

# RANDOM

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I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid.

# THOUGHTS

2003:07

## Of bourbon and business plans

A couple of decades ago, Phyllis and I vacationed in Kentucky. We walked through Mammoth Cave. We attended an outdoor drama that told the Steven Foster story. And we decided to visit a bourbon distillery.

We picked a small one – Maker's Mark – and signed up for the tour. The place had an attitude about the work done there. Each bottle, when it rolled out of the filling machine, was picked up, inverted, dipped into a vat of red sealing wax, and then set upright. The wax dripped down the bottle – each slightly different.

I don't drink a lot of hard liquor – maybe 3 bottles in an uncommonly wet year, probably less than 1 most years. Since the visit to Maker's Mark, most of those bottles have been filled with that company's product.

### I am an ambassador

About 2 years ago, I happened to find the Maker's Mark website and signed up for the "Ambassador Club" on a whim. It was free, but it didn't provide any tangible benefits, either. Ambassadors each have a barrel of bourbon "assigned" to them. I don't get any of it, but the number on the barrel is assigned to me.

It takes a while to get your barrel, though. I'd just about forgotten about it when a large envelope arrived in the mail. The letter was from Bill Samuels, Jr., who wanted to tell me that "my" barrel was ready. An attractive, well printed certificate in an expensive folder certified that all the wherefores and therefores were in order and parties of the first part and the parties of the second part had taken care of each and every wherewithall. It looked official.

What did I do with it? I immediately carried it around the house showing it to everyone I could find – Phyllis, my younger daughter, Kaydee, who plans to be a graphic artist, and elder daughter, Liz, who works in a restaurant with her husband, Rusty. I even tried to show it to the cats, but they weren't interested. Not bad, considering the certificate is worthless and meaningless.

### Is this advertising or pr?

But it did what it was supposed to do. It got my attention, moved Maker's Mark Bourbon to the top of my mind, and caused to share the story with my family. And with you, too.

If you're among the first 20 people on my mailing list, you'll find a Maker's Mark card tucked in with this newsletter. It has information about "my" barrel of bourbon (480610).

Both advertising and pr have a place in your company's mix of communications. What Bill Samuels and company are doing with the ambassador's club and the certificates is unquestion-

ably in the "pr" category, at least in my mind. Some might place it in the "advertising" category and they could make a good case for doing that.

Professionals in both disciplines seem to take delight in distancing themselves from the other, so I'll not make a fuss if you decide this is an advertising campaign instead of a function of the company's public relations department.

In the 2 years I've been a member of the Ambassador's club, I've received a poster that depicts a Maker's Mark bottle dipped in red, white, and blue wax – with stars. (I'm not a fan of using patriotism to sell, but this was uncommonly well done.)

### Clever marketing

Last Christmas, Phyllis bought a special bottle of Maker's Mark for me. It had been dipped in red (aka "Scarlet") and gray wax in honor of the Ohio State Buckeyes. Maker's Mark also used a couple of dozen other combinations to salute the alums of various other colleges or fans of pro teams. (Many of the color combinations could be used for several teams.)

Every month I receive a friendly, personable (not "personal") e-mail from Bill Samuels along with the occasional letter. Earlier, I said there were no tangible benefits to being a member of the club. That's no longer entirely true. I recently received an e-mail inviting me to an event at the distillery. As I recall, a free meal and a drink or two were included. I wasn't available that weekend even though it would have been a pleasant mini-vacation about a 3-hour drive from the house. Lodging probably wasn't included, but I don't remember.

Depending on the number of people who showed up for the event, it could cost Maker's Mark a lot of money. The offer was nearly open-ended in terms of how many people you wanted to bring along. The distillery might have worked with the local chamber of commerce or other members of the travel industry. It would be a good opportunity for cross promotion, so the other companies might have shared some of the cost. Even if they didn't, Maker's Mark would continue to build brand loyalty and develop evangelism among those who attended.

Can these techniques work for you? 

### NOW what??

*Dead Trees* seemed to be a somewhat negative name for this publication. Starting with this issue, the new name is *Random Thoughts*, suggesting – if not deep analytical articles – that at least minimal thought during development of the articles. Please note that I still bear no particular animosity toward trees.

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## Will the panther have a longhorn for lunch?

