

PICKS

PERKS AND PARADOXES



BY LORNE CHERRY

MY ROOM WAS A 10 FOOT SQUARE “UN PETIT” BOX WITH NO air conditioning and walls thinner than Calista Flockhart sideways. Overlooking the paradoxical mixture of nouveau riche art galleries, and the not-so-nouveau riche hookers that infest San Fran’s Geary St., Hotel David’s questionable fame is vastly overshadowed by its namesake deli.

Like the hotel above it and the street below it, David’s Deli is authentic circa 1952 — serving up its own paradoxically delicious, artery-clogging, Kosher salami omelet with home fries. Yummy. But the main attraction isn’t the food. It’s the waiter. “No, you can’t have any ketchup — shut up, eat all your omelet.” This subservient server has ruled over David’s since the 60’s and is noted for his well-rehearsed combinations of verbal abuse and glaring stares that illicit frozen-in-fear responses from the unsuspecting tourists. Now, I thought that this waiter’s attitude might be an inside Jewish thing, but I’m Jewish and I was still shocked. Eat with caution at David’s. And don’t even try to order hot chocolate instead of the prescribed coffee.

GEE, I WANT A G4!

Surprising even would-be know-it-alls such as myself, Apple is now actually shipping its frightfully fast G4 systems, thereby completing the evolution of the most successful professional-level graphics workstation of the 90’s. At roughly the same price as its predecessor, yet with a significant increase in speed, the G4 is well-positioned to keep Apple at the publishing forefront.

It’s too bad the Apple pitchmen spent so much time trying to show the system’s vast superiority over a Pentium III/600. We already knew that. Yet hidden beneath the hype is true 128-bit gigaflop performance yielding mouth-watering Photoshop filter speed, seamless streaming video, and real-time 3D. The G4/500 that I put through its paces is simply the best personal workstation money can buy, leaving everything else in the dust — and that includes SGI’s new Pentium-based systems and the high-end Intergraph PC workstation. (Please stop your drooling — these pages are hard to turn when they get stuck together.)

Apple is firmly committed to ridding itself of SCSI chains. The high end 500MHz G4 sports a new 27 gig Ultra ATA/66 drive with no SCSI to be found anywhere. While considerably faster than the Ultra ATA/33 found in the entry level



Apple’s blow-you-away, price-is-no-object \$6,000 22” dream screen and its frightfully fast G4 systems

400MHz (and older G3s), I question whether these ‘fast’ IDE drives can match the throughput of the older 450’s Ultra U2 fast-wide SCSI drives. And why not a FireWire drive? Enough whining, the lack of a SCSI or FireWire drive is the only negative — and it’s a minor annoyance at best. You can always add a RAID system.

The G4 is available in three unique configurations, beginning with a sub \$2,500 CDN 400MHz, well equipped with 64MB RAM and a 10GB ATA/33 drive. A 450MHz system sporting 128MB RAM and a 20GB ATA/66 drive occupies the middle ground, while the flagship 500MHz boasts 256MB RAM and a monstrous 27GB ATA/66 drive. More important, the graphics card, hard drive and memory bandwidth of the 450 and 500 models are all double that of older G3s and the entry level 400MHz G4. Top that off with the gigaflop performance of the new processor and it’s a no-brainer to see why your Apple stock is up.

The top two G4s also feature the AirPort wireless networking, first introduced on the iBooks at MacWorld. What’s significant about AirPort is its 11mps speed. While 11mps may seem a tad slow when compared to 100BaseTX or giga-



byte Ethernet, this new technology is vastly quicker than snail-like 1.2mps wireless network solutions that exist for the PC.

And don't confuse AirPort with the failed infrared technologies that never went anywhere — in a refreshing change of pace, Apple is driving a networking technology ahead of the Wintel cartel. This time around, Apple's not just winning with performance. For

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once, an Apple innovation is also a price leader — AirPort is significantly less expensive than wireless networking for the PC. What's really cool? You don't need a base station to have two G4s talk to each other. (With more than two, you'll need an Airport Hub/base station.)

The "sweet spot" in the new G4 lineup is definitely the sub-\$3,800 CDN 450 MHz system (the 500MHz system will probably come in at \$1,500CDN more — hard to justify for the small increase in hard drive space, extra 128 MB RAM and small 50 MHz speed bump). As I write this, Canadian prices have not yet been announced;

actual Canadian "street" prices may be \$100 to \$200 less than my conservative estimates.

SCREEN ENVY

If you've already got a Porsche Boxter in the winding driveway of your country home, then perhaps you may want to ante up a few extra shekels for Apple's blow-you-away, price-is-no-object \$6,000 22" dream screen. Perfectly flat and just an inch or so thick, this pure digital double page flat panel uses DVD's 16/10 aspect ratio (letter box) format to display an image Apple claims is twice as bright as any conventional screen. Unlike even the best of the new flat CRTs, I saw no distortion whatsoever in the corners and long vertical straight lines were actually straight.

What remains unclear is how well Apple's flat panel display calibrates for WYSIWYG color and at what color temperature. As the price is smack dab on that of Barco's Personal Reference Calibrator 20" monitor (the top-of-the-line personal workstation monitor), I'm wondering how the two compare. The Barco rep I talked to didn't seem to be working up a sweat.

Although there's no hardware calibrator available for the flat panel screen and I didn't hear the Apple pitchman trying to represent the monitor as a color correction screen, my guess is that digital technology may not need the same constant calibration as a CRT, and in four years or so (when the price drops to \$2,000), we'll all have one of these works of art next to our G6/1550 MHz. That Barco rep *should* be worried.

