

another Wiz Webmaster For Mac!

Welcome to the second installment of Macintalk. Each month, Apple Wizards will interview one significant person in the MacOS or Apple community. We are planning interviews with programmers, executives, and everyone in between.

This month we point our wand toward another of the outstanding Web superstars of the Macintosh community, Ric Ford. Ford, webmaster of MacInTouch at <http://www.macintouch.com/>, keeps the Mac world informed on late-breaking Mac-related news and technical problems.

Interview Conducted 06 November 1997

Apple Wizards: Could you please describe yourself and your role in the Macintosh community?

Ric Ford: I'm just Ric Ford :-). My role seems to be one of a visible person in the community who can be trusted and with whom people can communicate. One of my biggest problems now is managing the amount of communication involved. I used to answer every email, but it's physically impossible for me to do that now, although I still manage to read thousands of messages a month and reply to hundreds, at least. I definitely need a better email/database system!

AW: What is your background in computers?

RF: Well, I started on punched cards and paper tape, writing music

composition software in FORTRAN in high school. Just a few years ago... I ran mission-critical mainframe complexes at IBM, VAXen at GTE Labs and then fell for the Lisa and that was the beginning of the end of my mainframe involvement.

AW: What is your history with Macintosh computers?

RF: (I wrote a little about my history over the course of two decades for a Mac 10th anniversary column in MacWeek in January 1994.)

I watched Steve Jobs introduce the Mac in 1984 at the BCS in Boston, played with one the same week and bought one quickly. My first computer purchase. The "killer application" was communications - terminal emulation, CompuServe, etc. I didn't imagine the Web at that time, but everything I've done has gone in that direction, and the Web to me is today's revolution, as the Mac was the revolution in 1984. Of course, I got so completely involved with the Mac and the Mac community that it took over my life. (An important note here: It was the Mac community that was so compelling, not Mac CPUs or programs, but interesting, creative people.)

AW: How did you become involved in solving technical problems?

RF: I can't imagine working with computers, as I did, and not getting involved in solving technical problems. There are so many to solve!

AW: What is the history behind the MacInTouch web site?

RF: I started it three years ago and had some critical early advice from a friend, Kent Borg, that was a great help in setting direction. The site was a logical extension of the original MacInTouch newsletter I produced back in 1995 with Rick LePage (see the MacInTouch history page at <http://www.macintouch.com/AboutMacInTouch.html> for more info). It complemented my column in MacWEEK and took on a life of its own. I got nailed early by hundreds of dollars in excess bandwidth charges, without any warning, from my ISP. It wasn't a good experience, but then Bare Bones software rode to my rescue with hosting help. They had some problems with their upstream ISP (SprintLink) later, and my bandwidth usage started getting out of hand again. This time, Ben Harper and Reprahduce came along with massive bandwidth to rescue the site again. (Editor's Note: Ben at Reprahduce also hosts the Apple Wizards website. Visit Reprahduce at <http://www.reprahduce.com/> for great MacOS web-serving solutions.)

AW: What are some of the statistics for MacInTouch, hit count, etc.?

RF: Here are the stats from September 1997:

Total successful requests: 6,954,981 (1,441,107)
Average successful requests per day: 231,833 (205,872)
Total successful requests for pages: 2,658,186 (544,538)
Average successful requests for pages per day: 88,606 (77,791)
Number of distinct hosts served: 647,607 (203,673)
Total data transferred: 43,950 Mbytes (9,704 Mbytes)
Average data transferred per day: 1,465 Mbytes (1,386 Mbytes)
(Figures in parentheses refer to the last 7 days).

AW: About how much time per day does MacInTouch take up in your life?

RF: A really crazy amount of time. But there are a few nice things about not working a standard job.

AW: How has the success of MacInTouch influenced your life?

RF: It's consuming.

AW: Are you in contact with Apple at all, and if so, what do you generally communicate about?

RF: Apple and I have a distant relationship, although I have good relationships with some individuals. It has been challenging working with the company. I keep hoping things will smooth out, but rapid turnover there and my physical location on the opposite coast are problematic. It used to be hard to get a straight answer from Apple people, but that may be changing a little.

AW: Where does the bulk of your information come from, emails from readers, I would imagine?

RF: The strength of MacInTouch is its readership, and that includes most people at Apple and third-party vendors, as well as Apple's customers. Some writers hang out with industry executives, and that's one perspective. I talk with "the guy on the street," the customer, the developer, the engineer, the artist, the educator, the businessperson. That's the dominant perspective of MacInTouch.

AW: What can we expect in the future from you and the MacInTouch site?

RF: It's really difficult to predict the future right now. I'd like things to stabilize, so I could address my lousy infrastructure and spend less time thrashing and more time doing useful work. My email system, for example, is woefully inadequate for the volume of email that it handles, and I should have much more of my processes built on databases. If the Mac market lasts, the next big step is to get some really good people involved with the site, so it can grow beyond my own limitations. But that's a huge step, and it has to be supported by a stable foundation. I've got a lot of ideas I think would benefit the site, but there are only 24 hours in a day, and I'm burning all of them now.

AW: What are your feelings on the recent changes in Apple?

RF: Killing the clones felt dead wrong to me. I've never been so concerned, in more than a decade, about Apple's future. You know what the worst thing is? Some of the secrecy, the mushroom treatment. Is there a secret plan? What is it? Who knows? It's precisely this problem that's driving people from the Mac. I don't get it, and I don't think anybody else does, either.

AW: How do you feel about Steve Jobs as the temporary CEO?

RF: The proof is in the pudding, and the pudding's long overdue.

AW: If you were CEO, what would you do differently?

RF: I would have kept cloning, even at the expense of short-term profits. I think Gates was right about this in 1985 and nothing's changed. Now? I think the essential issue is Apple's treatment of its 30 million customers and partners. Listen to them and help them, and you can't lose. Try to outsmart them, and you're dead.

Apple Wizards would like to thank Ric Ford for taking time out of his immensely busy schedule of email-reading and web page-updating to answer our questions. Ric Ford does an outstanding job of keeping the Macintosh community informed. I highly recommend you visit his Macintosh site, <http://www.macintouch.com/> as it is one of the most outstanding Mac news resources on the internet.

If there is a well-known person in the Mac community that you are dying to learn more about, please let me know, as I would love to hear your suggestions. You can reach me at macintalk@applewizards.net to let me know who it is that you wish you knew more about.

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