

elcome to Macintalk, my series of monthly interviews with people who make a difference in the Mac world and beyond. This month Macintalk interviews two very different computer users — different in several ways.

Tom Siegman used to use a Mac. Now he doesn't. Does that mean he's joined the Dark Side? I think not. Tom is a great guy, so find out why he left the Mac (at least for now).

Lance Brown is a student with an extraordinary Mac and a consuming interest in using it. He also works hard at his studies, his other obligations, and his relationships. Most importantly, he reads Apple Wizards.

Read the following interviews and come to you own conclusions about what this means for the future of the Mac. And, as always, please write me with your comments, suggestions, critiques, and suggestions for future interviews. I can always be reached at bruce@applewizards.net .

Interview conducted: 18 February 1999

Tom Siegman is an expert in International Consumer Marketing and Strategic Planning, and has over 20 years' experience working with computers. He is fluent in Japanese and received his Master's Degree in International Management from Thunderbird in Arizona. He is known among friends as "The Consultant's Consultant" for his ability to create unique, customer-focused solutions. Tom can be reached at Tom@siegman.net .

Bruce Klutchko: Tom, you used to use a Mac. What kind of machine did you

use?

Tom Siegman: I started out on an SE with twin floppies and a 45 MB hard drive. My last Mac was a godforsaken PowerPC 6500 that I'd maxed out on RAM.

BK: Tell us about when you first got it, and how you used it. What kind of software did you primarily run?

TS: My use of Macs has always been primarily office stuff: word processing, number crunching, email, presentations, graphics, etc. In recent years I added Web work to the mix.

BK: At that time, how did you like it? Did you have PC envy, or was it considered a good alternative.

TS: At first the best software was always written for the Mac: FoxPro, Excel, Word, Illustrator. In recent years the Mac has had some software advantages, but more often Mac software was developed as an afterthought, or not developed at all.

BK: Although I have to say that Office 98, with Word and Excel, is actually better than what is currently available on the PC. Recently you started using a Wintel PC, and a pretty good one at that. Tell us about which one you are using.

TS: I have a custom-built machine: AMD 300 MHz Processor, 128 MB RAM, DVD, ZIP, the full wazoo (as of 6 months ago. Now it's all obsolete.) I also put in a high-speed internet connection.

BK: Which software do you run, and how are you using it?

TS: Just the usual. No games, just office stuff. Plus I have my Palm Pilot connection.

BK: You mentioned the Internet. I understand you have a really fast form of home access, one most of us had never heard of. Please tell us about this.

TS: I use TSI Cable's T4 wireless internet connection. The upstream is a simple 33.6 through phone lines. The downstream, though, is a blistering 400-700K using microwave broadcasts from the Empire State building. It's

way faster than an ISDN, at a fraction of the cost.

BK: Now the question that a lot of our devoted Mac readers do not want to see the answer to — what were your reasons for the switch?

TS: I had three reasons for switching: First, I was about to switch jobs and realized that I needed to get up to speed on the equipment that most companies use. Second, I was very tired of not being able to freely exchange documents and files with non-Mac users. Third, my Mac kept crashing, the software was a generation behind, and the situation showed no sign of improving.

BK: With the advent of Office 98, most of us can now transparently interchange the most commonly used files (Word and Excel) with PC users, but I know it can be hard to exchange files from other programs. How do you like your PC?

TS: It's a damn fine machine... except that the word "Microsoft" seems to be tagged on everywhere — it's like this damn kid who keeps jumping up and down yelling "I'm the one that did it! I did it! Look at me!"

BK: I know that your Mac would be considered antiquated by today's standards, but how would you compare the two machines? What is better about your PC? What was better about your Mac?

TS: I can't compare. My PC is fast and — by comparison — stable, and seems to do what I ask it to. And once I got used to the two-button-plus-wheel mouse, it was very hard to go back to the "hold the command key with your left hand while you triple-click" mouse. I miss the sense of extraordinary software that accompanied the early Macs, but that's been missing for a while. I also miss the fabulous Apple customer support. Oh, wait, there never was any customer support from Apple. Now I just call up the guy who built it for me.

