

Recent Developments

There have been a few things going on in the world of computers, not to mention the world as a whole. As I write this, Japan is recovering from a massive earthquake. I have a few friends in Japan, so my hopes and concerns go out to them, their families and friends, and their land. The only comparable tragedy is that this tragedy has not completely driven the “Charlie Sheen is nucking futz!” coverage from the airwaves.

Back to the on-topic coverage of computers and such, Apple has an online “app store” for Mac systems in the same vein as the one for the iPod/iPhone/iPad family of devices, in their ongoing drive to forever change the way software and digital content gets to consumers, who don’t necessarily get to “own” anything they buy anymore. Also of note is the announcement that Apple is “allowing” Mac apps that use their own full screen, not unlike many popular Amiga applications have since forever. Actually, contrary to the tone of the announcement, full-screen apps are not a totally alien concept on the Mac either. What Apple probably REALLY means here is to start expecting more Mac apps (especially ones from the app store) to be similar to iPhone/iPad apps. Apple may

be trying to shift their paradigms a smidge, and smudge the obvious line between the “real computers” and the mobile devices. I have no idea what the eventual goal of these movements are, though I doubt it will be easy to ignore, with the propensity of the industry at large to follow Apple’s lead more often than not.

It’s interesting to think about how science fiction reflects the time it’s made. The “far-flung future” computers of Star Trek, with their masses of lights, buttons, and big colorful tapes were far too quaint by the late 1980s, so “The Next Generation” and its related series gave us a future populated by touch-screen interfaces and small computerized pads that work the same way. Sound familiar? The 24th century is pretty much here already! OK, we can’t quite hold a scientific conversation with our computers yet, but between things like Google and that computer that beat the champs at Jeopardy, how far off can that be? Fiction has told us this kind of development either results in a utopia for all mankind, or the machines’ taking control and turning us into fuel or something. Either way, it’ll be a wild ride.

Back to the wonderful world of Amiga stuff. There has been a lot of talk about all the recent licensing of the Amiga name/trademark by the remnants of Amiga Inc. to various electronic devices from Icontain,

such as TVs, phones, computers, and possibly other stuff. There’s also the “Amiga” computer thing from Commodore USA, which is (or was, or might be) claimed to be licensed as well. Several are up in arms over all this, claiming the Amiga brand is being diluted, or dragged through the mud, or other bad things that can metaphorically happen to a name. Playing devil’s advocate, I suppose Amiga/McEwen has to make money somehow, and there’s not much left of the Amiga name to damage (though Hyperion software would probably disagree).

There was a time when I believed Amiga Inc. should aggressively license the Amiga name/logo/trademark to just about anybody, with the purpose of giving the company some operating capital for their real projects, as well as getting the name “out there” in the public to fight the forces of obscurity. Of course at the time I was expecting things like shirts and hats and novelties, rather than potentially competing computer systems and devices. It was also when I thought Amiga Inc. might actually do something worthwhile if they had the money to do it. Times change, don’t they? At least the people who care enough to know what an Amiga is will hopefully know when something has Amiga-esque hardware, or an Amiga-esque operating system, and leave the Amiga-labeled-or-

skinned PCs to the casual retro fans. At least this mess has a slight potential, where we might get to find out if the Amiga name still carries any weight in the market or not.

...by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech Gazette
March 2011

A Simple HTPC Setup

I have a semi-ancient 46" DLP 720P TV and ever since I got it I've wanted to find a way to play PC content on it (it has VGA but no HDMI). Back when I bought the set in mid 2004 I hooked up a lappie with Windows XP just to try it out and the results were terrible. For some reason the PC didn't know what the heck it was hooked up to so it defaulted to 1024x768 or a 4:3 resolution. The TV then stretched the image to fill its 1280x720 screen and everybody looked like they had gone all William Shatner on me.

Just for fun the other day, I slipped a new lappie with Win 7 on it into the VGA cable and Windows 7 said, "Hey, it looks like you've got an ancient Samsung DLP TV.

Here's 1280x720." And it looked pretty okay. Actually not bad at all. So I thought, hey, now I can get an HTPC (Home Theater PC) and be all set to watch Internet video in the living room.

I've got a pretty nice Comcast DVR so I wasn't interested in TV tuners and PVR functionality. I just wanted something to watch and listen to content from my network, Miro, Netflix and other Internet video stuff. Dell has some nice "Zino" units but they were a little out of my "this-is-a-toy" budget. Other HTPC solutions were more than I needed.

So I grabbed a dirt-cheap (\$379) Dell Vostro 14" lappie on Black Friday. It's got all the requirements: decent HD playback, Core 2 Duo 2.1GHz, wireless (running Cat 5 to that location would be a pain), 250GB, 2G RAM and Windows 7 Home Premium (with Media Center) and the all-important VGA-out. To complete the package I grabbed a Unisen iPazzPort wireless remote keyboard/touchpad that fits in a shirt pocket and works remarkably well. I piped the audio out through the headphone connector into my even more ancient Harman-Kardon audio receiver.

So, for a little over \$400 I can now watch back-to-back episodes of Top Gear, anything on YouTube, Hulu or the network sites as well as all the stuff on my network (including my whole CD collection) in the living room in glorious 720P on my 6-year old TV that still works. Unlike Google TV, I am not blocked from any content and the variety of stuff out there is limitless, unlike something like a Roku box or Apple TV (but more money, admittedly).

...by Kevin Hisel
<http://www.cucug.org/starship/vi ewtopic.php?f=4&t=2405>

April Calendar

April 4 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 PM — Main Grand Prairie Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

April 4 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

April 25 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 AM

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