

he Good

Just read your opinion piece in About This Particular Mac, and I couldn't agree more. All my Mac friends are championing the iMac as Apple's saving grace. However, when I first saw the thing, I groaned, audibly. You're right—it does look like a toy. Therein lies the Mac's biggest shortcoming. The Wintel crowd doesn't take the Mac seriously; they think it's just a souped up Nintendo or something—not a “real computer.” I work in a very PC environment, and the jabs I've had to suffer for being Mac guy at all have been tripled since the release of this thing. Anyway, sorry to ramble on. But thanks for your part in keeping the faith.

Scott Byers

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Thanks for hitting the nail right on the head.

I took a hard look at the specifications for the iMac and found them wanting. I have yet to see a USB hard drive, printer, or other peripheral. Additionally, since it has no floppy disk drive (and no SCSI chain) as far as I can tell, the user cannot even back up the hard disk on the iMac!

I suppose if backups are a “network manager” thing to do, Mom's going to have to learn network management.

This is also aimed at schools, too, specifically K-12 schools. And they aren't network managers, either. Teachers who are teaching 32 kids in a class that should have 22 don't have time to “fix the computer.”

The iMac looks suspiciously like a Larry Ellison idea. Larry, who is CEO of Oracle and who also sits on the Board over at Apple, is nuts about the concept of the NC, or Network Computer. This is a theoretical hunk of silicon that will run Java applets downloaded from huge Oracle Servers. Now that Apple has killed the Newton and the e-Mate, Larry needs another idea from Steve.

I remember the retro phase a few years ago, back when Novell LANs became the rage in the PC world. The “diskless workstation” became the big hype. It booted DOS off a ROM chip and loaded network software and attached itself to the network. It had enough memory to run DOS applications sent it over the network cable. And it failed. Despite the desire Fortune 500

companies have to control everything on corporate PCs, users want the ability to put their resume on a diskette and take it home with them. Users also want a fully-functional workstation.

Here's a few ideas for the iMac:

- A built-in DVD-ROM with all the bells and whistles. DVD-ROM technology is cutting edge and Apple seems to be trailing in that arena. Also you can use a DVD-ROM player to play back CD-ROMs and audio CDs.
- A printer port to hook up to existing printers, or a USB connector that will do the same thing. Better still, an AppleTalk connection to USB.
- A USB-to-SCSI adapter so that you can back up your hard disk to a Zip or Jaz drive. Better still, a built-in Zip drive (I know, not enough room).
- An upgradable processor.
- A lower price. If Apple tossed in an ink-jet printer with the iMac for \$1200.00, the price would be just about right.

Great article!

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The Bad

I just read your article in ATPM and feel you're missing the point. The iMac is an introductory product. It's for people who've never bought a computer before. These people don't know from StyleWriter or larger monitors or funky modems. They're where you and I were when we began our computer-using experiences. They just want something that will allow them to send e-mail and access this thing called the Internet. They want something that will allow them to type a letter to Aunt Jane or possibly maintain their checking accounts.

As they grow into computer usage, they might one day want some of the things you and I would find desirable, such as the things you mentioned. I submit that by the time these new computer users are to that point, it most likely would be time to buy a new box anyway and they have become enamoured with the Macintosh. They will then be ready to buy the "Performa" style machine or even a traditional box. Granted, certain things about the iMac (mouse that lights up?) may be unnecessary, but its a draw. Its something to attract home buyers to a machine that has seen sorry sales for a long time now. If people take the hook now with this machine its been shown that they, more than any other computer buyer, will return to buy another.

Thanks for your time and thank you for providing a counter opinion. We need to know that not everybody is sold on the concept of the iMac. I'm sure there are issues you have brought up that need to be addressed. I know that I will enjoy seeing your next offering in ATPM.

Scott R. Boveia

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I'm writing in response to Tom Iovino's Apple Cider article in your June 1 issue, which called for some redesign of the iMac. While his points were well taken, I just can't agree. I felt I had to speak out on the iMac's behalf. The iMac doesn't look like a toy at all—and neither, for that matter, did the original all-in-one Mac. The Mac was never meant to be a toy. Yes, it was cute, but what was special about it was that it was different. You know, like the slogan. Who really wants to sit in front of a boring, unattractive, unimaginative computer day in and day out?

The Mac is different because it's original, appealing, and fun to use. Most people don't like to be mindless drones, so when we're trapped in our office cubicles all day, we want something that'll bring us some kind of pleasure, something that reminds us that we're still human. What Apple is doing with the iMac is bringing back that rebellious, fun-loving, free-spiritedness that got us all hooked on Macintosh in the first place.

The iMac is colorful and curvy—just what I would expect a revamp of the classic Mac to look like. And as for all the fuss over no floppy drive and USB ports and that nonsense, just remember that the iMac isn't really aimed at the Macintosh faithful. Apple wants to draw in new customers; namely, the folks who missed the Mac boat the first time around. It's a machine for the first-time computer user, the converted PC user, and that college kid who would really love a cool, fast computer for his/her dorm.

As for us, the Macintosh "elite," some of us, maybe even a lot of us, will buy or think about buying the iMac. I know I'd like one. But Apple has other treats for us, like the PowerBook G3, and other higher-end systems. Apple knows what it's doing, and I think they're doing a great job of it. So what if some people make jokes about "toy" Macs? Intelligent, informed folks (PC and Mac users alike) will take notice of the iMac, and of Apple as well, in the months to come.

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The Head-To-Head

Tom Iovino responds to a letter from Simon Edison, <edison@fast.net.au>.

Dear Simon—

I must take issue with you over the recent opinion published in ATPM recently.

