

doubt anyone would describe 1997 as a boring year. We cloned sheep and landed on Mars. For Apple, 1997 is one year that will be remembered as a time of trouble. On the other hand, if the general public finally decides that Apple isn't "going out of business," 1997 will be the year credited with the turnaround. Regardless, the company did some fantastic engineering in 1997 that will remain invisible until sometime in 1998.

The year began with Gil "Buster" Amelio at Apple's helm. The Dr. invited company co-founder Steve Jobs to fill the mysterious role of "Special Advisor." During the summer, Amelio and most of the Board of Directors (who many blame for the company's amazing succession of bad decisions) departed. For a time, there was no CEO; then Steve Jobs decided to temporarily fill the gaping whole in Apple's executive lineup. He started implementing big decisions — an alliance with Microsoft — and encouraged us to Think Different. At the Apple Event in November, the company finally announced its G3 machines — three months after Power Computing and Motorola machines (which are still faster than any machine sold by Apple) won Best of Show awards at Macworld Boston. Wherever they end up, the Power and Motorola engineers who designed the award-winning machines will have the honor of being the last such awardees, because the east-coast Macworld is moving to New York City.

Despite all its internal turmoil, Apple managed to release three system software updates on time. Mac OS 8 is solid and has sold well, despite falling far short of the original promised design. It's too bad the marketing slogan was so terrible: "An operating system so advanced it could only come from Apple. Or did it?" I can't wait for the press backlash once Rhapsody is released: "An operating system so advanced it could only come from Apple. Or did it? — Wait, it didn't come from Apple, it's UNIX!" I console myself by hoping that people will take a fresh look at Rhapsody's feature. If it even moderately resembles what Apple promises and NeXT users attest to, Mac users will be pleasantly surprised.

Pippin and the Apple Club are all but forgotten. Apple's inability to capitalize on what could have been the first viable Network Computer is a shame. A mechanism for buying subscriptions to Apple system software releases other than through the Developer CD series would have also been nice, but most people don't seem to miss them. I hope the Newton group doesn't suffer the same fate, because that will be missed.

Macintosh manufacturing changed greatly during 1997. The cloners lost their licenses to build Mac OS-compatible machines. UMAX appears to be the "chosen one," but they're about to be sued by PowerTools. MetaCreations, the result of a merger between graphics powerhouses MetaTools and Fractal Design, is arguably the best example of software company consolidation the Macintosh world has seen of late. But, they're not alone.

Companies ranging from the giant America Online to the no-longer-so-tiny Metrowerks have been parties to consolidation. Such are the realities of doing business in the late '90s.

Farewell to Some of the Best

Longtime rivals Macworld and MacUser merged into a single magazine — Macworld. <<http://www.macworld.com>> In addition, the magazine is tackling the cross-platform reality that many of us face. Beginning in 1998, MacWorld will contain coverage of Windows NT.

Apple canceled its programmer publications Develop and Apple Directions. The former was somewhat resurrected in MacTech, while the latter is now completely electronic. <<http://www.mactech.com>> Apple even stopped its free technical support hotline, formerly 1-800-SOS-APPLE, and, in a terrible press release, Jobs stated that he was going to bring Apple's customer service more in line with Microsoft's!

Thankfully, MacWEEK is still around; but my favorite column, Henry Norr's "The Second Decade," will no longer be published, apparently the result of cutbacks. Along the same lines, my free subscription was, in the words of a customer service representative, "Evidently terminated." So, I will probably read the magazine online from now on. As they no doubt say at Be, "C'est la vie." <<http://www.macweek.com>>

Finally, MacSense, perhaps the best DOCMaker e-zine there ever was, closed down. I'll miss the professional writing, the unique graphics, and the sharp layout. I wish Chris McVeigh, Alex Narvey, and the rest of the MacSense team all the best in their future endeavors. Many of them, it seems, have already found new online venues for their writing. I only wish that the MacSense Web site were still online. To me, it's an important historical record of Mac culture and the nascent era of online publishing.

The Rising Stars

Since its premier issue less than two years ago, MacAddict, has captured the hearts of many die-hard Mac users. <<http://www.macaddict.com>> With the tagline "A better machine. A better magazine," it fills a niche for an "alternative Mac publication," much like the role MacUser once played. It's undergone explosive growth, not unlike the AppleWizards e-zine that began this summer. <<http://www.applewizards.net>> Many Macintosh news and rumors sites have started up this year (and a couple have already disappeared). This speaks well of the oft-mentioned Macintosh loyalty.

My favorite newcomer is NetBITS. It's sister publication is TidBITS, one of the oldest — if not the oldest — Mac publications. Both are available online in HTML format, as well as through setext (structurally-enhanced text) email subscriptions. While TidBITS covers general Macintosh news and software, NetBITS focuses on Internet issues from a Mac perspective. The writing is simply excellent. See <<http://www.tidbits.com>> and <<http://www.netbits.net>> for more information.

Onward to '98

Apple certainly has its work cut out for itself, but that's nothing new. Look for some new machines to be released this winter and spring, both in the high-end/server and the home/education arenas. We may even see some Network Computers. The Apple Store will be expanded and Jobs says we'll see a broader range of Apple ads; hopefully, there'll be some product-specific ones that really sell the Mac's advantages.

I'll be waiting for Rhapsody Premiere, which should be released early this year, as well as Rhapsody Unified and Allegro (the next major revision to Mac OS). In the meantime, I'm content with the about-to-be-released Mac OS 8.1. I hope you'll continue to use your Macs and enjoy the personal computing experience. It's going to be an exciting year.

"The Personal Computing Paradigm" is © 1998 by Michael Tsai, <mtsai@atpm.com>. Michael is still searching for the ultimate answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything.