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Feature

Where is the 'Mac'!

Some time ago, I needed to connect my cable Internet to an Apple *PowerBook* laptop that I happened to have. To help me with the TCP/IP settings, I was on the phone with the cable internet company. When all efforts failed they offered to send an "engineer" to my place. I had forewarned them that I was trying to connect an Apple Computer and not a 'PC'. The "engineer" said "no problem, any computer, we'll connect".

Once at my place, I connected the Ethernet cable, started up the *PowerBook* and handed it over to him. He first asked me, why the mouse had just one button! I just said that's the way it was. He then fiddled around while I watched a bit nervously. After a few moments he asked, "Where are the start button and the task bar?" When I told him there were none because this wasn't *Windows*, he seemed confused. How could a computer possibly run without *Windows*?

I did eventually manage without much help from him. But here was an "engineer", who was apparently quite a whiz with networks and networking, and even some basic computer troubleshooting, but didn't have the foggiest notion about how **Macs** functioned or even worse, had no clue what 'Mac' meant. So in some ways that is where the *Mac* is at now.

'Mac' still doesn't rule!



Today, Apple Computers have a global market share of 4-5 percent. In India that market share is even smaller - probably a percent! Actually, even the number-one company has only a share of about 21 percent in the world, so 4-5 percent isn't all that bad

Some days ago, I was at an Apple presentation, where I tried to ascertain the number of Apple Machines sold. I was told by some highly placed people at Apple that they don't publicly discuss the sales figures. The only information that I did get from them was that Apple had sold 2 Lakh copies of *Final Cut Pro* - their flagship editing software - world-wide. **And that India is the second largest consumer of Final Cut Pro after the US!** With these figures and some off-the-record guesstimates, I would put the sale of Apple Macs in India at a few tens of thousands Machines each year - compare this

with many Lakhs of PCs sold!

Free 'PeeCees' and costly 'Mac's'!

So is the *Mac* a niche Machine? Not any more. Until some years ago, the *Mac* was a dull beige desktop like any other PC, except that it cost twice as much - or thrice if you were in India. The launch of the colourful and innovatively designed **iMac** made the Macs really affordable and got them an entry into many homes - even in India. But Apple's India pricing vis-à-vis PCs has sometimes appeared a bit skewed compared to its worldwide pricing. To be fair though, the company is not entirely at fault. All imported goods here attract ridiculous customs duties, and Apple has to pay all of them where as the gray market does not have to! So an "assembled" PC could end up costing even half of what a *Mac* [of comparable configuration] costs. In most of the 'developed' nations on the other hand, with a non-existent gray market, Macs and PCs cost nearly the same - again, for comparable configurations.

The other factor that affects *Mac* sales is the software cost. All Macs are sold with an operating system. It's called **Panther** now, the previous one being **Jaguar** [I remember reading somewhere that Apple has registered the names of all wild felines for their operating systems. The names Jaguar, Panther, Cougar, Lion, Tiger, Cheetah, Leopard and some others have all been taken]. In addition to the OS, Apple Machines also ship with most of the software that an average user would need - to write letters, do accounts, make presentations, burn CDs and DVDs, play music, watch movies and connect to the Internet. And this software cost is built-in, not extra. So that adds up to the cost as well.

With PCs, in India at least, software is generally considered free. Free *Windows*, Free *MS-office* and even free *PhotoShop* - free anything. You can't compete with 'free'! And any manner of "free"



software abounds for PCs. Even **Windows XP**, which supposedly doesn't work without online registration is now freely available - "cracked". Users, who will use this kind of stuff, will never be Mac customers. Getting pirated *Maya*, *3DSMax*, or *Combustion* for a PC is easy, but for a Mac - nearly impossible! So even when many animators agree that animation on a Mac is much easier or even faster and better, they'll still buy a PC. Apple could hope to sell Macs to these markets only if the supply of pirated software for PCs somehow dried up. Fat chance!

So again, where is 'the Mac' at, today? Apple Macs are now available in various shapes and sizes - and of course, specifications - to fit different needs. At the risk of making this read like an Apple brochure, permit me to shamelessly gush a little. I've used Macs since 1987 [Macs supported dual-monitors even then, windows got this right in 1998!] and every one of these Macs has paid for itself and some have even fetched me decent sums of money. Even my web site and these articles I write sometimes, are all done on Macs, mostly.

