

elcome to Macintalk, my continuing quest to bring you the inside look at the lives and work of prominent Apple- and Macintosh-related figures.

This month's interview is with Andrew Welch, the founder and CEO of the hot Mac software company Ambrosia Software. Thanks to Andrew and Ambrosia the Macintosh community is blessed with such incredible game titles as Avara, Escape Velocity, Harry the Handsome Executive, and essential utililites like Snapz Pro and ColoSwitch Pro. Andrew's company has provided us with hours of entertainment, as well as time saving tools.

[Interview Conducted: 19 February 1998](#)

[lex Kushner:](#) What is the real history behind Ambrosia? Was it your own brainchild or was it something that was started because you had a product and no company for it?

[ndrew Welch:](#) Ambrosia was something that just "happened," to be perfectly honest. Instead of getting a real job while in college, I developed shareware software, and sold it under the Ambrosia name. When I got out of college (my major was photojournalism), I had to decide which part of my schizophrenic life I wanted to pursue. The computer won out.

[Alex:](#) It would appear that the name "Ambrosia" is a reference to the mythological meaning of the word, nectar of the gods. How did you come upon this as a name for your company? What factors led you to choose it?

Andrew: I've always been very into mythology — not just Greek. I'm not sure why, but I've always been fascinated by the fantastic stories from various mythos, and the common thread that binds them.

Alex: The general "vibe" that emanates from Ambrosia Software is one of fun and playfulness. Is this true in your work environment? What is it like at Ambrosia's offices?

Andrew: It's like any other workplace, really — albeit a bit more relaxed. There are times of fun, times of stress, times of hard work, and times of slacking. There's no dress code, certainly, and hours are generally pretty flexible — but we do have to deal with a fax machine whose beeps drive us insane, made worse by the fact that when the fax machine is working (and not beeping), Hector (our African Grey Parrot) takes over and beeps. Anyone want a parrot?

Alex: Ambrosia is probably most well known for its great games such as Avara, Swoop, Escape velocity, Harry the Handsome Executive, and most recently, Mars Rising. We have in the past seen great utilities from you too, such as ColorSwitch Pro and Snapz Pro. Recently though you appear to be mainly game oriented. Is this the position Ambrosia is now taking, games only?

Andrew: We're not moving towards only games; in fact one of the things I'm working on right now is an upgrade of Snapz Pro. We made a decision a few years ago that as hard as it was to do, we needed to concentrate on just a few utilities, and do them well. We used to have a number of utility products, and trying to keep them all competitive simply stretched us too thin (jack of all trades, master of none syndrome).

Alex: I have seen the word "Thaumaturgist" connected with you and Ambrosia in various places. What exactly is a "Thaumaturgist " and how did you become one?

Andrew: You have to be abducted by Mongolian monks and live through the secret Ritual of Seth.

Alex: Who is Andrew Welch, when he is not working on Ambrosia business? Is he an athlete? An artist? Or an aspiring actor? Does he have any hidden talents?

Andrew: Absolutely not.

Alex: Since its inception Ambrosia has been a Mac-only company. How did this begin? Are there any plans for PC versions of your games and future titles?

Andrew: We're Mac-only because that's what I learned programming on. We intend to stay making Mac software as long as the marketplace supports us. However, we have a number of people working for us who depend on this business for their livelihood; if the market gets untenable, we certainly will look into making Windows software.

Alex: What can we expect from Ambrosia Software in the future? More games? More utilities? Or even ventures into other software genres?

Andrew: This year you can expect incremental (but significant) upgrades to some of utilities, as well as a number of new games. We've been working extremely hard on a role-playing game called Cythera at <http://www.delver.com/> . It's taken us much longer than expected, but that is largely due to the fact that we listen intently to our play testers: the game needed more work. The good news is that when it is released, I think you'll be quite pleased with it.

