



The end is not quite nigh

Could all those media scare stories be true? Is this the end of Mac OS as we know it? Howard Oakley thinks not: Apple is committed to enhancing it well into the future.

Connections between Douglas Adams, of *Hitch-Hikers' Guide to the Galaxy* fame, and Corporal Jones of television's "Dad's Army" are tenuous, other than both feature a motto which every journalist should commit to heart before trying to decide what is going on: "DON'T PANIC!"

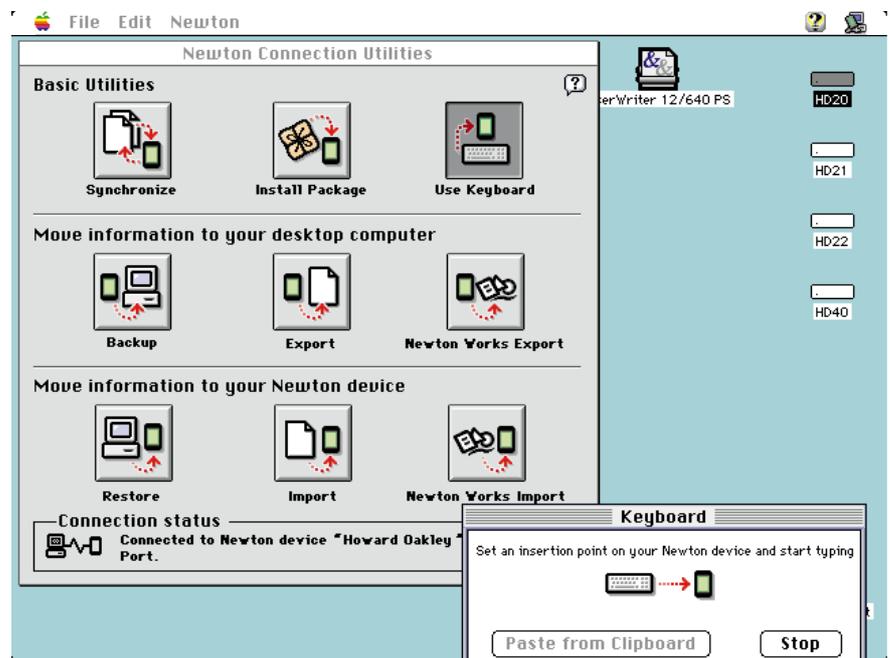
On the face of it, Apple's recent cuts seem dire and interpretations stated as fact in some quarters of the press make them seem even blacker. But press releases of this magnitude are carefully worded and repay careful re-reading.

Apple has not announced the death of Mac OS. On the contrary, it has confirmed annual full releases of Mac OS to "continue to enhance" it well into the next millenium. Nor has it killed Open Doc, Cyberdog, Game Sprockets or Open Transport. These will, surely, "receive reduced investments for future upgrades" but they "will be maintained as part of the Mac OS".

More revealing information has been emerging since then, in informal and unofficial statements from Apple employees. For instance, the lead developer for Game Sprockets has taken pains to point out that his team has not been closed down and that games developers can continue to use Game Sprockets for Mac OS. Putting these together, a very different picture emerges, in which Rhapsody is perhaps not the be-all and end-all.

Mac OS lives!

Even the Microsoft marketing behemoth has discovered that you can take a user to an OS launch but you can't make them update. Rhapsody has most to offer the corporate market, where Apple has most ground to recover and as a credible if not



The Mac's view of a Newton, using Apple's Newton Connection Utilities. These include a good range of file translators and support for many desktop diary applications

impressive response to Windows NT. Until Rhapsody's own native Yellow Box applications are appearing in droves, the small and home Mac user will have little interest in Rhapsody, other than its crucial role in securing a sound future for Apple.

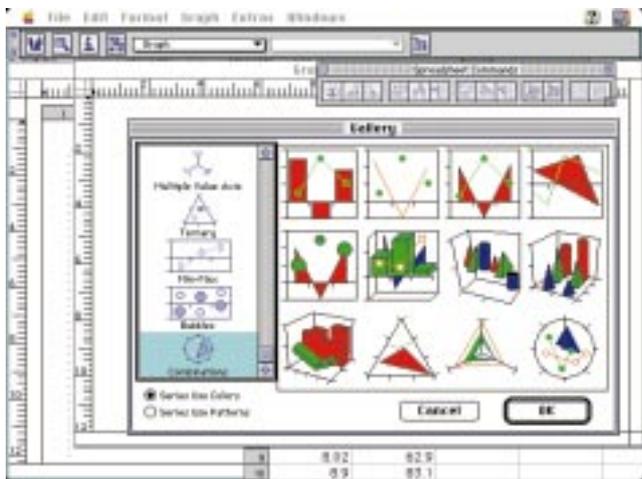
Just as there will continue to be droves of Windows 3 and 95 users as we enter the new millennium, so Mac OS applications will continue to be popular long after Rhapsody's Yellow Box ships.

Apple has probably played down the future role of Mac OS because that would not create a good impression with Wall Street investors, many of whom seem to think in clichés drawn from the advertisement copy of Apple's competitors, and other disinformation.