BK: Many Mac users develop a sense of camaraderie, or a feeling that they are a part of something larger. Did you feel that?

TS: I did. Heck, I went and worked for Apple for a while and wore their T-shirts proudly.

BK: Do you feel that with your PC? Is it fun?

TS: No, the PC is not fun. It's not hip. Neither is my toaster. I wish it were. But, more than being hip Apple used to stand for elegance of design. I sense that this is coming back, but it was gone a long time.

BK: How was the setup and installation of your PC and its software. Did you do it yourself, or was it done for you?

TS: It was mostly done for me. I've added stuff since, and the wizards make things easy. I am sure the Apple is easier, and better at cleaning out old files. But long-gone are the days — with either machine — where I could easily browse through system folders or ".exe" files and know what every piece of code did.

BK: Have you installed other software yourself? How did it go?

TS: Yes I did. It was easy.

BK: From your unique perspective, how do you see the future of the Mac in business?

TS: The key question is, what is going to be the role of computers in business? Will people move toward a more stable UNIX platform? Will applications be written in Java with GENIE interfaces? Will we lose the "One computer does it all" model for component-based systems? Will the new Macs be able to easily run software written for Windows? Who will make the first "crash-free" computer at a reasonable price?

As long as Apple can keep its focus on Ease-of-Use, Operational Elegance, and Human Interface they will keep doing better. Jobs is doing a great job in rallying the troops. But he's doing an even better job in getting folks to concentrate on things that really matter. The new colors are nice. But if they didn't have great machines underneath, it would be moot.

BK: I understand that you are now looking for new work, having outgrown your old position. Tell us more about what you do and who you would like to do it for.

TS: Too many companies make a product and then look for ways to sell it to the consumer. I want to find a management consulting position in which I can help companies use the new IT technologies to flatten their organizations even further, and focus on all their customers, both external

and internal. This would let me combine my expertise in International Consumer Marketing and Strategic Planning, with my passion for new technologies.

BK: I assume that your job choice will be platform-independent.

TS: The platform a company uses can say a lot about what sort of place they are.

BK: Do you get caught up at all in the platform wars?

TS: No.

BK: What do you think of the DOJ-Microsoft trial?

TS: Microsoft is a monopoly, and even though the folks who work there are nice, the whole attitude of the company is less than pleasant. I would hope that MS would get broken up into several parts — a company that does operating systems, one that does software, one that does online services, one that works with emerging technologies. Once broken up, the companies should be allowed to encroach on each other's territory, but not to rejoin for about 7 years. By that time other OSEs will have had time to take root. Meanwhile, Bill G. would get even richer off the split, as the market would reward each Baby Bill's focus on a core competency.

BK: Will MS lose?

TS: One can dream, can't one?

BK: If you allow your mind to wander, say, seven years into the future, what do you see as the future of the computer? What will they be able to do, and what kinds of new things will we be doing with them?

TS: Some of this we already know — convergence will bring together the computer, phone, shopping, video, music, and publishing. People will readily make their own video shows and upload them for others to watch. No longer will we think "What's on TV?" Instead it will be "What do I want to watch now?" The networks will be dead, except as brandname content filters. (News will be CNN, Hip will be CNET, etc. MSNBC will still be talking about the impeachment trial.) Much more of people's lives will be taken care of for them, as automated banking is beginning to do. VISA and MasterCard will

know too much about us and sell it to the highest bidder.

Computers, meanwhile, will get smaller and easier. Individual appliances will have their own CPU hookup. Otherwise, people will move away from having their own CPU, and more toward a thin-client/server set up where one buys computer access in the same way we buy TV (with our money or our eyes — watching ads). Few people generate their own electricity. They don't run their own phone company. Why have a computer — just plug in!

Companies will have far fewer computers as they concentrate on their core competencies and outsource all non-core functions to other companies. But you knew all this already.

