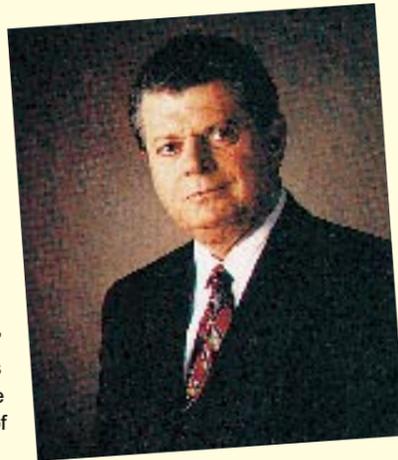




Brave new Apple world

Chris Cain peels back the covers on a new direction for Apple. Plus, upgrades and updates and Mac Hexen, forsooth.

It's happened. On 13th May, Apple's new CEO, Dr Gilbert Amelio, took the stage at the Mac World Wide Developers Conference to announce his plans for getting Apple back on track. The so-called "turn-around king" revealed his strategies for hardware, software and the development of key markets.



Gil Amelio is taking a slow and steady approach to getting Apple back on track

I didn't make it to the conference but it sounds as if Amelio knows what he's doing. His plans aren't earth shattering but they do appear to be exactly what the Mac market needs. Everything, from the amount of RAM shipped with machines to the Internet and Mac OS, has been addressed in what seems like a sensible fashion.

According to Amelio, from now on every Mac will come with at least 12Mb of RAM as standard. At least 16Mb would have been preferable, but 12Mb is enough to ensure new systems can run today's larger RISC-based applications comfortably and concurrently.

The next step is a 50 percent reduction in the number of Mac models over the next 12 months and a move to standardise around a core motherboard. This won't happen overnight but it should make it easier for Apple and third parties to develop more standardised software that will work across the entire line-up, including a universal version of the Mac operating system.

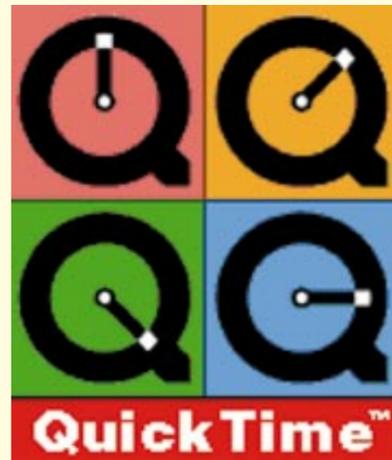
It's official

Copland is now officially called System 8, and it has been decided that this will definitely be a 1997 event. However, many of its key components will be released as upgrades to 7.5 as soon as they are finished, including the new Appearance Manager.

It's a messy way of doing things but Apple claims it will enable the Mac OS programmers, who have been centralised in one department for the first time, to deliver a more stable product.

Amelio also stressed the importance of the Internet, saying that all future Macs would be Internet-ready. Quite what this means we don't know, as not all Macs come with modems — but you can't expect him to get everything right first time, can you?

Other Internet-related moves include the release of the Golden Master version of CyberDog 1.0, available (by the time you read this) for downloading from the company's Web sites; an agreement with Netscape to bundle a QuickTime plug-in with the upcoming Navigator 3.0 to help establish it as the standard multimedia format for the Web; and a deal with Sun to integrate its Java programming language into the Mac OS.



Due for release in July, QuickTime version 2.5 will bring multi-processor support, an improved music architecture and compatibility with M-JPEG

For more on Amelio's speech and the Apple position see this month's *Newsprint*.

QuickTime 2.5

The next version of QuickTime, Apple's software architecture for handling time-based media, will not be 2.2 as detailed a few months ago. Apparently, the company has improved QuickTime so much that it has upgraded to version 2.5 and, at the time of writing, everything looks set to arrive in July.

Among the recent enhancements are support for the Motion JPEG video file format, often used by video professionals with products like VideoVision, multi-processor support for power-hungry real-time editing and improvements to the text track which allow you to search for strings in movies. The last feature will be particularly handy for finding clips when searching for information across the Internet.

One feature that still hasn't made it into the new version is the much-trumpeted software MPEG playback. According to Jonathan Knowles, senior product manager for QuickTime, new developments in the playback engine mean that it won't be ready until the end of the year.

The good news is that it will give full-motion video with 44.1KHz CD-quality sound on a 60MHz PowerMac or greater. Obviously, the more processor power you have the better, but Knowles says it will work perfectly on low-end PowerMacs. Naturally, I'll believe it when I see it.

A new version of QuickTime VR is also due, complete with programmers' API and support for speech, music, directional sound and hot spots that can be linked to URLs. Version 2.0 is expected to ship in August.

Going into Overdrive

This month, I finally got my hands on one of Apple's long-awaited processor upgrade cards. The first models are primarily designed for the 7500 and 8500, and provide you with either a 120MHz or 132MHz PowerPC604.

