

From time to time I get the chance to visit Acorn in Cambridge, and each time I do so I walk out of Acorn House fired with enthusiasm for the future and full of praise for a company that clearly believes in itself. I was there again recently, and I have to say that I don't think I have ever detected such a mood of optimism in the company as there is at present.

It's not hard to see why. Within the next few years, there will be such a revolution in computing and communications that only those with the most up-to-date technology will be able to keep up with the pace. Intel have so far had it almost all their own way as far as desktop computing is concerned, but the future will demand a new kind of technology and a new breed of processor far removed from the static world of the desktop. Pushing conventional technology closer and closer to its limits will demand more and more resources for less and less return. The writing is on the wall already - the mighty Pentium has a maximum power consumption of almost twenty times the ARM600, is six times the size, and costs eighteen times as much to produce in quantity; and ARM technology is improving all the time. A whole new industry standard will be needed, and Acorn has a good chance of being in the right place at the right time.

The whole question of industry standards in personal computing has puzzled me for a long time. What reasons do individuals (as opposed to corporate buyers) tend to give for not buying Acorn? Firstly that the machines are too expensive, and secondly that they might one day want to swap files with PC users. Yet if they applied the price criterion to other walks of life, they would all drive Skodas, and BMW, Jaguar et al would go out of business. And if they applied the compatibility criterion, they would all drive Ford Transits in case one day they need to shift a sideboard.

Acorn have been criticised for ploughing their own furrow in the face of relentless standardisation in the desktop world. They

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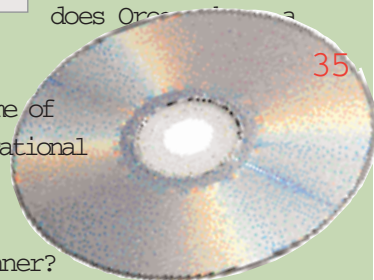


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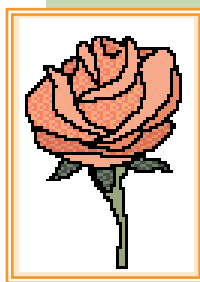
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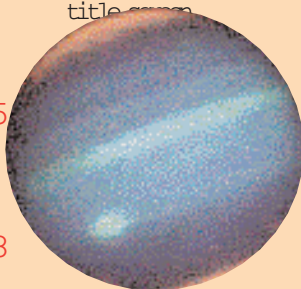
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