

**:When is a consumer not a consumer?**

**A:When he's a Mac user**

The iMac is, Apple has stressed, a Consumer Computer. The Real Computer for the rest of us. The iMac is an appliance designed to blend in with your microwave, your TV, and your telephone. No longer should you think of your computer akin to how your parents think of the VCR.

This iMac is built to withstand everything from grandparents to grandchildren.

The iMac is bulletproof [?]

But is Apple right to market the iMac as an appliance? And if so, is the market ready for such a computer?

**ould the iMac be a Consumer Product?**

Well, first what do we think of as a 'Consumer Product'. A Consumer Product is, I would suggest, an appliance which requires minimal effort or human input to get the job it does (and it generally only does one job) done. It is relatively cheap, and well designed both in lastability and (though rarely) looks, so that it sits well in its place of work.

Consider a kettle. What do you have to do to use it? Fill it with water and flick a switch. A radio needs you only to find the station you want to listen to, although you may have to fiddle a bit to get a good reception. The VCR maybe the most challenging 'appliance' people have in their households. Consider how parents find setting the thing up to make it record properly to be a Herculean Task.

However, for the kids in the family it is usually a breeze to use. This shows that a computer is

very nearly a consumer product, but not quite. The generation who grew up with vinyl record players and 9mm reel video (not RealVideo folks) is being usurped by a generation whose life has been surrounded by electronic gadgets - watches, calculators. Nintendo's and PlayStation's are the closest you could presently compare to an iMac, and still class them as a consumer product. They are technical appliances.

### Is the iMac a consumer product? Is it an appliance?

The iMac is a computer. The word computer draws a definite distinction between the PlayStation's 'console', but then the iMac is capable of so much more than the PlayStation. The iMac is multi-talented and this ability makes it ultimately more complex to use. You can get by without knowing how a toaster or VCR actually works, but an iMac? Surely it is more complex than flicking the switch on the kettle. Perhaps is impossible to simplify such a machine to transform it into a traditional 'appliance' without completely crippling it [remember the Pippin].

Perhaps.

But just for one moment, lets say that computers are consumer products. The iMac clearly has a lead over any other competition. Windows, as we know, is the most terrible thing to appear on computer screens. If any OS was to bridge the technology/appliance gap, it would be the MacOS and not Windows.

However, it still seem's that the iMac currently occupies the middle-ground between appliance and full-on computer. This distinction may start to disappear as technology becomes more integrated into our lives - and particularly the lives of younger generations - and what better way to start than the iMac?

### Should the iMac be a Consumer Product?

Computers have been and will continue to be a great boon to modern society due to their wide variety of abilities and uses. Yet this very fact causes them to be more complicated to use. A bit of thought is required to use a computer (or a lot if you're on Windows), and to some extent we have to learn how the computer works. To understand how the engine inside your iMac works will help you get the most out of your machine. The typical appliances, such as kettles and VCR's are more or less 'no-brainers'.

Would it be better if we didn't have to think about or know what we were doing on an iMac? (I think therefore iMac, right?)

I would suggest not. To some degree, I think this argument can be illustrated by a simple WIntel v MacOS comparison.

When something goes wrong on a Wintel machine, you'll typically get your blue screen of death and that will be pretty much all the apology you'll get. The Windows user will generally have no idea what caused the problem and what to do about it. Compare to a Mac. Often error messages pop up, and explain what went wrong, and what you can do about it. It's not so much sitting down with a manual and figuring out what DIP switches or Slaves are, it's more like discovering what the button with a little circle does on your VCR. It's not scholarship, it's acquisition.

Reading back, I guess I just demonstrated that the iMac could be considered a consumer product, an appliance. Maybe I have, but then again all I may have demonstrated is that if there ever is a computer-appliance, make it a Mac - if it's Windows, the general public will just become even more technophobic.

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Now's the time to strike - while the iMac is hot.

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Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail.