

“What do I do, Daddy?” My daughter’s words startled me. My precocious seven year-old has been a Mac user since she was a toddler. She knows her way around a Macintosh desktop better than she knows the way around our block. All the more reason her question caught me by surprise. My kids and I were at CompUSA and Jessica was looking at a G3 minitower that was connected to a high-quality monitor. She had no problem seeing what was on the screen and the mouse was responding to the gentle movements of her hand. What was the difference between the Macintosh on display and the computer she has at home? The G3 minitower was running Windows 95 via Virtual PC.

Children have a natural way of knowing the “real thing” from a cheap imitation. The Mac OS has a more intuitive design than Windows 95 and it’s easier to use. That’s not personal bias, it’s computer industry fact. It’s the platform of choice for content creators and designers. It’s also the computer of choice for thousands of educators in America, provided they have the opportunity to make a choice.

I spent the past year as the business manager of a small, non-profit elementary school. I was hired to automate the school’s accounting systems. The school’s directors graciously accommodated all of my resource requests except one: They wouldn’t approve the purchase of a Macintosh. The school’s classrooms and media center are filled with seemingly inexpensive Wintel boxes that were either donated by parents or purchased for what they thought was a low price. The directors were influenced by well-meaning parents who wanted the school to use the same kind of computers in the classrooms that they used at home and at work.

As a business manager it’s easy to see that using Wintel boxes can be a costly mistake. Although many of the computers in this school are only a few years old, the motherboards have already been replaced and many of the replacement boards are quickly becoming obsolete. The cost of third-party networking cards has only added to the school’s expenses. Had the school chosen to use Macintoshes they would be saving thousands of dollars in yearly upgrade costs and the savings would go a long way towards putting new iMacs or G3 All-In-Ones in the school’s media center.

To automate the school’s accounting systems I needed to replace old 386s in the administration offices with Pentium 166s purchased from a major manufacturer at educational discount prices. One of my favorite resellers was able to find high quality 15" monitors at closeout prices. The computers came without CD-ROM drives and Ethernet cards. Additional monies were spent configuring a Windows NT 4.0 server and adding networking hardware. For a few dollars more per unit the school could have purchased G3s. It’s ironic because the best accounting software I could find to fit the school’s budget and accounting needs was the Mac standard, M.Y.O.B from BestWare.

This school is not alone. There are parents and administrators all over the country who argue young children should only use Windows-based computers in school because it's the predominant OS where most people work. It's weird logic. By the time today's elementary school students enter the work force quantum computers may be common and the only evidence of Windows 95 and Windows NT might be found in interactive history books. The real concern should be what computer is best suited for today's educational curriculum and what computer represents the best long-term value. If your answer to the above question is anything other than a Macintosh, please recheck your figures. If recent history repeats itself, a Macintosh purchased today will be in original service long after the hard-working folks at Goodwill Industries have recycled its Wintel competitor.

The short time I've worked in a school environment has convinced me it would be a better world if the lessons we learned in grade school came to work with us each day. Can you imagine working in an office where people willingly took turns sharing mundane responsibilities or remembered to put things back where they found them? Why would we want to bring more of the "work world" into the school classroom?

We can learn a lot from children. We can also learn a lot from allowing ourselves to be more like children. Our newspapers are filled with sad stories about grown-ups who get caught doing "childish" things. But our church sermons and history books are filled with stories of great people who had a "child like" faith that inspired them to tame continents and build vast civilizations. The difference between being childish and childlike is a mile wide and ten miles deep. The difference isn't something we learn at work, but it is something we're supposed to learn at school. As adults, it's intended to be part of the knowledge base we bring to work.

For many years the press derided Steve Jobs for being childish. But he and a partner started an industry because they dared to foster a childlike dream. It's no mistake that the first computer in most American classrooms was an Apple product. Apple Computer is primarily a hardware company. Its main competition doesn't come from Microsoft, it's from Compaq, Dell and Gateway. That's been a hard lesson for the people at Apple Computer to learn and understand. But it's a lesson they've learned well. Ask any educator, mistakes can be valuable learning experiences.

It's my prediction that by Christmas over one million iMacs will have been ordered. One of the reasons I believe in the iMac's future success is because in their childlike enthusiasm to create a new computer, the people at Apple have stopped doing something that's childish. Namely, they've aggressively opened the market for iMac peripherals to outside vendors. Third-party vendors will be instrumental in selling the iMacs to consumers. Apple Computer is willing to share its success.

I admire Apple's co-founder Steve Wozniak. He made a lot of money at Apple and he's chosen to make a new career for himself by educating children. I also admire Steve Jobs. He's learned a lot from his mistakes and he's working hard at re-writing his place in computer industry history. I hope a lot of parents and school administrators are watching what's happening at Apple. The G3s represent the best price/performance value in today's personal computer market.

Does Apple have to offer G3s running Windows via Virtual PC? If so, it won't be for very long. The success of the iMac and other G3 models will double Apple's retail market share. Very shortly Apple will again command close to half of all new CPU sales in the education market. In the meantime, Mac advocates need to put into practice an important lesson we all learned in elementary school—if at first you don't succeed, try, try again! Tell your neighbors and tell

your friends about the iMac and low-priced G3 desktops. Low prices, high performanc...The equation is rather...elementary!

“What do I do, Daddy?” That was my daughter’s original question. “Be patient,” is my reply. “In a couple of months you, me and your brother will buy an iMac.” Thankfully, Macs are used in my children’s school. The increase in Mac sales will prompt more developers to port their products to the Macintosh platform. Virtual PC need not be everyone’s reality.

If your local school isn’t using Macs or is considering switching to the Wintel platform, please stop by Dan Knight’s Web site:

<<http://www.iserv.net/~dknight/grps/>>

Thanks, Dan. You’re an inspiration to all of us in the OS trenches.

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