

t's time once again to do Christmas shopping for my kids. I've made a concerted effort over the years to eliminate from my shopping list any items that contain lots of small plastic pieces (the kind that find themselves between seat cushions or in the vacuum cleaner bag). Still, the post gift-opening floor debris invariably contains little pieces of what I'll call "petroleum-based what'snots." I call them petroleum-based because of the materials from which they are often made. I call them "what'snots" because that's my cry when we sit to play a new game and discover vital pieces are missing. It's an exasperated scream of "What's not here that we need to play this game?"

Similar to the abrupt removal of the holiday tree from our living quarters a few days after Christmas, searching the vacuum cleaner bag for missing game pieces has become a part of our post-holiday tradition. It has a ceremony all its own. Before the vacuum cleaner bag is removed from its housing, I place the kitchen trash receptacle outside the house and replace the plastic liner. I quickly detach the bag, race outside and gently open one end before placing it open-end down in the receptacle. I slowly empty the contents into the plastic liner and with my right shirt sleeve rolled up, I grope through the dusty contents searching for hard plastic objects. It's amazing what one finds, but the plastic pieces are the only "buried treasures."

I look upon the gift-giving aspect of the Christmas celebration as an exercise in compromise. There are gifts I'd like to give my kids and then there are gifts my kids would like to receive. The two are often mutually exclusive. Rather than subject my children to what they might consider a "melancholy Christmas," I make a big effort to ensure that there are gifts that will provide them with a bit of holiday merriment. While it's not always possible to know what will be liked and disliked, I try to find things that will be of interest to them.

All things considered, I'm not a fan of Christmas gift giving as it's practiced in America today. It's an uneasy coexistence between the secular and the sacred. I was told years ago that the decision to celebrate Christmas on December 25th was not based on historical information about what day in the modern calendar year that Jesus Christ was born. Rather, December 25th was selected as the day to celebrate the birth of the Redeemer, in part, because church fathers wanted the observance to eclipse or replace pagan festivals that were held this time of year (Did you ever wonder why Christmas is celebrated so close to the winter solstice?).

Consequently, the celebration of Christmas has always battled with pagan festivals and secular practices for the hearts and minds of mankind. The commercial excess of today's Christmas celebration is only the latest skirmish in this long-running battle. Likewise, I've been told, the high-profile celebration of Chanukah (an otherwise minor Jewish holiday) has become a nice way for members of Christianity's mother faith to occupy themselves while the rest of us go nuts at K Mart and Toys R Us.

I've read that the tradition of exchanging gifts on Christmas was started as a means to honor Christ in a manner similar to the way the Wise Men paid homage to Him as a newborn child. This is a reason why members of many Eastern Orthodox churches exchange gifts on the Epiphany (the day we celebrate the arrival of the Three Wise Men), twelve days after December 25th. While the gifts brought by the Wise Men may have seemed extravagant for a humble Jewish child lying in a manger, they were most appropriate for a Heavenly King and an earthly family that would need to finance hard travel and provide for itself while in exile from their homeland.

It is foundational Christian teaching that through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, members of the Christian faithful become co-heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, Christmas gift giving is a wonderful way to honor each other as princes and princesses of God's Eternal Kingdom. Like the gifts brought to the Christ Child by the Wise Men, our gifts should honor the recipient's status as an heir or heiress to the Kingdom of Heaven, and we should keep in mind the person's earthly needs as they travel life's journey in exile from their eternal homeland. In my mind, this is a far cry from today's frantic holiday shopping at the local toy superstore.

Before you dash off an e-mail accusing me of being some kind of theological Scrooge, let me say I see no reason why holiday gift giving can't have an element of fun. After all, Christmas is intended to be a celebration. This year, especially, Mac users have many things to celebrate and lots of reasons to be grateful for the gifts we've been given. The success of the iMac should give all Mac users cause for joy.

The original Macintosh was created to be the "computer for the rest of us." But instead of gifting the company with vision and innovation, the less-than-wise men who ran Apple Computer during the Mac's heyday squandered the rich financial resources entrusted to their care. Can history repeat itself in a kind and benevolent way? The iMac is the legitimate successor to the original Mac's ease-of-use legacy. It's the perfect PC for millions of people who, until now, have never owned a personal computer.

The Mac and the Mac OS have enriched the lives of millions and helped ordinary people do extraordinary things. If you believe that success can only be counted in sales dollars or majority market share, I free you of any obligation to ever read my column. Success can be defined in many different ways. Were it not for the popularity of the Mac OS, their might never have been a Windows 95. Apple computers were the first computers in most American schools.

I believe there's a certain amount of goodwill that's gained from an iCEO who chooses to work for one dollar a year. The dollar is paid so that Mr. Jobs may add his family to Apple's health insurance program. I seriously doubt that Mr. Gates would be hard at work at Microsoft if he didn't have an immediate financial benefit from his labor and a large shareholder's stake in the organization. Will Mr. Jobs be financially rewarded for his effort? Perhaps (and rightfully so) but for now, it's a labor of love. Mr. Jobs' affection for Apple is evident in the revolutionary iMac and the technological evolution of the new products to come. They are the kinds of products that come from extraordinary leadership and are inspired by something more than the prospect of a paycheck.

As a company, Apple Computer prides itself on innovation and providing consumers with products that have long-term value. There's nothing cheap about a cheap PC any more than there's anything inexpensive after 50,000 miles on a cut-rate car. Lots of PC users have learned this lesson and are buying iMacs to replace their "less expensive" Wintel boxes. Conversely, few Mac users migrated away from Apple machines because of general dislike

or unhappiness. They were motivated by the widespread fear that Apple was about to close its doors. Perception is often a more potent force than reality.