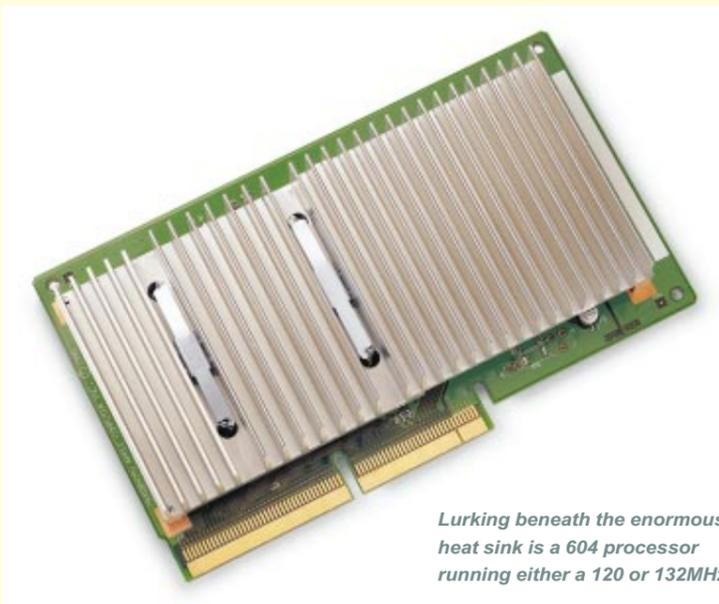
At first glance, the most obvious thing about the card is its enormous heat sink (shown, right) which completely covers the board concealing all the components. Installation is simply a matter of removing the existing processor card and firmly inserting the new one. There are no additional jumpers to tweak or software to install — simply put back the lid and away you go. The only other thing I can say about the

hardware is that you should make sure the card is firmly seated in the processor socket.

I tested a 132MHz model on my 7500 and, as expected, there were instant speed improvements. The difference was specially noticeable using time-consuming filters in Photoshop and with 3D routines that make heavy use of the 604's floating-point capacity.

If you plan to make heavy use of QuickDraw 3D, now or in the future, then a 604 upgrade is a good idea. The end result is a machine that runs almost as fast as a top-of-the-line 9500, as shown by the graphs in Fig 1.

The 120MHz card costs £455 (plus



Lurking beneath the enormous heat sink is a 604 processor running either a 120 or 132MHz

VAT) while the 132MHz version is priced at £682 (plus VAT). These prices might seem expensive, especially when compared with PC CPU upgrades, but they are actually quite reasonable when compared with the cost of a whole new system. It's basically the equivalent of moving from a Pentium to a Pentium Pro, and you can't even do that yet.

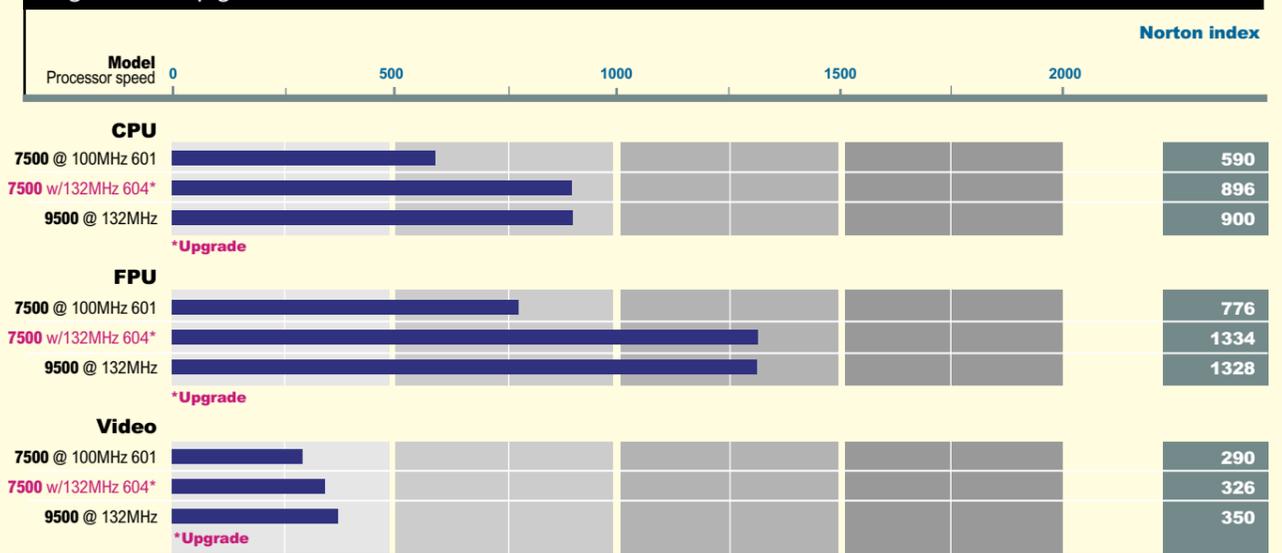
Matrox update

PCI Mac users with a Matrox Millennium graphics card will be keen to hear that a patch for the card's flash BIOS has been posted on-line. A new driver is also available and the company strongly recommends users to update for maximum performance.

