



Fort Worth

Dallas

October 2009

OS Comparisons

Another month passes, and another meeting approaches. This month I plan to bring in my Pegasos system to show off the latest version of the MorphOS system: 2.3. I don't have any formal presentation planned, but my system and I will be available for showing off and answering questions where possible. Overall I am quite satisfied with the new version of the operating system. There's not a lot new and different about it... mostly fixing some bugs and tweaking to improve the way previous updated features work. It would seem elements of the graphics system or video card drivers were updated, as I noticed a few differences and some minor glitches that I hadn't seen before. Nothing that amounts to a real problem though. MorphOS 2.3 can be run on the Pegasos 1, 2, and Efika systems, with a version for PPC Mac Mini and possible other Mac models on the way. Unfortunately the new Efika MX system is not supported, as it uses a different CPU. See you guys at the meeting.

Not long ago, I read a few articles on MorphOS and Amiga OS4. One was a comparison between the two, which largely showed MorphOS as running faster for most tasks on the same hardware. Another was a review of Amiga OS4 on OSnews.com. The review was notable for being written by someone with no previous experience with the Amiga. It was fairly positive, though it was obvious to me (as someone with a lot of Amiga experience) that a fair amount of his issues with OS4 stem from ignorance about how Amiga

operating systems work, bias or assumption that they work like Windows or Mac. For example, he stated the system would forget window or icon positions, compared to something like a Mac, which will save things where you left them by default. The Amiga requires you to "snapshot" the object positions if you want them remembered (it was a little vague in the comments whether the snapshot function works the same in Amiga OS 4.1 as it did in 3.9 and earlier), which adds a step but gives you an extra level of control to test and check things without committing, or writing to disk if you don't want to. The same goes for preferences and settings, where you can test and use them temporarily, or save them permanently, unlike most other operating systems. It's not necessarily easier, but it's easy enough to understand and make use of the extra control when you get used to it.

I remember years back in college, when I had a graphics class that used Amigas. The instructor introduced the Amigas as "Similar to Macs, but only enough to confuse you." After years using a variety of systems, it's become clear that most people prefer what they are used to using, which more often than not is their first system (or perhaps their first operating system with a graphical interface). If that is a Windows system, then there's the breaks. Look at all the various flavors of Linux — it's pretty much possible for it to have any sort of interface you want, via any window manager and configuration, but most end up a rather direct copies of the Windows interface, to help current and former Windows users feel comfortable. It doesn't take much to provoke a trading of insults between the

Windows and Mac camps. I remember clearly in an argument someone called the Mac desktop interface "retarded" for having the window close button in a different corner than it is in Windows, or for using a "dock" instead or a "start bar." I myself felt much better after configuring the window manager on the Linux laptop into a more Amiga-like configuration (because everyone knows having a close button on the right side like Windows does is retarded). It's a pity that these preferences and designs aren't likely to change soon, at least not before the whole paradigm changes, much like the graphic user interface changed the game from the text screen and the DOS prompt. Until then, I'll remain a fan of the way Amiga (and its relatives) do things, and probably for some time afterward too.

...Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech-Dayton Gazette,
September 2009

Harwell Computer Restoration

The world's oldest, working computer to reboot after 48 years.

The historic Harwell computer, later known as the WITCH computer, came out of storage last week to travel to The National Museum of Computing at Bletchley Park where it is planned to restore it to full working condition. Once restored by the volunteers at the Museum, it will be the oldest original functioning

electronic stored program computer in the world and will be housed alongside the rebuild of Colossus Mk II, the world's first electronic computer.

The National Museum of Computing TNMOC is inviting members of the public and industry to sponsor the restoration of the Harwell computer by purchasing one of 25 shares at £4500 each. The funds will be used by TNMOC to undertake the restoration and extend the ever-expanding museum. Insight Software has become the first sponsor of the Harwell/WITCH computer restoration project.

The Harwell Computer dates back to 1949 when plans were drawn up for a machine to perform calculations then done by a team of bright young graduates using mechanical calculators. The team's work had been so tedious that mistakes were inevitable, so the aim was to automate the work. Simplicity, reliability and unattended operation were the design priorities. Speed was a lower priority concern. The machine first ran in 1951. It was a relay-based computer using 900 Dekatron gas-filled tubes that could each hold a single digit in memory—similar to RAM in a modern computer—and paper tape for both input and program storage. The Dekatron was described in Elektor March 2008.

The computer was operational at Harwell until 1957, when it was offered in a competition for colleges

to see who could make best use of it. Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College (later becoming Wolverhampton University) won and, then becoming known as the WITCH (Wolverhampton Instrument for Teaching Computing from Harwell), it was used in computer education until 1973. After a period on display at Birmingham Science Museum, it was disassembled and put in storage at Birmingham City Council Museums' Collection Centre. Their curatorial care and attention means it can still be made to work again.

Its arrival at TNMOC on 3 September will be the first stage in an expected year-long restoration challenge. The restoration project is under the aegis of the Computer Conservation Society, who have a long history of successful similar projects.

The current earliest functioning computer is the 1956 Pegasus machine at The Science Museum in London. There are functioning rebuilds of earlier machines, including the Colossus Mk 2 at TNMOC/ Bletchley Park.

Wireless Carrier Gouging

Most people complain about their cell phone carriers. But for Mike Elgan, a journalist for Computerworld.com who has been writing about technology and consumer electronics

for 20 years, the problem isn't just high prices and lengthy contracts.

In his recent article "Wireless Carriers: 10 Things I Hate About You," Elgan explained that this was an industry not only engaged in price-gouging, but whose anti-competitive practices have left the United States wireless industry lagging dramatically behind the rest of the globe.

Mike Elgan: Carriers seem to specialize in finding ways to get money for nothing. Recorded messages, the SMS charges, all that kind of stuff. Instead of innovating and competing with each other, and doing what the consumer electronics industry itself does, which is always better, faster, cheaper, better customer service and so on, carriers are just looking for ways to gouge you.

For example, Elgan points to the recent work of New York Times columnist David Pogue, who uncovered how much wireless carriers were making from longer calls by forcing consumers to listen to unnecessary instructions before leaving a voicemail.

Voicemail: At the tone, please record your message. When you are finished recording you can hang up, or press one for more options.

Mike Elgan: They make about \$620 million a year from that message. It's just a thing that they force on everybody so they can get more money.

October Calendar

October 5 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — South Grand Prairie Library
760 Bardin Road, Grand Prairie

October 5 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 pm — Location TBD

October 24 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

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