We've also been working on back-end tools; for instance, our Network_Tool just entered beta testing. It is a cross-platform library that makes it relatively easy to write networkable games (AppleTalk, TCP/IP locally or over the Internet, and IPX support will be easy to add in the future). Backend technologies like this are building blocks that allow us to make better games more quickly; I'm very excited about the possibilities that it opens up.

We also are working on EV: Override, a new game based on Escape Velocity. It uses the time-tested Escape Velocity engine (albeit with a number of enhancements) coupled with an entirely new, vast universe, as well as all-new artwork. The idea is to keep the good things about EV the same, but provide an entirely new experience for people to explore. It's similar to Doom vs. Doom II or Marathon vs. Marathon II.

Of course, there are other projects going on as well — a game tentatively entitled "Slithereens," which is a fun, light-hearted game along the lines of our own Bubble Trouble. The code base is pretty solid at this point, and our musicians and artists are just gearing up to make it shine. Meanwhile, Network_Tool is being integrated to allow you to play it with friends and enemies over a local network, or the Internet if you wish.

Alex: If you were to run Apple Computer, Inc. like Ambrosia is run, how would things be different? What changes would you like to see in Apple?

AW: I'd like to see Apple sell more computers, frankly. That's the bottom line; how to get there is no easy task, but it looks like they are doing a reasonable job of it lately. The bottom line for developers is that they want to have people to sell their software to; without that, we'd be forced into the Windows salt mines.

Alex: On the Ambrosia web site, a very prevalent area is the "Ambrosia Cafe," an area where you host Mac related web sites gratis for the world to see. How did this part of your website spawn? What type of reception has it received?

Andrew: The idea came to me when I was reading about how companies are doing advertising on the web using traditional paradigms; often it didn't work quite as well as they expected. People don't want to visit a web site to read ads, they want real content. I realized that we could get exposure for Ambrosia, while also providing a real service to the Macintosh community.

There were a number of people who had excellent sites, but they were paying for them, or they weren't getting much exposure, etc, etc. By putting them all together in one place, they all benefit by having a free, fast web server, as well as by association. If you visit one site in the Cafe, and enjoy it, you might be inclined to take a peek at some others. It's the shopping mall mentality; everyone benefits.

Alex: What does a typical day in your life consist of? Is it nearly all spent programming, running the business, or playing?

Andrew: Of late, I've done little programming, to be honest (this will be changing shortly), and have been spending more time running the business, and acting as a "producer" of the titles we are working on. Of course, part of the job is playing games, too. "Market research" (yeah, that's it!).

Alex: Why have you chosen to market all the Ambrosia products as shareware instead of retail software? Have you found it more profitable to market your own products?

Andrew: The line between "commercial" software and "shareware" software have become quite blurred in recent years; we just plain think it's a better

way to distribute software. The biggest problem with it is lack of exposure; a product in retail catalogs and on store shelves simply reaches far more people. We're working to change that.

Alex: In the Ambrosia FAQ, you mention an interest in developing for Be. Is this still happening? Is there anything in the works now?

Andrew: We've decided that if we're going to learn a new platform to write software on, it will be either Rhapsody or Win32 (Windows). I'd rather not do the latter, but I'm not ruling it out. As I mentioned before, it all depends on the Macintosh market. Rhapsody sports an incredible development environment, I've been spending some time learning it in the recent months. I'm eagerly awaiting Rhapsody DR2.

Alex: When the guys at Ambrosia decide to have fun, what do you all do? Are you a work-together/play-together group or do you all like to go your own ways?

Andrew: We sometimes go out to bars or plays together, but for the most part, we all have our own separate lives; it's like any other workplace, really.

he End

I'd like to sincerely thank Andrew Welch for providing us with some time away from Ambrosia to discuss who he is and what he does for us all. It is those accomplishments that enhance our daily computing experiences!

For more information about Ambrosia Software and its products visit <http://www.AmbrosiaSW.com/>

If there is a well-known person in the Mac community that you are dying to learn more about, please let me know. I would love to hear your suggestions and your comments about my column. You can reach me at

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