

IN PURSUIT OF IMPORTANT TECHNICAL TRIVIA

AND OTHER OXYMORONS

LORNE'S GUIDE TO AVOIDING Y2K BURNOUT

BY LORNE CHERRY

SO YOU REALLY HATE READING SOFTWARE MANUALS, computer trade journals and other techie gibberish? Life's too important to immerse yourself in geek speak — that's for people with very thick glasses and very thin social lives and is not apropos for an up-and-coming, left-brained socialite like yourself. For you, technology is just the justification of justifying your Machiavelian approach to getting through yet another day of creativity.

But you want to keep up with what's what — after all, that wonderful new technology to which we're constantly being told to upgrade is supposed to make us more productive by enhancing our creative output — while simultaneously lowering the overall cost of doing business, and thus our blood pressure.

Better living through better technology. (Stop laughing — I can hear you from here.)

But there's too much new technology: barrages of ads, friends saying "do it this way" and upgrades to stuff that worked just

fine — until you installed the upgrade.

There is no fine line to cross, no happy medium, no finite amount of money to spend, when it comes to chasing down the moving technology target. And we're too tired anyway — we've been exposed to the upgrade ladder for the past fifteen years and it's taken over our creative lives — hell, it's taken over our entire life.

Welcome to Y2K burnout.

Well, don't fret, because this month, Lorne's done your homework assignment for you. After wading through a deluge of online cyber babble and a sprinkling of real-world testing, I've distilled some bits of important technical trivia that will keep you from hurling excess superlatives at inanimate objects, like your Mac and *Quark*. Here is a discussion of a few topics that will affect you this year or some time in Y2K. (And I promise no discussions on Y2K itself.)

ARE YOU VACCINATED FOR THIS YEAR'S DIGITAL FLU SEASON?

Used to be that viruses were mostly confined to the PC world. Some of us Mac people even viewed viruses as due punishment for using a PC to do anything that remotely resembles creativity. Well now, new evil strains of those PC viruses are incubating in your Mac hard drive, scrambling your System Folder or growing the Mac Finder into a cancerous size.

Because there are so many mutations, I won't go into specifics, but suffice to say that over 20% of the Mac systems admitted for service at our shop are virally infected. If they are lucky, discharge takes place with no data loss and hard drive intact. But they also leave with a big service bill — OHIP doesn't cover digital influenza, and neither does your manufacturer's warranty.

Norton 5.0 (make sure you get the 5.02 upgrade from the Web) or, better yet, Dr. Solomon's *Virex* are now must-have programs. Although not as well known as the Symantec product, *Virex* is a little more stable and less of a drag on performance. (Previous problems with the new release of *Norton* corrupting files are finally past history and now it's safe to use with System 8.5.)

But PC's still get the worst of it — last month my daughter's Pentium was admitted to our shop's hospital with a particularly sadistic virus. After creating bad sectors in the hard drive and rearranging the PC's config.sys and autoex-



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ec.bat, this pesky digital microbe erased key executables within DOS so that I couldn't edit out the evil. The end result was a new hard drive and reinstallation of everything. Yuck.

PC users can use a variety of products to inoculate themselves — Doctor Solomon is one of the favourites around here. But be sure to download updates from the net as they become available.

Until this digital flu season passes (and it never does), don't open your hard drive to strangers, keep your web downloads to an essential minimum and scan all removable media that's being introduced to your system or network.

SCSI CONTINUES TO BE THE STANDARD FOR FAST DATA TRANSFER

Ultra2 SCSI now offers you (theoretical) transfer rates of 80MB/sec and takes advantage of the next generation 10,000 RPM drives. In the past, I've discouraged such drives because they ran too hot and were too expensive. But after dropping one into a PC along with another cooling fan, I'm a convert. Access rates of 5.3MB/sec are nearly double what we've grown used to; 40 MB *Photoshop* files now open and close faster than the mouth on the radio guy who reads those annoying "dealers-may-sell-for-less-quantities-are-limited-see-store-for-details" disclaimers.

