y Mudgeon

<p style="text-align: center; color: blue;">AHHH, THE GAME BE AFOOT FOR APPLE. . .</p>

'Tis the waging of the Software Development Kit (SDK) wars. Microsoft's Windows 95 SDKs, Silicon Graphics development kits, new M2 possibilities, and the upcoming Apple's super-push into the game development arena, are signs that the computer entertainment industry is extremely healthy. After all, one does not waste valuable R&D resources to simply create a puff of breeze when what is required is a cyclonic wind to catch the attention of those that "do" games.

A computer is merely the outward manifestation of man's creativity. As DOS and Windows machines dominate the installed base, no wonder it takes very little in the way of development tools to encourage coders, programmers, producers and marketing folk to spoon feed hex into suitable media for presentation on such platforms. Despite a huge foray into the entertainment community by Microsoft, the rush to Windows 95 as a game platform has not, shall we say, been overly rambunctious.

More than 50 percent of all software purchased is entertainment related. Entertainment titles outsell apps like word processors and databases and spreadsheets. Entertainment titles that promote multiplayer capabilities, on-line gaming, and utilize the latest and greatest hardware technolgies (such as surround sound and software-based double buffering) are in huge demand. The bottom line is, basically, that the tail is now wagging the dog -- software sells hardware!

Commencing this Sunday is the Computer Game Developers Conference in Santa Clara, CA, and Apple is going to be enormously present as the company attempts to remotivate developers to not just simply continue ongoing Macintosh projects, but to engage in new title development as well. (I must hasten to add that Apple's nearly simultaneous decision to pull back from the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles in May is a dismal sign that the company still "doesn't get it." Why avoid the largest, most convivial, most attended digital entertainment tradeshow of all times? Why? This is blood clot thinking!)

I honestly do feel the Macintosh is as good a computer for digital entertainments as any that

currently exist. However, the news of late from Cupertino has been far less than substantially supportive. Massive company losses, large layoffs, confusion over priorities, the eradication of programs that indicate a true depth of feel for technologies--these occurrences have left many of the game publishers recalcitrant to continue or even start new Macintosh entertainment products.

In previous years, there has never been a rush to the Macintosh platform. That lack of movement continues today. Some of the top level Apple managers seem to be out of tune when it comes to understanding the problems third-party developers face in committing to Macintosh title creation. Heck, why is it that the Apple folk don't even LISTEN to what the developers need to support their platform? Perhaps what they are asking for is not as much as Apple believes it to be! And even should that not hold true, the stops should really be removed to enable the Macintosh to become a game system strong in demand and wealthy in titles.

Plus, on Apple's behalf, let us also realize that there are far too many Macintosh game publishing companies who know not one whit about how to market Macintosh products. Even companies that do extraordinarily well with Windows and DOS games seem to have problems in bringing their Mac titles to the consumer. This is a sorry state of affairs and certainly yet another area Apple could be of enormous assistance in helping "move those SKUs." When Apple markets their product lines correctly, the result is a torrent of sales. Bring Apple in to assist Macintosh title publishing companies push their media, and that torrent of sales could easily encompass the hardware and the third-party software with better sales.

My minuscule words are not to lay blame, but to hype solution. The fact that Apple's past support for game developers on the Macintosh is lame, the fact that Apple has done little to encourage retail shelf space, the fact that long-term budget commitment has never existed for game environments, all add up to a lackadaisical view that ignores the fact that entertainment software is the HOTTEST genre of retail, mail-order and on-line sales.

If a third-party developer is able to create a super game for a machine, that title could well be responsible for massive numbers of units moving through the channels. I have spoken with many folk who purchased Macintosh machines simply because two or three third-party developers created the coolest games imaginable, and those games ran on the Mac (such as Bungie's Marathon and LucasArts Entertainment's Star Wars titles).

I loudly laud Apple's new movement toward the developer community for the time is now that the Cupertino-based concern must show their true colors as far as supporting such creative activities by third-party folk. Much of this drive has to be credited to Apple's Senior Product, Game Technologies, Ben Calica. Over the past seven months, Ben has driven hard, begging engineers to create some really cool tools that should cause developers to feel meritorious toward Apple. With little in the way of budgets, Ben has managed what, in many circles, might be considered to be an impossible task: the creation, and arrival of, Apple Game Sprockets. Not only will these new tools really irritate Microsoft, but they will prove Apple has committed the resources necessary to make super cool games for the Macintosh platform. Although the horn of Apple's developer group is not as loud, of late, as Microsoft's, the proof shall be in the pudding, so to speak. For there are now six Apple game technologies that shall come to the support of the game developers and encourage them to write code for the Mac platform.

The Apple Game Sprockets include DrawSprockets that will automatically enable a game to run at the screen size and resolution supported by your monitor. Additionally, double buffering and Valkyrie chip support is "built-in." Until now, none have actually figured out

how to access and utilize the power of this chip--Apple has! Heck, even the Macintosh Menu Bar will be hidden. Then there's the NetSprocket that'll enable multiplayer game environments that are cross protocol. For example, someone running AppleTalk will be able to play against someone utilizing TCP/IP protocols. (And when the latency issue is figured out by Apple, watch out! There will be a new king in town.)

There's the InputSprocket which will ensure consistent APIs across product lines. It simply won't matter which joystick or other I/O device you're using with your game. Plus, thanks to SpeechSprocket, coders will have the option of assigning voice command or keyboard commands as the order of the byte. This means ANY game can have speech recognition capabilities with ANY I/O device. Plus you'll find full Spatializer 3D stereo and surround sound capabilities. Toss in some of the QuickDraw CD Rave technology that will ensure games will not need specific graphic card directives, also cross-platform, and you have ensured game developers that they can move ahead on what they do best--create games and not worry about the system substructures. This is cool stuff, folks!

I hasten to add that there's a new site that shall appear on the World Wide Web commencing March 31st. The URL is http://dev.info.apple.com/games. For Apple is taking another step forward by distributing their new game SDK via this site! No more CD-ROM distribution. You shall find all of the tools necessary at this site address. And that, my friends, is yet another example of how Apple intends to carve their important share of the digital entertainment industry.

Alright, now that such has been written, folk probably believe I am absolutely head-over-heels in love with the Macintosh. I appreciate the compactness of tightly written code. I thoroughly appreciate hardware innovation. While Windows 95 exemplifies superior advancement for Intel-based hardware, what Apple manages is truly the ability to bring the future to gamers today. I may be whistling up a pole, as Apple may yet let everyone down. I certainly hope not, for gamers appreciate the best of whatever worlds they access for entertainment. Through competition comes better and better product. Should the Macintosh set new standards for game play, how much better will Windows 95 games become? The gamer, the software company and the hardware manufacturer all become winners because those important dollars are being spent on their product lines.

Without more title development for the Macintosh, and the continued success of Microsoft in enlarging their installed base, time is definitely on the poor side for Apple. With hard working folk such as Ben Calica and Heidi Roizen and Guy Kawasaki doing all they can to encourage Macintosh development, perhaps the playing field will become level again in the not-too-distant future.

The final realization must be that, no matter how hard these folk work, no matter how much consumers yearn for good Macintosh games, Apple's lack of funding for such technologies and inability to increase market share through SKU distribution will result in a hapless void that will only hurt CPU sales. Yes, the DOS and Windows games are awesome--but so, too, could be the Macintosh side of the biz as well. Only time shall tell, and time is a rather rare commodity for Apple these days.--Mudgeon