

y Eric Klein, Jr.

“Apple’s Future : Are They Game?”

As the holiday season finally passes, it’s time for game developers and publishers to plan for 1996. The games that will fill the shelves this summer and next Christmas all get planned now. Next generation game consoles (Playstation, Saturn, Ultra 64) have arrived, and with the Windows 95 focus on games, the potential number of game platforms to develop for has skyrocketed. Developers can only create software for a finite number of platforms, so where does the Mac fit in?

Apple brought a number of developers together recently for a Game Council where they unveiled their “game” plans and asked for feedback. The meeting was insightful giving us, as developers and publishers, the chance to see how Apple is going to support us from a technical perspective in 1996. The results were encouraging, and I think the data given out at the meeting (and reproduced here as faithfully as an NDA will allow) helps us as developers make that all important decision on Mac game development plans for 1996.

Apple has decided to make the Mac a friendlier machine to develop games. Given Microsoft’s recent Windows game API, this step by Apple is overdue. Like Microsoft, Apple is concentrating its game APIs on areas of the Mac hardware and operation system that are difficult for game developers to work with. These are:

- Joystick support
- 3D Graphics
- 3D Sound
- 2D Graphics
- Networking

Each of these APIs will allow game developers to more quickly or efficiently access the data they need for their game. In the case of joystick support, the APIs will finally allow game developers to access all models of joysticks without having to call each vendor's specific joystick API. Double buffering APIs will allow developers to determine the video capabilities of any Macintosh and take advantage of those features without gestalts, custom code, and the like.

One of the areas that most interested me as a game developer is Apple's 3D story. 3D is going to dominate 1996 game development, and Apple is positioning some powerful tools for game developers interested in 3D. If a game developer is interested in developing a 3D game but has not created a custom 3D engine, they can take advantage of the high level QuickDraw 3D API to create a game (see Diagram #1). If the developer has created their own 3D engine but wants to seamlessly take advantage of Apple or third party 3D accelerator chips, they can send their triangle lists directly to the QuickDraw 3D low level interface (see Diagram #2). Either way, they can take advantage of coming hardware without having to recode their graphics routines for every 3D chip on the market. Both the high level and low APIs take advantage of hardware and this API has the advantage of not being "vaporware." QuickDraw 3D is shipping today for Macintosh and will be shipping soon for Windows.

Contrary to all of the mainstream press, Apple is gearing up in 1996 to support game developers with crucial technologies. Apple assured us that the home market is one of their key target markets in 1996 and hearing that was great. While we didn't hear from clone vendors like Power Computing, I have a feeling they are targeting the home market in 1996 as well. If Apple can continue to sell units into the home like they did in 1995 and support game developers with marketing and technology, the game market on the Mac in 1996 looks good. A lot of "if's", but if recent history is an indication, those "if's" are worth betting on.

I mentioned in last month's column that CD was the way of the future. As way of evidence, CD-ROM software revenue jumped 208 percent in the first half of 1995 (Software Publishers Association). This is a good sign that the market cutover to CD has begun. CD ROM revenues

will for the first time exceed floppy software in 1996. (PC Week 12/18/95 pg. A12)

Comments about this column are always appreciated, and you can send them to the address eric@surf.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" [Okay, that was supposed to be this month's topic, but I got sidetracked by Apple's info.]