Computers will be able to interface much more readily, and be far more user-oriented than they are now. We will wear them without thinking it odd.

The biggest change will be in our educational system. Computers have the capacity to swiftly shift teaching styles and provide individual attention to students. Moreover, they can tell whether or not a student has actually learned what is being taught. Students who learn from the new teaching machines will learn more, and have lots of fun doing it.

HAL: THIS IS HAL: YOU EVEN LIKE YOUR PC BETTER THAN ME, DON'T YOU, TOM?

TS: Gee HAL, I didn't know that you liked my PC.

Lance R. Brown has a writing background. He began his studies in chemical engineering at Carnegie Mellon University last fall. A full scholarship from Naval ROTC supports him. He sends email, browses the Web, writes papers, and runs RC5 "constantly" on a G3/300 with OS 8.5.1, 160 MB RAM, 12 GB hard drive, and XClaim VR/TV, with two 20" monitors, and four sets of speakers. Y'know, a typical dorm room setup. This is his icon:

Lance Klutchko: Lance, you received a pretty cool Mac for a high school graduation present. Why did you decide to go with a Mac?

Lance R. Brown: In a high school where I had a choice, I always chose

Macs. I was the guy that knew how to fix anything that could go wrong with a Mac and had the utmost confidence that little would go wrong if I got the best Apple made.

BK: I got a \$10 Schlockmobile car for my graduation present — why were you so lucky?

LB: The way my parents and I see it, I'm going to a \$30,000 school, and thanks to my ROTC scholarship it ends up costing about one fifth that. Comparatively, \$2000 for a solid piece of equipment that will last all 4 years isn't much to pay. So think of it as a "cheap present" ;-)

BK: What is the percentage of Macs vs. Wintel boxes at Carnegie Mellon?

LB: Unfortunately not as good as I would like. The overall percentage is like 10% Macs, 60% Wintel, and 30% Linux/UNIX/other.

BK: When you speak (electronically or otherwise) with your fellow students, who seems happier with their computers — the Wintel or the Mac people?

LB: Wintel users are usually satisfied, especially if they're experienced using their machine. Mac users, on the other hand, seem more intrigued by their computers. It's that old "my Toyota Camry gets me there the same as your BMW" thing.

BK: We know which one is the BMW. Does this affect your happiness with your choice of platform?

LB: Definitely.

BK: So which way do you use your Mac more, for leisure and fun or for work?

LB: Slightly more on the leisure side, thanks to email. [Ignoring the argument that Macs increase productivity.] But there's the "work" side of email too...

BK: Which are your favorite games and leisure software? Honestly now, how much time do you spend playing them?

LB: With such a kick-ass gaming machine, I don't in get as much gameplaying as I'd like to. I probably average an hour a week.

BK: ROTC must really be getting its money's worth if that's all the time you spend playing games!

LB: I really like Unreal even though I'm not a big first person shooter guy. My genre of choice is Warcraft II/ Command & Conquer.

BK: As a chemical engineering student, you probably have some serious uses for your Mac in addition to all the fun things we know you like to do (especially with 8 gigs of stuff available on the campus network). What are they? How does your G3 stack up as a serious machine, especially as regards the availability of "serious" software?

LB: The academic stuff that I use it for now uses traditional programs like AppleWorks and Excel. I have used Graphing Calculator to help with Calc and I'm getting into Maple (advanced mathematical software). Unfortunately, though, the engineering software I will be using later in my career here is mucho-expensive stuff that I will have to use in a lab, either on Wintel machines or Unix (or SGI) machines. Note that it would not help to have a Wintel in my room to use this stuff.

BK: We can forgive you for using VPC. Lord Jobs is an iCEO of compassion. How good a Windows machine is a G3 with VPC?

LB: It's faster than my roommate's Pentium 75 MHz, but not immensely. I typically only give it 16 MB of memory (but I question whether it deserves that much!). I'd guess that it acts like a P133.

BK: Can your Windows-flavored fellow students still respect you with this platform?

