

## Thoughts on Jack Tramiel

There was a notable obituary in the computer world recently. Perhaps equally notable is that his passing was marked with barely a percentage point of the recognition Steve Jobs received upon his death, despite being an equal or greater influence to the world of personal computing in his heyday. That person was Jack Tramiel, founder of Commodore Business Machines, and father in a sense to the biggest-selling single computer model of all time, the Commodore 64. Much of his career was known for two principles—a basic belief that computers and technology should be affordable and available to as many people as possible, and the business savvy mixed with dirty ruthlessness to make it happen. Often associated with slogans like “computers for the masses, not the classes” and “power without the price,” Commodore machines were generally cheaper than their contemporaries (sometimes in the “inexpensive” sense, occasionally in the “shoddy” sense) and utilitarian yet capable. The approach worked, especially with the VIC-20 and C-64, which quickly outsold the competition, and forced them to adapt.

Tramiel was forced out of Commodore in 1984 after butting heads with Irving Gould and the board one too many times, in no small part because it was apparent Jack intended to eventually install his sons in high-level positions within the company. Not long after, he bought the struggling Atari home game and computer division from Warner Communications and managed to turn it around, with the concepts for what

would become the Atari ST already on the drawing board before all the papers were signed. The Tramiel tenure at Atari was a moderate success, but with no “big hits” like the Commodore 64, perhaps because the market was already beginning its seemingly inescapable shift to DOS/Windows and “PC” domination by then.

I made a comparison to Steve Jobs earlier, and it’s interesting to see the similarities. Both had very strong (yet different) beliefs about technology and business. Both were forced out of companies they founded, and had to find their fortunes elsewhere. Both had the reported capacity to be terrible pricks to anyone who got on their bad sides. Perhaps if Jack had never retired, and was the workaholic charismatic public figure Jobs was, perhaps he’d be the one getting the lion’s share of the press. He seemed happier working behind the scenes though, and is remembered fondly as a holocaust survivor, family man, and the boss behind the biggest success of the 8-bit home computer era.

It’s hard to say exactly how much of an impact Mr. Tramiel had on our favorite computer, the Amiga, but you definitely can’t say none at all. Jack had already left Commodore before the Amiga corporation became part of it. When Amiga was looking for capital, they borrowed from Atari (still with Warner at the time) with the contractual expectation the Amiga tech would go to Atari either by sale or by default. Amiga spoke with Jack during his “transition period” between Commodore and Atari, and he made it clear he was interested in the technology, but not the company or the people behind it. When word came down that Tramiel would be the

new head of Atari, the Amiga people started scrambling for money and courting what they hoped would be better buyers than a Tramiel-run Atari. As we know, Commodore swooped in at the last minute before the Atari contract was up and paid off the loan, supposedly nullifying the contract. Jack didn’t exactly see it that way, (and was more than happy to get back at the company that booted him) and sued Amiga and Commodore for breach. The suit was eventually settled, but it did hold back Amiga development a bit. When the Amiga was finally brought to market, a primary direct competitor was Atari’s 520ST computer, pushing heavily on a lower price and (slightly) faster clock speed.

With a story like this, you can definitely say Jack Tramiel had an effect on Amiga in its formative years, and there’s plenty of “what if” points where if Jack had taken another path we might have seen a different path for Amiga as well. Perhaps the Amiga would have become an Atari computer or game console if someone other than Jack was holding the reins. Perhaps it never would have come to fruition at all. Even if Commodore may not have turned out to be the best “mother hen” for the Amiga and its engineers, it’s hard for me to speculate a situation where the Amiga fares much better than it historically did, so perhaps we can thank Jack Tramiel for all his indirect influence, seemingly mostly in the Amiga engineers’ desire to avoid working under (or being fired by) him.

...by Eric Schwartz  
from the AmiTech Gazette  
April 2012

# Commodore OS Vision

It's been way too long since my last article. I'm sorry. I'm happy to say that I have a reason to write this article: Commodore OS Vision. All I can say is "WOW." I had no idea that this project even existed until a friend sent me a link on the new Commodore Mini which came as a shock too. Perusing the Commodore site led me to the Vision operating system and download link.

## What is Commodore OS Vision?

Maybe up front I should say what it is not. It is not in any way, shape or form related to any Amiga operating system. None. What it is is another version of the the Linux operating system finely tuned by Commodore USA. They don't try to hide the fact that this started as Mint with a Gnome 2 windowing system—Tweaked. Think of it as if Commodore never went out of business and kept releasing cutting-edge desktops to this day. Imagine comparing 1985 Amiga OS 1 to MS-DOS. Out of the box, all the graphics tweaks are turned on for the latest graphics cards. Features I have not seen the like of on Win7 yet. Granted, there are plenty of Linux distributions out there but this one is by far the most luscious, visual, feature packed release I have seen yet. Like most other offerings now, you have the option to boot up the system and try it without installing it.

The next shock was the size of install, 2 full DVDs. The problem was the only way to get the downloads was by torrents. At home the download speed was averaging 1 Kbps—weeks to get. Unfortunately at the university peer to peer downloads are highly discouraged. I talked to a sysadmin friend who stated that torrents are OK if you limit the number of connections to 40, which I used. The transfer started off slowly enough but after several minutes the speed increased and ramped up to 5.5 megs per seconds and bits were flying. Once dialed in, the second DVD image took mere minutes and freshly burnt disks a couple of minutes after that. I couldn't wait to get home and decided to try it on my work machine—dual core i5 with decent ATI Radian card, 4 gigs of RAM. It ran flawlessly the first time and the responsiveness was much greater than what I was accustomed to on Win 7. Linux programs that I love were already in there, very useful system tools unknown to me included.

## Problems

Very few problems so far. Booting up the system, if you don't have a 64 bit machine, the boot loader just sits there and does nothing, acts locked up. Having used Linux for several years now, I knew to reboot, hit the tab key and change the word "quiet" to "verbose" in the boot arguments. Only then did it report that a 64 bit machine was necessary. I tried it on a P4 2Ghz laptop I had only to find out it was not 64emt capable. I ran and got my Eee Atom netbook and prayed for results. No deal there either.

Another bit of a gripe I had was what to do with the second DVD disk. The install made no mention of it. Looking on the disk did not reveal any README files or any documentation as to what to do with the disk. I finally just got on Google and searched. There it directed to go to the Menu bar (on the top Ed, where God intended it) and sure enough, there was a command to install the Commodore content which went smoothly, quickly, correctly. I have not had time to do it yet, but there are commands in the system to install purchased Amiga Forever software and old 8 bit Commodore software. YES! A few gigs of old Commodore music and demos were installed.

## Last thought

I have to get to bed and haven't gone through this drivel. All I can say is that Vision is awesome. It will very likely become my main machine distribution very soon. Of course from Commodore a system would come together that works like I do with the graphics things that interested me in the original Amiga. Hell, this is even a Deluxe Paint clone in it.

...by James Lawrence  
from the AmiTech Gazette, April 2012

## May Calendar

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

May 7 — Board of Director's Meeting  
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

May 27 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 4418 Sharpsburg Drive Grand Prairie, Texas 75052  
<http://www.amigamccc.org>