Ahhh! I have succeeded! My goal in taking the 'Devil's Advocate' position was to start a

critical discussion of the merits and disadvantages of the iMac. Until my article, I had read nothing even remotely disparaging about the iMac. It was as if Steve Jobs suddenly hit on the 'perfect' computer design and no further development needed to occur. Being as well-educated as you are, you understand that within six months, the iMac is going to look slow and restrictive. That's the march of technology.

Am I alone here or has everyone missed the perfectly bleeding obvious? Apple's fortunes took the biggest dip in financial year 95/96—September to August respectively (Apple's financial year). I believe a certain Windows 95 came out in August (in Australia at least) and let's face it to the uninitiated there was not a great deal of difference between Win 95 and the Mac OS. Of course we know that isn't true but you have to want to find the best and not accept poor imitations, the majority of people do not do that.

I agree with your last statement, but I think a few of last year's (1997) quarters looked very bleak—and they had nothing to do with the release of Windows 95...

At the same time Apple was faced with switching processors just as MS caught up. Users facing a buying decision see no performance gain with a PowerMac and no perceived gain in useability. What do they do? They buy a windoze machine (and save money in the process).

And this desire to save money is what drives many home computer purchasers today. Most look at the bottom line—how much will the box cost? Now, here comes the iMac, touted as the entry level Mac for the masses—and how much does it cost? Almost \$1,300 dollars. It doesn't compare favorably with the \$999 Windoze computers I can buy at the local discount megastore—which come with a printer, no less. If Apple truly wants the iMac to be the entry level solution, they either have to a) throw in more with the computer (a printer, DVD drive, etc.) or b) lower the price.

That is why Apple faced the problems it did - its competitive advantage was eroded.

Well, Mac never really lost its competitive edge as far as performance goes, but it surely did suffer from mismanagement, indecision, lack of an effective advertising and public relations campaign, lack of regular, meaningful OS upgrades, and unfulfilled hardware promises. How legendary are the stories of promised hardware that never materialized in sufficient quantity?

Now we have Intel facing the same problems, not only that it has put those problems off until 2000. The opinion says Apple did not make the "bold moves to maintain its market share"; it made them 3 years ago. They will pay dividends soon.

I'm not sure where you are getting your information, but Apple's market share has dwindled significantly over the past three years (how many times did the media point this out to we, the Mac faithful?) and has only recently seen an upturn with the G3 machines and some very effective advertising.

As for the iMac, I think it is a great concept and will sell in bucketloads.

No doubt it will—at first. However, once the novelty wears off, people realize that it's not the solution to every computing problem that they have ever had, Apple sells computers with faster chips, etc., watch the sales plummet—just as with every other computer Apple—and every computer manufacturer for that matter—has put into a box and shipped.

In my opinion Apple has to position itself as the platform of choice for speed and efficiency;

the G3 together with OS X will do that.

Oh, yeah! I can't wait for OS X to come along! That is a very bright spot in the future, if Apple doesn't change it's OS strategy yet again...

My only complaint is that as part of the strategy Softwindows or Virtual PC should be bundled. Two machines for \$1299 now that's a bargain.

Agreed 100%—Apple has lots of nerve selling this for more than a grand without a few more perks for the customer.

Apple is pursuing a good strategy right now: reducing the premium for Mac OS solutions over Wintel by use of more PC parts, pushing the performance envelope.

Standardization is great. Lower cost peripherals are a real boon to computer manufacturers and consumers. Of course, we now have to do a complete about face after 14 years of hearing the 'ADB is awesome' mantra from Cupertino.

You complain that the iMac does not allow flexibility—I disagree. You may want nice options that allow you to upgrade your monitor, maybe if you feel like it but you won't even if you could...

I would desperately love to upgrade my monitor. Most Web pages are designed on 17" or greater monitors [Not ATPM's :-) —MT], and I have to do lots of side-to-side scrolling to see the entire page. But, with the LC 580's built-in monitor and lack of a video out plug (just like the iMac), well, my options are limited—and expensive.

Apple is echoing actual experiences in the mass Wintel market. People generally don't actually upgrade even though they can. The most common upgrades are a sound card and a graphics card both of which are already in the iMac (functionally at least). The personal computer is becoming a throwaway item—get used to it and get your credit card ready for iMac 2000.

Ouch! There goes another reason that I chose for buying a Mac—longevity of the box at my house. I don't even want to hazard a guess at your household finances, but with a new house, a very young child, and a wife who likes to get into new clothes every so often, a 'throwaway' item that costs me \$1,300 isn't in my budget. I and many of my friends who I have spoken with who have purchased Macs appreciate the fact that they don't have to replace every year or two as our friends who have chosen the Windows platform.

I believe SJ has done his homework and done it bloody well. After all, 80% of the 28.6 million Mac users are out there still working now (Apple's estimates of the number of Macs still working) and their networkable Macs have a floppy drive on board and access to a hard drive for back up. If you don't have an old Mac then you buy one of the new USB superfloppy drives.

Now this \$1,300 Disposable Computer is becoming even more expensive.

I bought my computer before CD ROM drives were de rigueur and didn't enjoy having to shell out extra money to purchase an external CD-ROM drive. Now, Apple has slid back to the past. Apple should have at least included an internal Zip drive for me to copy some files and take them with me to Aunt Mabel in Sheboygen who isn't so Internet savvy.

Works for me !!!!

I'm glad to see that you are happy with Apple's decision. And, don't get me wrong, I think the iMac looks neat. It will probably sell very well. As I had stated above, my purpose for writing the article the way I did was to begin a truly honest dialogue about the product. If I have done so, I can say that my work here is done.

Take care, and keep on clickin!

Tom Iovino, <tiovino@atpm.com>, writes the regular Apple Cider column for ATPM.