people and Apple might have made a tactical error by identifying the version as 10.2 instead of 11.0, or at least 10.5. The new version has something like 150 new features.

I still miss the Windows-style Start menu and I find making system modifications needlessly complex. I wish that Apple would give its users credit for being intelligent and provide a manual that describes how the operating system works. It would be wonderful if, when something went wrong, I wouldn't have to format the drive and reinstall the operating system.

But I have to show some respect for this cat!

In fact, if you want to do anything with amateur video production, buy a Mac. I have a 1.1GHz PC 512 MB of RAM and an obscenely fast (15,000 RPM) disk drive, yet I can't reliably capture video from a digital camera the way I can with my "puny" little iBook (500 MHz PowerPC chip with only 256MB of RAM and a standard disk drive).

Case in point: I helped Kaydee with a homework assignment that involved creating a video "commercial". She and her friends shot all the video and I promised to plug it all together. After trying with two different applications on the PC and failing miserably, I decided to see what the Mac could do.

No contest

I plugged in the video camera, opened iMovie (an application that's included with the operating system), and started the video camera. The iMovie application captured each scene as a separate clip (some PC applications do this, too). There's no manual with the iBook and that's one of my sore points, but I was able to use the built-in help system to figure out how to trim excess video at the beginnings and ends of scenes and how

to apply transition effects. Getting the scenes in the right order was as easy as dragging them into position on a timeline.

I noticed, but didn't use, two audio channels for sound editing. This is supposed to be a student production, not an episode of "dad goes wild with the computer".

My point is that a computer with half the memory of my PC and half the processing power of my PC was able to out-perform it when it comes to video production.

That's not a big surprise, by the way. I've known since shortly after buying this little computer that it's faster than its CPU speed would indicate.

Am I about to become a Windows traitor?

Over the past 18 months, I've gained a lot of respect for Apple computers, but I also understand some of their shortcomings. There's not much chance that I'll dump the PCs I own and replace them with Macs for Internet access, website design, graphics development, and publishing. For those applications, I'm more than satisfied with Internet Explorer, Mozilla, Netscape, and Opera on the PC; with Dreamweaver on the PC; with Corel Graphics Suite 11 on the PC; and with Ventura Publisher 10 on the PC.

The Mac's desktop is still too cluttered. I find Microsoft's approach to be much more logical and easier to understand. Don't be surprised, though, if you hear that I've bought a desktop Mac. Or maybe ….

That Mac is a PC!

The Mac's new operating system, OS X, is Unix. Unix runs just fine on Intel and AMD processors. Apple has always used Motorola processors. Motorola's fastest processor at this moment is a 1.25GHz while both AMD and Intel are at or above 2.0GHz. Given those facts, what would your conclusion be?

Before you answer that, consider this: Apple no longer uses proprietary hardware. Many Apple computers ship with ATI graphics cards and standard Seagate or Western Digital EIDE disk drives instead of SCSI drives.

In other words, **Apple is using the same hardware that PC manufacturers are using**. Now what would your conclusion be?

Might you expect that Apple is on a path that could allow it to build computers with Intel processors or AMD processors in addition to the usual Motorola processors that have powered Macs? Might you suspect that Apple could produce lower-cost systems by using generic hardware that's available to PC manufacturers?

In my opinion, you would be right if those were your conclusions. Apple tried licensing its technology a few years ago in what turned out to be a costly flop, and following this path could be dangerous.

It could also prove to be the spark that ignites a resurgence of interest in Apple. Many people see Apple computers as being too expensive. That's not the case, but it is the perception. This might be a little too far out even for Steve Jobs.

Buy what's right for you

Macs are seen as the machines for graphics professionals. PCs are seen as the machines for office users. The truth is that the Mac can spin a mean database and the PC can produce graphics and publications as good as anything that comes from the Mac. If the Mac is a clear leader in one area today, it's video production. PCs will catch up.

My advice continues to be what it has always been: Find the software that meets your needs first, then buy the hardware. The Mac is a computer. The PC is a computer. They're more alike than they are different. ß

Ventura Publisher 10 leads, but follows

At first glance, Corel Ventura 10.0 doesn't look much different from Ventura Publisher version 8, but the differences are there. Subtle, perhaps, but present. Corel now sees this application as key to its *Deep White* strategy, but marketing is still well behind the curve.

One big change between Ventura 8 and Ventura 10 is that the new version runs only on Windows 2000 and Windows XP. Windows 9x machines need not apply. Nor Windows Me machines. If you want to use a real publishing system, you have to use a real operating system and – when it comes to Windows – the only ones that fit the description are Windows 2000 and Windows XP.

Strengths

Tagging has always been one of Ventura's best and most powerful features. In the beginning, paragraph tags differentiated the program from others. Being able to apply attributes on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis was a big deal in the mid 1980s. Eventually, programs such as Pagemaker began to provide paragraph styles. By then Ventura had added character styles, frame styles, and page styles. These were later joined by rule styles and now by table styles. The point with each of these it to establish repeatable design specifications that can be applied across an entire publication and, should the style change two days before the press deadline, to make it possible to change settings across an entire publication by changing just a single style.

One of Ventura 8's biggest handicaps was its dated file import capabilities. Version 10 brings with it the ability to import a wide range of file formats, including WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, CorelDRAW, Micrografx Designer, iGrafx Designer, Corel Designer, and Corel Photo-Paint.

Creating output as PDF is easier, too, with the new Publish to PDF functionality. This isn't the wimpy (and largely useless) PDF Writer, but a genuine Adobe PDF distiller built in to Corel Ventura. Users can add crop marks, calibration bars, densitometer scales, and registration marks. There's also support for embedding any type of file, complete with author, keyword information, and ICC profiles, into the exported PDF.

XML wizards will be delighted to know that Corel Ventura allows you to import XML files. Users can publish XML content to create professional business documents, but no XML export is available. This has been a disappointment to some. And text I/O is still less than perfect.

Included in the Ventura 10 box (in addition to Ventura) are Corel DataBase Publisher, Corel Capture 10, Corel Barcode Wizard, XML Mapping Editor, Color User Guide, and more than 1500 typefaces in both TrueType and Type 1 formats.

The weakest link

The most significant shortcoming in Corel Ventura 10 is the same thing that has plagued Ventura 8, Ventura 7, Ventura 5, and earlier versions (when the product was owned by Xerox): **Limited marketing support**.

Corel has only recently realized that it is unique in having applications that cover every aspect of publishing:

- WordPerfect for document creation.
- Corel Draw for vector art and ad creation.
- Corel Photo-Paint for photo editing.
- Corel Capture for screen captures.
- Corel Database Publisher for catalog projects.
- Corel Ventura for newsletters, magazines, and books.

No other company has products for every step of the publishing process. Nobody. Period. Ventura isn't available on the Mac, but it can create Postscript and PDF output that Macs are more than happy to consume.

If you're a Ventura user, just buy the upgrade. Now! If you're using another publishing program on the PC (Adobe InDesign or Quark Xpress), taking a look at what Ventura can offer you would be a good way to spend a day or two.

For Mac users, the equation is a bit more complex. The most popular publishing program on the Mac (Quark Xpress) isn't yet available as a native OS X application. Neither is Ventura and it won't be. So if you want the very latest publishing technology, maybe it's time to look at a Windows computer. And at Corel Ventura. ß