LB: Some of them are caught up in their NT or Linux and can't get past that, but the Windows 95/98 people are usually willing to notice that Macs do a lot of things better.

BK: See, some degree of intellectual honesty still exists among students. But how about the morning after — do they still respect you? (Oops — sorry — wrong article.) Which software do you mostly run on VPC?

LB: Actually, through a design flaw in VPC, the PC can't share an IP address with the Mac. That's harmless for the Mac, but the PC can't use internet [on the school network] at all. It can connect to the campus network, though, and that is about all I use it for. This can be an academic function, by the way, because sometimes I have to submit homework electronically over the Windows network. Mostly, VPC is there "just in case."

BK: You have been using Connectix Virtual Game Station (see review elsewhere in this issue). How does it compare in terms of playability, and compatibility, with the Real Thing from Sony? My eight year-old son plays Nintendo 64 now. Should I start weaning him onto Playstation so he could use CVGS?

LB: Believe it or not, I will make a claim of 100% performance on my computer. In fact, it seems the G3 has better CD-ROM hardware so it actually loads faster! I don't even have to disable extensions. The only catch is that my controller looks nothing like a playstation controller, so if you've played a game on the real thing it will take some getting used to.

BK: Your G3 was really the best thing until the Blue and White G3's just released. Is it still cool, or are there some features you long for?

LB: I almost sold my G3 when the new ones came out because I wanted so bad to have the new video card. The PC people get way better performance on Unreal because they have Voodoo2 cards and I'm using the onboard RagePro. However, Firewire and USB right now are no-sells because I have little use (or room!) for more peripherals.

BK: You know, I interviewed the folks at Micro Conversions last October. Their Voodoo2 card more than evens the score with those PC guys... Now on to politics. Does the Microsoft case get a lot of attention on campus? How do you and your fellow students feel about this? Has Microsoft brought us the New Age in computing, or has it brought us the Dark Ages? Should MS be broken up into Baby Bills?

LB: It's not that hot an issue considering the computer-defined lifestyle here. I have mixed feelings about Microsoft. They've put out a few good products recently, namely Office '98 and IE 4.5. But they deserve very little credit for moving computing forward. They seem to have left that responsibility, as usual, with Apple.

BK: Right now you are on the beginning of a road towards what could be a

great future. As you look towards that future, what do you see yourself doing in about seven years? Do you see yourself using a Mac at that time?

LB: I can't say what my employer will require, but I can't imagine that I'd have anything else for personal use. In seven years I'll be fulfilling my NROTC commitment as an officer in the Navy. Maybe I'll have a "G6" laptop with a wetsuit. Oh wait, they already look just like wetsuits.

BK: With all of the past confusion at Apple Computer, and now all the recent hype, where do you see Apple heading? Is it a viable platform for the future?

LB: If it's not, computing's gonna suck. Apple has put the smack down as far as putting the arcane floppy to rest and nurturing the USB and FireWire interfaces. They know how to push computing forward like no one else. USB, with all of its advantages and its widespread installed base, stagnated until Apple forced the issue. If they're not around to continue this leadership, I don't know who could fill their shoes.

BK: Will all the MP3, CD, and audiovisual equipment you have in your room, it must be quite a babe magnet. Which is more important these days on campus — a hot car, excelling in a varsity sport, or having a hot computer setup?

LB: Well, I'd better downplay the car since I don't have one. But on this campus, I think it just might be the last anyway!

hanks, Tom and Lance, for sharing your thoughts with us. Although both Tom and Lance are at very different stages of their lives, both have in common that they each have at least one foot in Wintel World. This shows our readers what it is like for many Mac users in the real world. Most of all, it should help you Mac users to feel good about the choice of computer you have made. After all, with a little effort, you can cope in a PC world. On the other hand, there is nothing that PC users can do to enjoy the advantages and opportunity of using a Mac.

If there is a someone in the Mac community that you are dying to learn more about, please let me know. We would love to hear your suggestions and your comments about my column.

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