You'll need an Adaptec 2940U2 adapter and a Seagate Cheetah 9.1 GIG or other 10,000 RPM drive/controller combo, and if you're going this far, why not double up on the drives and create a high performance RAID system?

On the downside, two of these drives sound like a never-ending game of rodent ping pong — kind of a constant "click clack click clack". So if you value your quiet time, avoid a 10,000 RPM drive and choose a quieter 7,200 RPM. But if you're constantly opening and saving 50MB+ files (or you're just a speed junkie like me), then a new Ultra2 hard drive may just be your ticket to the data transfer bragging rights in your office.

On the SCSI horizon? A recently rati-

fied 160MB strain of SCSI — as the purveyors of SCSI continue to fight the encroachment of USB and IDE into the high performance data transfer sweepstakes. Look for an emerging fight between SCSI and the new, lower cost technologies, with SCSI continuing to hold the high performance ground — for now.

So don't worry about infrared, USB and IDE. SCSI is still the defacto standard for moving your unruly 200 MB *Photoshop* monsters around.

3D FOR THE REST OF US

Despite being around for 30 years, the 3D and virtual 3D side of your business is growing almost exponentially and cannot be ignored by those who want to remain constantly employed. Faster data pipelines and more realistic representations of our world, like web site "walk throughs", HDTV, and the current infatuation with computer gaming have all combined to wet the masses' appetite for more realistic 3D. And realism needs more complex tools. Dan, your fearless publisher, has made every effort to keep GRAPHIC EXCHANGE readers abreast of the latest 3D software. But what about the hardware?

If you want to know what's hot in emerging video card technologies, ask a kid. RIVA TNT, Banshee, Intel 740I and dual Voodoo 2 are terms he might banter around on the school ground, as he brags about the latest 3D gaming cards with his sub-adolescent cohorts. Indeed, my seven year old son and I have found common ground in our avid reading of COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, where we keep up on what can make our *Quake II* frame rates faster still. In pursuit of that end, our ongoing ultimate PC project will feature three graphics cards with a whopping 40MB of video memory to really tame those 3D mutants.

And it's just a matter of time before the new 3D hardware and software technologies filter down (up) to our world of *Photoshop* and *Illustrator* and

we are forced to adopt such terms as "bump mapping" and "polygon fill rates" to our creative vocabulary. In the new millenium, the term desktop publishing and graphic artist will fade away just like typesetting did, as your flat world gains new dimensions.

No, I'm not saying that 2D media is going away — there will never be a replacement for a good book or mag (breathe easier, Dan) — it's just that the world is becoming more realistic. If you can add some 3D to your digital arsenal you'll be much better prepared for Y2K and beyond, which simply means you may actually get paid what you're worth.

WHERE DOES IT ALL END?

I don't have space to talk about the new DDR DRAM that may make your memory investment obsolete in the next 24 months, or about a new strain of Ethernet cards that can quadruple throughput without you ripping out your current investment in 100BaseT. And then there's four upcoming successors to the Pentium II chip...

You're not laughing any more. I've probably confused you, maybe made you a bit angry. I'm sorry if I offended you — it's my job. Understanding what technology is, where it's going, and why, is just plain difficult — and it's not going to get any better. (I got that line from someone in Iomega tech support.) But at least I got you thinking that maybe the person with the very thick glasses wasn't so bad.

Next issue be prepared for more of the same — after a year's hiatus, I'll be at MacWorld in San Francisco, where I'll wade through the great prepress promised land to find out just what direction our mice (or Wacom tablets) are pointing in. *

—Lorne

LORNE CHERRY IS PRESIDENT OF COMPUTER GRAPHICS WAREHOUSE AND A WRITER WHO SOMETIMES FINDS TIME TO WRITE ABOUT HOW TECHNOLOGY AFFECTS OUR LIVES.

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