Apple needs to be seen to be taking Rhapsody seriously and pitching itself unequivocally at Wall Street (which, interestingly, had really taken to the original launch of NeXT systems). But back in the real world, where we can't even dream of throwing away our computers every three years, we need to keep using today's software on today's modest hardware for several years yet. I believe that Apple's real strategy will continue to support us soundly and faithfully.

MessagePad 2000

Rumours also abound that the unprofitable but innovative Newton products were for the chop. Thankfully, Apple not only retained the Newton group, but has



RagTime's spreadsheet is a credible alternative to Excel, particularly if you need a richer choice of graph types. It is tightly integrated into a component-based environment which is ideally suited to Open Doc

StrongARM processor and the excellent bundled software, my greatest reservations

proceeded with the launch of the latest model, the MessagePad 2000. My own MP2K, as it has become known, arrived within 24 hours of being ordered from the distributor, and has already proved that it can replace my PowerBook 5300ce for many tasks. This is a great relief as, although a naked PowerBook looks small and compact, by the time you have swaddled it in a protective case and added those essential accessories to keep it fit and useful, it is no mean burden. The equivalent MP2K kit is but a fraction of the bulk and weight, yet can perform so many of the same functions: most importantly, maintaining my appointments and supporting my writing.

Given the huge performance improvement delivered by the MP2K's new

had been Apple's commitment to making data exchange with desktop computers quick and simple. Although still a beta release, the Newton Connection Utilities (for Mac and Windows) at last address this issue properly. Roll on the eMates and other Newton models due later this year.

Alternative Works

If ClarisWorks were not so wonderful and Microsoft Office not so popular, I expect we would all be using B & E Software's RagTime. Although it has an excessive appetite for hard-disk space (nearly 14Mb) and memory (11Mb), if you have the resources it is well worth consideration.

The central metaphor for RagTime's rich documents is the frame-based layout familiar to those in Adobe PageMaker, the

more up-market FrameMaker, and many other fine applications. Frame content is composed in separate views, though, making it a prime candidate for use with OpenDoc. A component-based version of RagTime is currently in beta, and I hope OpenDoc's future remains bright enough to encourage completion of this new version.

What surprised me most about RagTime is not its tight integration of different content types, which is impressive, but its sophisticated features. For example, if you have become jaded with the limited business-orientated charts in Excel, RagTime will be a breath of fresh air, offering dozens of additional types of graph. Indeed, if you seek an alternative to Excel itself, RagTime 4 could fit the bill.

In memoriam: a monitor

The only slightly sour note this month has been the demise of my much-loved AppleVision 1710 monitor. From new, it had always been a bit quirky, refusing to turn on for non-Mac computers such as my BeBox (now, I presume, a collector's item).

Last year, the 1710 decided that it would not synchronise properly with my Power Mac in certain resolutions. It was no great loss and I never found the time to get it looked at. Dealers now have a utility from Apple which can reset the 1710's internal controller which my friendly local Apple engineer reckons could have sorted this.

Before we could try it out, there came a sharp *crack*, horribly reminiscent of a video display dying and, no matter what I tried, the display remained black. My 1710 was made in late 1995, at a time when Apple seemed to be having problems with quality control and in some cases at least Apple has been known to provide free repair beyond its standard one-year warranty. This prompted the handy list of causes of black monitors shown here in the panel on the left. Here's wishing that you, yourself, will never hear that ominous *crack*.

Top 10 causes of a black monitor

A black monitor is as disrupting as a dead motherboard, but is usually much more easily and cheaply solved. Here are the ten most popular causes:

1. The monitor is not turned on, its power cable is disconnected or it is turned off. Check that its power light is green: if the monitor turns on "automatically" (e.g. AppleVision 1710 series) and it fails to, see below.
2. The monitor cable has become disconnected. Check visually or shut your Mac down before disconnecting and reconnecting it at each end.
3. The Mac's backup battery has died. This particularly affects Mac LC and 475 models and the Power Mac 6100. Prior to the black monitor, you may have noticed the date resetting. Get a dealer to replace the battery and everything should work fine again.
4. Energy-saving software has turned the monitor off (or blackened its screen). Moving the mouse or pressing a key should restore the normal desktop.
5. A screensaver has blackened the monitor's screen. Move the mouse or press a key.
6. The contrast and brightness have been turned right down. This is usually perpetrated by well-intentioned cleaners and children.
7. The monitor has failed to synchronise with the video card. This typically affects "smart" monitors such as the AppleVision 1710, which only turn themselves on when they detect a suitable video signal. A dealer's help will be required to solve this.
8. The video card (or the motherboard video output) has become displaced or has died. If you have another Mac, moving your monitor to that system may clinch this, otherwise only a dealer will be able to tell.
9. You are using an old or unsuitable monitor cable. Shut down and turn the power off as quickly as possible in case you do any damage. Some old Apple monitor cables do not work with newer monitors because they do not contain the right signal lines. Use the correct cable.
10. The monitor is dead due to hardware failure. A diagnosis of last resort.

PCW Contacts

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