

acMate, WebMate, whatever

By Thomas Ash

A few days ago, Apple dropped the first ever hint as to the direction it would take with its consumer portable, referred to before only as P1. It registered 3 trademarks - MacMate, WebMate, and MyApple. The information-starved Mac community leapt upon this information, trying to find what these three names told us: not a lot. What follows before is of course pure conjecture, so don't place your company's future on it, but here's my take on what Apple might be planning to do.

The names MacMate and WebMate bear more than a passing resemblance to eMate. Mate is of course a trendy yet natural, informal yet capable-of-being-taken-seriously name. It's the sort of name that could sell a few thousand more models than something like, oh, Newton MessagePad 130. Previously, I'd thought they might call the P1 the iMate.

But if you want to include something in your product's name that will really help it fly off the shelves, go for 'Web.' To me, the name WebMate suggests that Apple may have got it right at last. Just imagine, if you will, a MessagePad capable of accessing the web remotely without wires [and Apple has been researching how to do just this for the past year or so]. Just imagine a PDA running a version of MacOS [and Apple has said the P1 will run just this - it'd beat Windows CE and PalmOS by a mile]. Just imagine more than 100,000 of these machines being bought. I can.

Of course Apple has registered three product names, not one. Another possible product might be a stationary version of what was outlined above, which plugged into your TV, bringing the Internet to your arm chair - a set top box. Ker-ching! goes the cash register, as thousands more P1s fly off the shelves. As to a third product/service, I hope we can discount MyApple - it sounds incredibly naff.

Meanwhile, Apple has lowered the iMac's price to \$29.99 [\$29.99 per month finance, before you run out with your cheque book] A pretty good deal - no wonder even supermarkets are stocking iMacs now ;-). But it's not so much the deal [which is per month, folks] that interests me, although I think it's a bloody good one. It's the reason for the deal. You see, reports were coming in that sales of the iMac were falling, and this at the height of the Christmas buying season too.

The pressure from sub-\$1,000 PCs was getting too intense. While Apple's approach is clever,

they could also have chosen a simpler remedy - make iMac one of those sub-\$1,000/£1,000 PCs. The price is getting positively ridiculous for a home computer. Yes, Apple will probably cut the price after Christmas, but really it could have boosted the sales hugely by cutting into those fat margins and reducing the price beforehand. Anyway, I'll close with this song, to be sung to the tune of 'The night they drove old Dixie down':

The lesson is, you can't live long
Unless you market to the clueless throng.
The night they sold old Netscape down,
And all the browsers were corporate...

Feedback is welcomed - send it to:

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