The 'e' and 'i' of Mac



At the entry level there is the **eMac** - for students or homes. This is a one-piece design like the old *iMac*. It consists of a G4 processor up to 1 GHz, sitting inside a case that also houses a 17" CRT display. RAM is 128MB, expandable up to 1 GB and the hard disk is 40GB, expandable up to 160 GB. There is a CD-Writer installed, but you can get a DVD-writer if you wish.

A step higher is the **iMac** - also a home or SOHO Machine with a radical new design which resembles a table lamp. It has a 15 or 17" widescreen LCD display and a fast display adapter. All *iMacs* have CD-writers and you can get a DVD writer as well.



Apple should either give away these Machines - *eMacs* and *iMacs* - or at least make them available for a really good price, to all schools and colleges. They make excellent general-purpose Machines that rarely fail.

The Mighty G5!



Going one step higher in the Mac chain - for the professional - there are the desktop **PowerMac G5** models. G5 is the fifth generation processor. And it's made by, guess who... none other than **IBM**. These G5 CPUs are 64-bit processors, from 1.6 GHz up to dual 2 GHz models. RAM can be upgraded all the way up to 8 GB! And for these desktops, Apple makes gorgeous LCD displays from 17" up to widescreen 23" *Cinema Displays*, which have to be seen to be believed. Hard disks in G5s are the new **SATA** interface disks which can go up to 500 GB internal. Or you can add external SCSI or FireWire 800 hard disks till your room fills up with storage. Or you can get Apple's own disk array - the **X-Raid** which goes up to 2.5 TB. (Yes, they're using a unit called Terabytes which is 1000 Gigabytes). And 2.5 TB doesn't fill up a room in an X-RAID.

Grab, Cut and Dump... oh, Paint too!

G5s are targeted at the creative community [well, they are into servers also now]. And Apple makes a wide variety of software to run on these. For professional editing, there's **Final Cut Pro** or **FCP**. For high end compositing they make **Shake** - a recent acquisition - which was used in the compositing of movies like *Lord of the Rings*. With third-party hardware, these Macs can work with uncompressed video, HD and even film resolutions.

The Mac also runs **Avid XPress Pro** and **XPress DV** as well as **Avid's Media Composer** and **Film composer** software. For compositing, there are Mac versions of **Combustion** & **After Effects** and for 3D, there's **Maya** [*LightWave*, *Cinema 4D* and *Electric Image* are some how not that popular in India]. Audio editing can be accomplished with **Logic Audio** and music composition with **Soundtrack**. For professional level DVD authoring, there's **DVD Studio Pro** - all from Apple.

In all these Machines - even *iMacs* and *eMacs* - FireWire and USB ports are provided - so you can add external hard disks, drives, printers, scanners, anything USB or FireWire! Even Ethernet is present, as is a modem. And Macs connect to one another with Gigabit Ethernet, so you can transfer files

between them at unbelievable speeds. Macs are also built-in with some exciting new technologies. There's *Airport* and *Airport Extreme*, which allow cable-free wireless networking between Machines at speeds up to 54 mbps. *Bluetooth* support is also built-in to interface with *Bluetooth* devices like mobiles. And a *Bluetooth* wireless keyboard and mouse with long battery life is now available from Apple.

Finally, since the head honcho of Apple - Steve Jobs - called 2003 the year of the laptop, there is a range of portables - *iBooks* and *PowerBooks*, cute 12" models and super-large 17" models. Speeds from 800 MHz to 1.25 GHz and hard disks up to 80 GB! Mac laptops are capable of running and running well, software like *Final Cut Pro*, *Avid XPress*, *Logic Audio Cubase* and you name it!

MHz to GHz

In these descriptions on the *Macs*, you must have noted that the clock speeds of these processors are lower than that in PCs. But Apple has always maintained that MHz or GHz is not an accurate measure of performance. So they claimed that their dual 800 MHz Machines outperformed PCs of over 1 GHz. This was fine up to a point, but then Apple Machines began to lag behind - partly because of some laggard CPU development by their partner - **Motorola**. But only a month ago, the launch of the G5 brought the Mac back on track. The G5 is a 64-bit Machine unlike all PCs which are still 32 bit. The wider data pathways that 64 bit computing offers, gives the new *Mac* the potential of being many orders of magnitude faster than comparable PCs of higher GHz ratings.

To make sense of this, consider the high end video workstations, running **discreet** *smoke*, *flame*, *fire*, *flint* and *inferno*. Most video people will agree that these machines are faster than your normal 2 GHz PC, at least at crunching video effects. So just how many GHz do you think a *smoke* machine has? Well, not even 1 GHz! If you buy a *smoke* workstation today, you have a choice between single or dual 600 MHz or 550 MHz CPUs with 2MB L2 cache. And if your *smoke* is a year or two old, then it's even less. So there - Mega or Giga hertz isn't really the end of the world!

So is Apple better than Orange?

So what am I getting at? Is an Apple *Mac* superior to a PC? In some ways it is. But still, the *Mac* won't be the computer in that Udipi restaurant, down the road Or at the railway reservation office Or in banks, shopping centers, parlours etc. It isn't meant to! It's not a bean-counting Machine. So in these kinds of applications and environments, the *Mac* is probably overkill.

But in ad agencies, imaging set-ups like pre-press processors, video and audio editing suites, design firms, and other creative and graphic applications, the *Mac* rules. One reason is probably because the *Mac* seems inherently more stable. The same folks, who make the machine, make the operating system too! So they can tweak it till it works just fine. Another factor is that it does not have the normal memory and IRQ limitations that plague most PCs - so it works more smoothly with peripherals.

In fact, to really understand the true meaning of plug-and-play, connect a digital camera to a *Mac* and see how quickly you get to seeing your pictures, saving them, cleaning them, e-mailing them and burning on a CD! Or connect a *Mac* to another *Mac* or to a network and see how fast you're sharing - without reboots or *ctrl+alt+delete*!

In pro audio and video, the *Mac* has just about as many peripherals as PCs. And most of these, like capture cards, disk arrays, displays video recorders etc., cost such large amounts of money, that the PC-*Mac* price difference becomes almost a non-issue. Even DV-only editing, using a *Mac* and free software like *iMovie*, or paid software like *Final Cut Express* or *Final Cut Pro*, is a far hassle-free experience on a *Mac* than a PC. Just get a FireWire card, and use the bundled free software like *Video Studio* or *Main Actor*, or whatever, and try editing a film on PC, you'll see what I mean Or try authoring a DVD on a PC!

Macs also remain 'current' for longer. So they end up costing less in the long run because they outlast other computers. Just how many people do you know using the same computer since 1997 and doing all they did in '97 and more? I know some. They all have *Macs*!

One can really go on and on with this PC vs. *Mac* thing. Sometimes it's this way, sometimes it's the other. But in conclusion, the Apple *Mac* just seems somehow friendlier, looks cooler, glides across tasks smoothly, and makes you perform better in a way that's hard to describe. It is sort of, like 'computers done right'.

- Neil Sadwelkar

About Neil Sadwelkar



Neil Sadwelkar has little formal training, so he just about makes a living in the film & TV industry in India. His profession is a higher form of meditation through which one can deny hunger and sleep - it's called editing. In his spare time thinks hard and writes stuff like this piece above. And in whatever time is left over, he does his own accounts and chases clients for money. As you must have noticed by now, he is also shamelessly besotted with Macintosh machines and considers them as God-sent gifts

to man kind!

He builds and tinkers with computers, so some people get conned into believing that he knows a lot about computers and editing software, so they even pay him as a consultant. Really! If you love what he's written you can drop him a line at neil@misenscene.net and tell him he's the greatest. He even has

a web site dedicated to Final Cut Pro where you can take in more of his writings.

If you're a budding editor you can make him feel good by asking for advice. But if you're looking for work, don't bother because he doesn't have contacts. And if you really hate his writings, write to him and give him some work, so he has no time to write stuff like this. But don't make him chase you for money; else he'll go back to writing.

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