The BIOS upgrade is supplied as two files — an application called FlasherMGA and an accompanying ROM image. Before running the program you need to make the BIOS editable by changing a jumper on the bottom right-hand corner of the card. Then simply run the program and follow the screen prompts.

The latest revision of driver software is version 1.1, which includes updates for both the MGA PowerDesk Control Panel and the MGA 3D accelerator.

Fig 1 — Upgrade Performance





Matrox has improved the BIOS and driver software for its PCI Millennium graphics accelerator

Take that ye Varlet!

Regular readers will know that I occasionally take time out from working to enjoy the odd game of Doom or Marathon.

This month sees the launch of the Mac version of Hexen, GT Interactive's medieval 3D romp, aka "Doom in tights". A demo has appeared on the Web, so naturally I downloaded it.

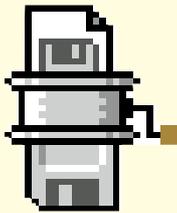
Hexen allows you to explore its 3D world as a Fighter, a Cleric or a Mage. Each character has its own special abilities and a unique style that affects the way the game develops.

For example, a Mage can use magical weapons and spells to obliterate the enemy, whereas a warrior has only his brute strength and cunning to rely on. The idea is that once you complete your quest with one character, you can do the whole thing again, slightly differently, with another character.

Graphically, Hexen is similar to Doom, except in a medieval style, but the gameplay has been engineered to be quite different. Instead of simply following on from one another, the levels are connected via a series of interlinked hubs. This has you running backwards and forwards several times because actions on one level change things on another.

Guaranteed to keep you up half the night, the Hexen demo can be downloaded from <http://www.gac.edu/~bgustafs/hexen>.

Utility of the month



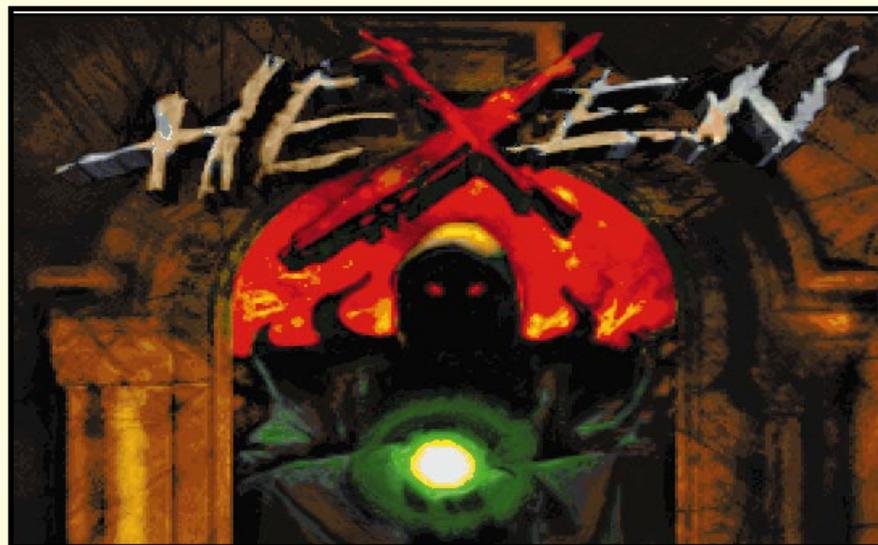
This month's life-saving utility is Drop Disk, a tiny Apple-made application that lets you mount disk images on your desktop and access them as if they were normal floppy disks. Although unsupported by the authors, it can save you a lot of tedious work.

For the uninitiated, disk images are files that contain the complete contents of a floppy disk. They are often used as a convenient way of sending exact duplicates of disks across the Internet, or for archiving copies of floppy disks onto a hard disk. If I

wanted to send someone a copy of a program that came on seven disks, for example, I could make a disk image of each one and then send them all via email. The person on the other end would then use a utility, such as Disk Copy 4.2, to copy the images to blank disks and make their own disk set.

The only disadvantage with all this is that when you want to use the files in a disk image you must have a blank floppy disk ready on which to copy them, assuming you already have a copy of Disk Copy. With Drop Disk you can simply drag the image onto the application and a couple of seconds later it appears as a mounted volume on the desktop. It can then be opened and accessed like a normal disk.

● Drop Disk can be download from various sites on the World Wide Web, including <http://www.peak.org/~labquest/Dimages.html>



Cry "hey, nonny nonny" and vanquish the demons infesting the world of Hexen



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