If you've ever really, really, *really* wanted something, then you know how I (and you) will feel about the G4 and the 22" flat panel display. I thought I asked you to stop drooling.

XML – THANKFULLY YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.

What's driving the new web publishing technologies? XML (extensible mark-up language), a new meta-language (language used to create other languages) was all over Seybold, as a hot seminar topic and exhibit focus.

I know enough about the web to know I know nothing, partly because the technology changes before I even have a chance to try it out. Thus I'll leave many of the technical aspects of the overnight XML migration craze to other columnists and other publications...I'll present only a primer on this important new publishing tool.

Because of XML's neutrality (it's both application- and machine-independent) this relatively new twist on an old technology greatly simplifies the task of cross-platform publishing. With the web's heavy back-end links to databases, credit card verification, scripts that advertise add-ons, tie-ins, suggestive selling and discounts, no one has time to hand code cumbersome HTML.

Why? In the race for e-commerce market position, time to market is everything. And XML simply allows you to get there first, way ahead of the hand coders. We Mac folks have always detested anything that resembles hand coding — seems the rest of the

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WORKFLOW SYSTEM

Creo

www.creo.com

Creo and Heidelberg show Prinergy Extreme-based workflow

The first workflow product from the joint-venture formed between Heidelberg and Creo in 1997 was unveiled at Seybold San Francisco.

Prinergy (an amalgamation of the words "print" and "energy") is based on Adobe Extreme technology and the Portable Document Format (PDF), and is an integrated, state-of-the-art workflow management solution that organizes and automates the individual tasks in prepress and in the produc-

tion of film and plates.

Prinergy is scalable to a multi-server, multi-user environment. Software and hardware components are independent and can be added or upgraded individually as required.



publishing world is finally following our lead.

ASSET MANAGEMENT — THE TECHNICAL TERM FOR WHERE IS IT?

Along with XML, the other popular buzzword at Seybold was asset management.

Asset management is far more than keeping track of a few tiffs beached on your dusty Syquests and Zips. In fact, it may (and should) become your only method of organizing all the files which make up your work.

The central theme of asset management is a core database, acting as a hub, where all digital assets are catalogued. (A digital asset can be any file that you use for print, on your web site, archived on tape, used by your clients, etc.) The databases that organize these files range from simple proprietary stand-alone flat file systems managing a few PhotoDisc images, to complex Oracle 8-based engines linked to enterprise-wide databases that manage terabytes of data from world-wide locations.

During Seybold, I looked at ten or so of the most popular asset management systems ranging in price from the single user US\$99 versions of shrinkwrapped off-the-shelf software to US\$500,000 customized cross-platform enterprise publishing systems.

Wait!, you say. What does this have to do with graphic arts? — I could care less about cross-platform, enterprise publishing systems! And I won't have \$500,000 until next payday.

Listen up. Like it or not, designers must now, more than ever, interact with IS technologies and IS departments. (If you're a one- or two-man band, then you are the IS department and therefore need to know this stuff.)

The key word(s) to understanding the need for asset management is cross-platform. Today's designers must not only design; they must design for many different platforms simultaneously.

These include: standard HTML web sites, dynamic web sites, push channels, Web TV, kiosks, CD-ROM, DVD, interactive point of purchase, and 'good old' print. (And you thought being a designer was simple.) The prerequisites of cross-platform publishing require thought, planning and the organizational tools of a central database.

What do you get for \$500,000 that you don't get for \$99? How about the ability to simultaneously publish on-the-fly to both print and the web! Every time you update your Quark file, the proprietary cross-platform system



automatically builds the corresponding web page from templates without your intervention.

Suppose that you're responsible for publishing a quarterly 400-page catalog, four monthly flyers, plus technical updates on CD, and are now expected to keep the company's 600-page web site current. Suddenly that \$500,000 you just invested has saved hundreds of man-hours per month, and most important, you're able to do the work of three people. (I know, you already do.) Home Depot, Sears and other heavy-weight advertisers use these systems as their cross-platform hubs. For these enterprise publishers of long documents, time to market is everything; thus they justify the hefty price price tag.

Now lets get back to the real world — asset management for small and mid-size corporations (under \$50 million in sales). My overall favourite tool is *Canto Cumulus*. The new version 5 starts at just US\$99 and is ideal for single workstation designers. *Cumulus*

keeps track of over 120 file formats with support for all removable media, including Retrospect-based tape backup. Moving up, the workgroup edition of *Cumulus* is a fully loaded asset management and content distribution system for US\$2,495 that allows five users to simultaneously update data.

Finally, Canto will do on-site customization if you need to integrate their asset management tools into an existing web site or database (we're about to do all this). I thus hope to do a full review on the *Cumulus* system in an upcoming issue as we've selected it as our core database to distribute royalty-free content over the Internet.

SOMETHINGS WILL HAVE TO WAIT....

My final pre-designated mission at Seybold was to seek out low cost (sub-\$1000) and mid-range (sub-\$10,000) color management systems that can take WYSIWYG from screen through to press while being fully compatible with today's popular inkjet proofers. Such systems do exist, but they are still very complex, as color management itself is very complex. For example, ICC profiles simply state differences between your devices and the ideal; those profiles aren't able to tell you if your devices are good enough in the first place for the task at hand. (This is especially true with scanners.) And you still have to deal with profile targets, spectrophotometers and gamut differences. Not fun. Thus, like asset management, color management justifies an entire article.

In retrospect, Seybold was definitely worth the trip and as an educational experience is of more value than MacWorld. With multi-platform publishing the prerequisite for success in the new millennium, you can't afford not to embark on the Seybold San Fran pilgrimage at least once in a while. Eating at David's is optional. *

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