**Panther** is Apple's follow-on for OS X 10.2 and Longhorn will be the next version of Windows. Because (in my estimation) Apple's development stumbled badly in the '90s, Microsoft's Windows got far ahead of Apple's operating system. Multi-windowing and advanced memory management are just two areas where Microsoft had the edge until Apple shipped OS X. In many ways, the PC still has a significant edge over Apple.

The two operating systems are much closer now in capabilities. Windows XP has a few tricks OS X can't touch and OS X beats Windows XP in several other areas. These are the two operating systems most of us use — at least on the desktop. Linux is becoming more popular, but only a true geek would replace either OS X or Windows with Linux as a desktop operating system.

Apple is about to roll out Panther. (Does one roll out a panther or just open the cage and stand back?) You won't see Longhorn until 2005 and by then Apple is likely to have produced another iteration of OS X. (*Lion? Tiger? Calico?*) By 2005, if Apple continues the progress it's been making lately, Windows XP could begin to look a little shopworn.

Microsoft still leads Apple by a wide margin — 80% to 90% of computer users run Windows. But Apple systems are much more affordable than ever before and the underlying Unix operating system make it possible to use Apple computers in ways that haven't been possible until now.

For Apple, it may be too late, though. Even Apple stalwarts such as Adobe are today putting more effort toward developing software for Windows than for the Mac.

### The next few years


Microsoft says it won't even have an interim release of Windows (those who predicted it tended to call it "Shorthorn") There will be a technical preview (misnamed an "alpha") distributed at the Microsoft Professional Developers Conference in October,

Apple is said to be working on improving start-up, log-in, and program launch times, all of which are significantly slower than what Windows owners expect. File encryption and decryption is another area where Apple is working to catch up.

Microsoft has been quite about most of what it's working on, but representatives have shared some information at recent conferences. The user interface will be modified and a new application programming interface (API) will replace dozens (maybe hundreds) of existing files.

The question is — will the panther eat the longhorn or will it be trampled into the dust?

But does it really matter? Maybe that's the real question. If you're a graphics professional, you probably use a Mac because that's the machine you're supposed to use (even though the PC can do the same thing). And if you're an office worker, you probably use a PC (even though a Mac can do the same thing). Those decisions have already been made.

But if you want to make Microsoft's Steve Ballmer more than a little nervous, the word to use is "Linux". That's the next threat Microsoft sees. 


## The lost art of thinking

**Columbus** got into trouble for failing to provide the appropriate curb cuts for the disabled and is now rushing to make up for lost time.

Last week, I drove through an intersection and noticed that construction was underway.

The northwest corner had been torn up and a sign said, "Sidewalk closed. Use other side."

I glanced at the southwest corner: "Sidewalk closed. Use other side." Then the southeast corner: "Sidewalk closed. Use other side." You won't be surprised to know that northeast corner also had a sign: "Sidewalk closed. Use other side."

Fortunately, I was not a pedestrian that day, or in a wheelchair. Had I been, I might have been wondering exactly **which** "other side" the city had in mind for me to use! 




## Invisible lomega disk drive

**lomega** is well known for Zip disks, Jaz drives, and other storage devices. Now the company offers one you can't see. The company had a big hit with the Zip disk. The Zip 250 was less of a hit. With 800MB CDs costing less than 50 cents, a 750MB Zip disk (about \$9) just doesn't make a lot of sense. For the last 5 years or so, lomega has been behind the technology curve. Now lomega has the makings of a hit!

iStorage Online allows users to store 50MB of data online for \$2.49 a month. This is a far lower price than what most online storage companies ask. To store 1GB of data, you'll pay just \$18. This compares to \$50 per month for equivalent storage from backup.com.

Whether lomega can make money with these prices is an unanswered question. But it seems to offer a better chance than lomega's hardware.

The lomega iStorage Online trial offer is available to anyone in the US with access to the Internet. Regular iStorage accounts range from \$2.49 per month (50MB) to \$17.95 per month (1GB), with 100MB, 250MB and 500MB capacities also available. Purchasers of 12-month annual subscriptions get two free months and a 30-day money back guarantee. 

## on the market by A.J. Stinnett.

**CORNER**

"Motivating is getting people to do what they want to do. The trick is helping them figure out what they want to do."