

The Retro Computer

Not too long ago, I visited the Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club, or C=4 show. The show was dedicated more to the Commodore 64 and others in the 8-bit generation than the Amiga, so for the sake of travel ease I brought a DVD player to show off some of my old Amiga animations, but not an Amiga itself, or my Pegasos. There was a bit more interest than I realized (I didn't really know what to expect though, so perhaps I should have). It was an interesting show, with interesting homebrewed hardware and software innovations for Commodore 64s and related systems, such as network adapters and hardware to use flash memory cards as drives. With a suitably high-capacity card, one could keep all the C64 software they ever need, if not all the C64 software ever created, in one place. I also realized a thing or two about myself. Even though I used a Commodore 64 extensively in my youth, I didn't retain a strong connection to it. I looked at all the C64 owners and fans at the show, and wondered why they hold onto an antiquated system, when more modern systems are easier to work with. The irony was not lost on me that others see Amiga users like myself in exactly the same light, so I couldn't exactly be too judgmental.

It seems to me most computers, game machines, and many technologies in general go through three stages of life. The first stage is

the "bleeding edge" stage, where a machine has yet to be generally accepted, and is often more expensive and more difficult to deal with as flaws are shaken out and support for it comes together. People buy "bleeding edge" technology either just out of geekish love for new things, prestige of owning new things, or even understanding the potential uses for the technology. Occasionally something doesn't quite catch on, and never escapes the first stage. The high point of any computer is its "useful life," when it's readily available, along with its supporting hardware and software. People buy it for reasons of productivity, entertainment, or just because others that they know have it. It's the easiest time of product life, because there's little to no hardship involved in ownership. Unfortunately it eventually and invariably comes to an end, as it becomes harder and harder to support the machine and find new hardware or software to keep it useful for newer needs. If you're really lucky, a cottage industry will crop up to provide new materials for your aging platform. The third stage is when something is classified as "retro." The only place to find "retro" gear is stores that sell used items, or maybe the Internet. The other distinction of "retro" is that the original hardware is no longer necessary, and might be substituted by a newer piece of hardware with enough power to run the necessary emulator. "Retro" is usually explored by people with nostalgia for machines they used in the past, or at least had some level of curiosity about. The downside is

that "retro" usually applies more to fun and entertainment than work and productivity. Unfortunately, the Amiga has graduated (or been demoted) to the retro category, as there is next to nothing in development for "classic" Amiga systems, and the PowerPC-based machines that try to claw back into the "useful life" category — the Pegasos and Amiga One — may have a stronger life as a Linux box than as their true calling should dictate. I'm still waiting for that stunning cottage homebrew industry I saw at the C=4 show to bring the Amiga forward again for those of us who prefer to be productive with our "antiquated" machines. We've already seen the start of an Amiga-on-a-chip project, so anything might be possible. I'd like to see AmigaOS or MorphOS become a legitimate alternative choice again, like it was back in the early nineties, so get working, cottage industry!

...by Eric Schwartz
AmiTech-Dayton Gazette
June 2006

The Campaign Against DRM

Calling themselves freedom fighters, members of the Free Software Foundation are engaging in a campaign against Digital Rights Management, which they emphatically refer to as Digital Restrictions Management.

Members donned yellow hazardous materials suits to kick off the

initiative, called DefectiveByDesign.org, in Seattle earlier this week to protest Bill Gates' keynote speech on the future of Microsoft. The direct action campaign, targeting "big media and corporations peddling Digital Restrictions Management," plans more flash protests.

Peter Brown, executive director of the FSF, is encouraging technologists to get involved. "We see this as the tip of the iceberg and it is our duty to do something about this," he said in a prepared statement. "We know about the collusion of Big Media, device manufacturers and proprietary companies to lock us down. Their aim is to put Digital Restrictions Management into all our computers and homes."

The group contends that computers, high-definition

screens, phones, music players and video players do not respect users' rights to make private copies of their digital media. That means art, literature, music and film cannot fall into the public domain and that user viewing and listening habits can be monitored, DefectiveByDesign argues.

"In any other industry, such limitations or invasions would be considered major flaws," Brown said. "A media player that restricts what you can play is like a car that won't let you steer."

Henri Poole, chairman of Civic Actions, said that calling users "pirates" equates sharing with murder and kidnapping.

AmigaMCCC News

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July Calendar

July 10 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — Grand Prairie Public Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

July 10 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

July 29 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

"Media bosses have long been the 'gatekeepers to the market' for artists," Poole said. "Now they are threatened by new distribution methods that give artists new freedoms and direct access to an audience. DRM is the media bosses' attempt to re-impose their rule."

Supporters, including the Motion Picture Association of America, claim DRM is needed to control distribution and copying of material, while protecting artists and copyright holders.

By K.C. Jones, TechWeb.com
May 26, 2006