

From the Editor's Desktop

Announcements, Editorials, and Other Issues

The Case for Pippin

Let's face it, games are what drive home computer sales. Don't believe me? A recent survey done by Computer Intelligence InfoCorp showed that over 70 percent of computer users said they used their computer mostly to play games. Although I imagine that percentage is far lower for Macintosh computer users, but not that much.

It wasn't until the early nineties that Apple Computer began to realize this. Yes, people need computers to work on spreadsheets, word processors, and financial programs but how many hours can you stare at a spreadsheet before feeling the need to take a break. This is where games come into play, literally. Games relieve stress, provide alternative entertainment (ie.,

to television), and show off your computer's abilities. Apple's failure to realize the impact of games in the home computer market in the 80's is the single biggest reason Macintosh games today lag considerably behind PC games. And if I may boldly say, it also might be the main reason why only 10 to 15 percent of the computers in the market are Macintoshes.

But yes, Apple has changed its attitude toward Macintosh games. Two full page ads in the most recent issue of Computer Gaming World featuring the Power Macintosh alongside Power Mac games is proof that Apple is now taking this games business seriously. However, I'm still baffled by the fact that Apple sometimes puts down games. For example, I recently saw the Apple half-hour infomercial and there was not a Macintosh game in sight. In fact, in one part the son suggests playing games on the Macintosh but the father replies that games don't count. Sure, they plug eWorld and Cookbooks for half an hour but when it comes to games is simply "doesn't count."

Another thing that has me baffled is Apple's new game machine, code-named Pippin. Announced at Macworld San Francisco (early January 1995), the Pippin includes a PowerPC RISC processor, quadruple speed CD-ROM drive, support for NTSC, PAL, S-Video, and VGA displays, and support for up to four ADB input controllers. Software wise, the Pippin will employ a crippled version of the Mac OS so it runs entertainment and edutainment CD-ROM titles, only. Apple claims that most CD-ROM based products available for the Macintosh will run on the Pippin with little or no modification (I've heard that one before).

The first to license the Pippin platform is Bandai, a leading Japanese manufacturer of entertainment products. Bandai plans on introducing the first Pippin-based product available by the 1995 holiday season and will likely sell for around \$500 retail.

So there you have it in a nutshell. Sounds like a good idea but will it sell? No one seems to be sure. When asked about the new Pippin, many industry insiders at MacWorld (who all wished to remain anonymous) agreed the Pippin would face tough competition from the likes of Sega, Nintendo, Sony, and 3DO, who all have new 64-bit game machines coming out soon.

So what we have here is a company, Apple, who in the past had an anti-games policy who is now trying to nudge its way into the very same game market it once tried to destroy. How quaint. It seems once again that Apple is treading on dangerous unexplored, if not unwelcome ground. So why would Apple venture into a market that is so extremely competitive and unforgiving? This is the question that has me baffled since I learned of the Pippin.

Since we haven't been able to play with the Pippin and there is still much to be learned about what it can or cannot do, we'll reserve judgement on it until later this year when it becomes available. But early indications from some developers is that the Pippin is in for a bumpy ride. Many see it as yet another Newton fiasco. Apple will predict everyone will need to have a Pippin, but the end result is that only a few will be sold (just like the Newton) but eventually, it'll find its niche somewhere in the game crowd, just trying to staying alive. Typical Apple...

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