y, How Time Flies (and My Computer Crawls)

The other day, I was making my daily rounds of Mac news sites when I came upon a few interesting articles at Mac OS Rumors (located at http://www.macosrumors.com/ for all of you Web-heads out there) discussing future Macs and their expected performances. We've all gotten used to these reports because they all go something like this:

Sources within Apple indicate that the company plans to ship a 4 GHz processor (code named Moe) by the end of 2000. Moe will be a 5th generation PowerPC processor and will be much more efficient than current G3 and prototype G4 processors. Using a new Kryptonite adhesive process, the chip runs much cooler and can actually be powered by a team of five hamsters with wheels or 6 potatoes connected in series. Apple will offer Moe in laptops with an option to simply run the computer off of a bag of potato chips for up to 7 hours at a time. And of course, Moe will be fully backward compatible with the Gossamer, Hopscotch, and Dogbert as well as future motherboard designs...

Every time I read one of these articles, I run through a range of emotions. As, I'm reading the news I'm in the "This is so [bleep]-ing cool!" mode." Then I quickly move into the "Those wacky guys at Apple" mode as I read all of the code names and try to figure out what they mean. Eventually I fall into a "I'm really impatient to get one of these computers even though I can't believe that they'll really be out in only a year or so" mode.

Even though it's been proven time and time again that computer performance doubles every 18 months (a fact that has only been stressed in a half dozen CIS classes I've taken), I still find it hard to believe. I mean really, I've been writing for Apple Wizards for about that long! Has my computer really been lapped that many times since I've gotten this job? Is Gustav really that slow, or is it the beige that's holding him back? Will painting racing stripes on the side help? Maybe he needs a new carburetor?

he Future of Computing...

Sources like MOSR continue to publish what future designs will be like and they always seem to be on the mark... that is of course unless they fall into that psychic protection clause. Nobody remembers what you said a year ago... so say all you want about the future and then when the future really comes, claim to have predicted it. So, as I dream about these quantum processors and the shedding of the current archaic system of computing... I figure one of these days, someone will develop a processor so fast, that no one will take a 2 minute nap waiting for their computer to start up. Until then, we should look back and see where we've been over the years. I've developed a brief time line to show you how we've progressed, and how every sarcastic remark I've made so far will probably be shoved in my face next year when everything comes true.

...and the Past

Late 1800s - 1939
This was the early era of computing. Most computers were a woven
mesh of wood and steel, incorporating a steam-powered processor to
compute simple tasks. Very unpopular because of their high cost, only those who could afford to pay for help to constantly refuel the computer with the coal needed to make it work were able to purchase them. This was the last time processor speed was measured in Torr.

1940s
Known as the early industrial computing age, many computers
were now powered with electricity. They were so large that entire
villages were hired just to dust them. Computers were mostly used during the war to plot out troop movements, break secret codes, and when all else failed, to be dropped on the enemy. Most people of today wouldn't recognize these machines as computers, since most of them implemented a complex series of pulleys and gears to flip a coin for random number calculations.

1950s
Using newer technology and 50s flare, the computer was given black
horn-rimmed glasses and chrome-plated fins for that truly aerodynamic feel. The machines were cut down to the size of a small apartment, and their weight was actually comparable to a Chevy.

Experts generally agree that this was the golden age of computing. While there weren't many of the great technological innovations in computing that we enjoy today, like color monitors and stereo sound, they didn't know much about viruses or computer terrorism. This was the time before the annoying "Good Times" email.

1960s

IBM rung in a new era by breaking the 5 MHz barrier in mid-decade.

Hydroelectric-powered computers took off as environment-friendly

reforms rocked the industry. This changed quickly, however, as early programmers learned that water and electricity don't work well together (wear those static bands!). This was the first real depletion of programmers in the field, continuing up to today. One of the biggest things of this decade was the release of the Vinyl-ROM. Not only could it play standard records, but it could store up to 20k of info per side. Although steel needles caused loss of data over time, this was still a hit with the "cool" people.

1970s

Nothing really happened until mid-decade, when the two Steves

started collaborating and made the first Apple computers. The rest

of the decade has been unanimously agreed upon to be considered completely useless... unless you like disco. Viruses became more popular in this decade, because let's face it, there wasn't really anything else to do. This is when 8-track backup tapes became popular to save your data in case your system went down.

1980s

Apple continued to amaze the industry with better and faster personal computers. There is still a serious depletion of programming talent, although now, most programmers are lost to the asylums after experiencing "Clinical Blue Screen Syndrome" as opposed to the aforementioned water/electricity mistakes of the past. The industry neared a breaking point until Apple released the Macintosh with a graphical interface like none other... and the world was saved.

1990s

Somehow, the industry managed to survive this long despite Dell,

HP, and a few others who preferred to sell computers "any color as

long as it's beige." Candy-colored, and eventually, candy-

flavored computers hit the market like wildfire. This decade also had its share of pitfalls. Companies like Intel missed the mark, creating computer designs that were neither good-looking nor functional. On top of it all, they did the unthinkable, by continuing to put Intel processors in computers. The decade closed out with Microsoft releasing 10 consecutive pieces of doctored video evidence in every one of its court cases. This was enough to convince Bill Gates that all of their lawyers should be taken out and be shot, while a new batch of Microsoft Barney dolls were put in place to represent the company. Microsoft actually won two cases based on that decision.

hat's Next?

Here are a few of my predictions for what might happen after 2000 (this should be good reading in about 10 years or so):

• Dell will try to get in the style market, like Apple, but will fail miserably with the release of computers available in three colors — harvest gold, avocado green, and coppertone. This will excite a very small number of people who still have working appliances in those colors.

• Steve Jobs will hire a bunch of people, and fire a bunch too, but will always make interesting keynote addresses. Eventually, he will become so powerful and popular that his likeness will grace the boxes of his own brand of vegan treats. At the height of his popularity, he will be the CEO of 16 companies at once.

• Microsoft will attempt to buy the open source of Linux and will come close to getting away with it. It will also patent 3,000 common, everyday items just so it can scare small companies into paying royalties for using a Microsoft-designed can opener.

• Every musical will be redone by a rap group by mid-2000 with Oliver being the last holdout until Master P releases "Olivah." This has nothing to do with computing, but it's a prediction, nonetheless.

There are so many possibilities in front of us. And as each prediction comes and goes, I will probably still be here writing for Apple Wizards and looking for a real job. Just remember, if I'm right about any of this, you can't say that I didn't warn you. Just like a bad Steven King miniseries is always inevitable each season, so are my accurate predictions. See you next month.

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