The road ahead for Apple Computer will not be an easy one. There's much talk that in a few years PCs will be given away by advertisers in exchange for control of certain parts of the desktop. If you think the Justice Department's suit against Microsoft is only about Web browsers and today's QuickTime technology, please spend some time quietly reading the testimony of key witnesses. The computer desktop and the software by which digital messages are delivered to consumers will be the commercial gateway of the future.

Like it or not, Apple must play the market share game. The iMac and consumer portable are key parts of Apple's market share strategy. Although the company doesn't need to be the world's biggest PC maker, it must be able to deliver large numbers of consumers to the digital marketplace if the company is to thrive. Revenue from ancillary sources, such as advertising, may become an important part of Apple's profit growth.

It astounds me that of the 20 or so Wall Street analysts that track Apple Computer, roughly one half of them maintain a "hold" recommendation on the stock. Apple has learned the hard way that its desire to provide consumers with the best possible computing technology must coexist with the company's need to deliver price-competitive products. No matter Apple's impressive share price gains during 1998, most people on Wall Street still maintain a "wait and see" attitude about the company.

Apple must continue to introduce popular products if it's to change Wall Street's perception of the company's long-term prospects. The fact that the company has over \$2 billion in cash and the lowest price to earnings multiple among profitable computer manufacturers has done nothing to lift the stock's price to industry comparable levels. Apple's stock is still "dirt-cheap" compared to shares of Gateway, Dell, and Compaq.

Apple's decision to use more industry standard parts in its hardware products has reduced the cost of Macs to the consumer. At all levels Apple is continuing to adapt to product price levels dictated by the competition. Despite Dr. Amelio's efforts (he did work hard at his job), the kinds of changes Apple has made in the past eighteen months could only have happened with legendary leadership. Steve Jobs is the only person who could have forced the company to change its ways so dramatically and in so little time.

But with all the attention paid to Steve Jobs, it's important to note that other people have contributed to Apple's newfound success. One of the few "holdovers" from Dr. Amelio's era is Fred Anderson, Apple's Chief Financial Officer. Mr. Anderson has done an excellent job of restructuring Apple's financial operations. Without his efforts, Apple would not be in the position to offer iMacs at \$29.99 per month or be in the market to acquire the technology that the company needs for new product development. Avie Tevanian, Apple's software chief, is responsible for the timely release of Mac OS 8.5 and his staff is hard at work making next summer's transition to Mac OS X as painless for software developers and Mac users as possible. The fact that Apple will be releasing a price-competitive consumer portable that uses a regular version of the Mac OS and has the added functionality of the eMate is a remarkable accomplishment. There are thousands of Apple employees who are working lots of late hours in order to keep the Apple dream alive and well.

I'm grateful this Christmas season that last year's "expert" prognostications of Apple's demise have been quickly forgotten. Perhaps the biggest change since last Christmas isn't the iMac, the soon-to-be-released consumer portable, or the plans for Mac OS X. The biggest change may be that the company is listening to its customers. Technology can be fun but it's not of much value if it doesn't meet the consumers' needs or is priced beyond their ability to

buy it. The changes can be described with one word: Respect. It's a wonderful holiday gift that all of us can share.

Respect is the word I'd like to keep mind as I do my holiday shopping. There are so many things parents would love to give their children. Finding balance between what's called "the true meaning of Christmas" and living in a world that delights itself on holiday excess can be a difficult challenge for any family. In turn, finding appropriate gifts that both delight my children on Christmas morning and benefit them in their earthly journey can be a formidable task.

I've spent the past few weeks scouring the catalogs for Christmas gifts appropriate for my kids. For elementary school age children I recommend the Jump Start™ series of educational CD-ROMs offered by Knowledge Adventure®. They can be found in catalogs at most major software stores. If you have a young girl between the ages of 7 & 11 on your holiday shopping list, I recommend the Pleasant Company's American Girl™ collection of dolls and books <<http://www.americangirl.com>>. The books offer young readers wonderful insights into different eras of American history.

The holiday season can be a confusing time of year. Despite the season's hustle and bustle, we're supposed to take time to pause and reflect on "bigger things." It's a time when we're conditioned to rise above our fallen nature and extend an open hand to others. It's also a time of year when we are pressured to make things "perfect" and must compete with standards set by storybooks and failing memories about Christmases of old.

All things considered, perhaps it's the "Miracle of Christmas," that allows us to be reminded at this busy time of year, that no matter our age, our accomplishments or level of intellect, the greatest gift we all share, through the merits of the Redeemer, is the opportunity to be called true children of God.

I can't help but be awestruck by the meaning of Christmas. After our tree has been decorated, the presents wrapped and placed in proper order and everything made ready for a Christmas celebration, I find myself filled with a sense of peace and personal liberty. This might explain one other Christmas tradition. It's a last minute Christmas shopping trip to take in the sights and sounds of the season.

Unfortunately, my last minute purchases often evidence my relaxed state of mind. That's because some of the items have those little plastic pieces. It's OK. My vacuum cleaner bag is ready. And so am I.

I'm looking forward to Christmas and the new products to be released by Apple a few weeks later. The new line of PowerBooks, desktops and the soon-to-be-released consumer portable may be a big help to those of us who must use computers in our own earthly journey. And if early holiday sales reports are correct, Mac fans everywhere will have much to celebrate soon after the holiday season.

Until we meet again in ATPM 5.01, may the true meaning of Christmas gladden your heart and the hearts of everyone around you.

Merry Christmas and Happy Chanukah from my family to yours.

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