ric Klein, Jr.

Is The Floppy Disk Dead?

"In the sky, it's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's, it's,   an ex-Apple Game Evangelist!? What's he doing here?"

Old habits die hard, so I am jumping from the Game Evangelism column to the Publisher's Corner. Covering the Mac game market from my portable office (currently flying at thirty seven thousand feet over Nebraska), we will examine the Mac game market from the developers' perspective.

I have two goals for the column. The first is a feeling of direct interaction with game developers. If game developers could come sit in your living room and talk about gaming, this column will do it. Doug Grounds recent column on configuring your Mac to make games fly fits into this category. Many guest developers will appear, giving you their thoughts on games and the Mac market.

The second goal is exploring the issues that face game developers today.   What is the future of game distribution? Where are network games going? What about Win95 and those game consoles? How do you get good Mac game distribution? You will get an inside look at the Mac game market, with the bias filters taken off. No BS allowed...

This month's topic is the future of the floppy disk. Is it dead? Has CD-ROM killed the mighty floppy, and if so, what will sneak up and slay the CD ROM?

CD-ROM is the vehicle of choice for distributing games, and 1996 will only reinforce this. Gone are the days of six floppy disk containing the latest Sierra adventure game. Publishers have moved to CD for three main reasons; cost, size, and technical support. CD pressing costs have dropped so much that the cost of putting one CD in the box is less than putting six or eight floppies. The CD's larger format allows game developers to add more content to their games. Even titles that don't rely on huge interactive videos take advantage of the added

space. Hint books, demos for other applications, shareware add-ins, and editors can all be added to the game without adding more floppies. Technical support costs for CD based games are also less, as game installation is much easier and the chance of media failure is lowered tremendously.

If you don't already have a CD-ROM drive, and love the best Mac games, get one. You will need it. There will still be occasions where a game will be distributed on floppy, but it will be rare. A good example of floppy based game that makes sense is Zoop from Viacom. The game is so small that Viacom only needed one floppy. (BTW - This is a fun and simple game!!!) Putting that game on CD would be overkill. This scenario, however, will be the exception rather than the rule in 1996.

So what comes after the CD-ROM? Many adventure games now ship on multiple CDs, so it appears that the multiple floppy problem is coming back to haunt us again. Luckily, storage developers, computer companies, and movie houses recently got together and approved a new format for CDs called DVD. This format will remove the 650 megabyte size barrier for CDs, allowing them to store gigabytes of data. This should allow game developers to continue to harness the power of new machines without having to worry about size constraints.

A strong wildcard to watch is on-line distribution. Many game developers already distribute full demos of their products over on-line services (e.g. AOL) and the Internet. With "virtual cash" rapidly becoming a reality and higher bandwidth network connections (e.g. ISDN, cable modems) coming into the home soon, buying games directly from a company's Web site will soon be a reality. Many mail order houses already have virtual stores on line. Imagine this as a future scenario for buying games. After playing the demo, your game could connect to its publisher's Web site, upload your credit card number (with your approval I hope!!) and download unlock codes for the game.

I bid farewell to the floppy. I remember fondly getting the 140k floppy for my TI 99/4A many eons ago. For me then, leaving the era of cassette tapes was a godsend. I guess the same holds true today for floppies...

What do you think about this column? If Bill Dugan, Mac High Priest for Macplay, showed up at your doorstep, what would you want to ask him? Send your feedback on this column and things you would like to see covered in future issues to gameevang@aol.com. As the subject, use "Publisher's Corner feedback". Don't be shy or you won't be heard!

Next month's topic - "Everything you should know about the Mac game market, but were afraid to ask"