The InkBlot
We write so you don't have to

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Mac Daddy

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Although many users try to assert the superiority of a Mac over a PC, and vice versa, the differences between the two operating systerms are distinct and specific to their individual architectures, making many points moot. The main difference is their separate characteristics in the loci of art and programming. We find that while the Mac is capable of the same programming functionality as a PC, that this "code world" is more often governed primarily by the whims of imagination and creativity.

The Microsoft OS is packed with a very powerful and highly professional attitude attendant to its code-writing and traditional code-generation existence (designed to alienate millions of users, create a world monopoly, obstruct learning and quite possibly thinking). Biases and conspiracy theories aside, is this "ease of use" factor really necessary to the seasoned programmer?

One finds that the typical thinking attached to one operating system or other based on usability (though helpful to those untrained in the computer "lit") is really just that, a way of thinking. The Mac is capable of many functions which the Microsoft platform is adept at, and vice versa. Neither machine is total or omnipotent; able to solve the Y2K bug, do your trig homework, and broadcast quality bideo before bedtime, but that day is coming soon with improved technology. In fact, a whole new era is approaching from the glare of a bleak horizon, an din many respects, the Mac OS is leading that revolutionary era. So many times the greatest tools are not at all from the distance horizon, but from the vast subterranean soil of a now global underground right beneath our very feet.

Even on the surface, a translucent toy like the iMac is certainly a more attractive, even to those gun-toting users who would much rather shoot one due to its lack of a 3.5 disk drive, poor speakers, and crappy mouse. The idea is that none of these complaints hold any weight in a world governed by immense graphic files, pure Internet savvy, and a good work ethic. Okay, so owners of iMacs may lack a little in the work ethic category, but hey, they're fun. Right?

The points remain--a 3.5 disk holds a maximum capacity of 1.44 Megs, whereas even a basic web monkey is likely to need more than 5 Megs to actually design a decent graphic...and print design is exponentially larger. So, what's the point? Well, the onboard speakers do little to remedy this. That's a good argument, until you realize that a PC doesn't come equipped with either a set of speakers OR a soundcard. The point? Okay, so the mouse leaves a lot to be desired.

Cosmetic differences aside (hey, I did have a very valid point with the whole 3.5 disk capacity thing, huh?), the iMac is only the lowest common denominator in a design dynasty which has been consistently proven to beat any Pentium class processor hands down. The newest version of the G series, the G4, is actually classified as a national threat since formerly "uncrackable" codes generated in the Pentagon are now susceptible to its blazing processor speed (read: encryption). Speed is a valuable commodity to users working with anything but text scripts and fish prompts. Apps be damned, today's design guru needs only a few weeks of tutoring, a fast computer (which can conceivably eliminate taxation all together), and a vast disregard for variables of design which have so little to do in the gray realm of arithmetic as they do in color and arrangement.

But what about the lack of third party developers, the virtual lockdown imposed by Gates at any given software outlet, and the difficult problems of compatibility between platforms? Well, the answers aren't simple and they pose some of the most conceited quandaries imaginable to the workaday user of either system. But an important motto to be held in mind

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is the fact that a cross-platform design tool is much more likely to be better for your design in general (Adobe, Macromedia, anyone?) and less likely to fall prey to the limitations imposed by one or the other systems. In fact, the need for platform specific programs is commonly affected by a licensing of popular products for one system in direct relationship to previous marketing statistics which will contend that the modification of that program can sell more than already vital applications that have been doing the same job for years on the original system (i.e. voice activated applications known to Mac users since the early '90's are now an innovation of recent Microsoft commercials which tout "hands-free" typing apps a near decade later).

There are more examples of porting, or conversion from a small company like, say, Mac, to a much larger and more highly advanced marketing machine like, oh, maybe Microsoft, which change the way we work.

Examle 1: HyperCard, the first fully scriptable multimedia presentation application developed by Mac and then ported to the PC as a little technology known as PowerPoint. Many of you have used this before.

Example 2: A bit of history, the invention of a GUI System (read: gooey like the ugly Chihuahua which many of you TV owners view any given hour of the day. It stands for Graphic User Interface and is just that), Xerox Park's own, is now the only conceivable interface known to users of all systems. This little interface is what many call Windows, star to modern technologies' continuing saga of "upgrade or die."

Example 3: Applications designed for desktop publishing of any genre, audio, video, audiovisual, layout, vector, web multimedia were originally pioneered on the tiny, beige powerhouse known as Macintosh, then shamelessly ported to the uncurbed beast known as Microsoft, due to popular demand.

The ideas aren't new, they are only tested, marketed, and reinvented by media specialists, but to keep an otherwise harmless critique of the Mac OS compared to the Microsoft Monopoly from careening into a senseless jabber of secret plots and utter paranoid "word salad," as many of us Mac users are likely to launch into at any given moment (right Linda?), the author will return his/her eye to the more refined advantages of the current age.

Anything you can do on a Mac, you can do on a PC; just not as fast, nor as empirically detailed, or as stylish (hey, I just got my "revision B" to say "haute couture") as you can on the Mac OS. That is the essential difference between a highly usable, highly portable (listen up college travelers) and highly versatile tool compared to a simple computing machine. It must be quick, good-looking, and utterly intellectually stimulating, much as a good mate must be to a bachelor or bachelorette in the market. Hence the title. And for all of you lovely ladies out there, this writer does have a G3 333 Mhz processor with an honest 96 Megs of RAM and plans to upgrade in the near future.

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Professional Writing Updates

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Portfolio samples, hard and soft copies, are being collected to provide future students with an idea of what Professional Writing is all about. Contact Kelly at <kellygal@purdue.edu> for more information on the what, where, and when.

Susan Hazel is almost to the point of begging for recipes to include in our fund raising project. Your mission is to send her original recipes. At this point, we've accepted the fact that none of us is Chef Boyardee, so don't worry about performance anxiety. Mail your recipes (good or bad -- Susan will try them all out in her kitchen) to <shazel@purdue.edu>.

As many know, the first Computer Colloquium, headed by Amanda Cross, was a success. This should encourage the rest of us to brave the same waters and help host a tutorial. For info, contact Amanda at <amay1@purdue.edu>.

The next meeting of the PW Club will be April 5 at 6:30 in HEAV 320 (note different time). We will have guest speakers from Simply Written, an Indianapolis-based documentation company.

Spring is in the air!