

Three User Philosophies

Summer is in full swing. We recently went to a 4th of July fireworks show, or tried to, as the one we went to was rained out on the 4th. We did get to see it a day later, though even then the humid air helped the firework smoke hang long and thick in the air, blocking visibility more as the explosions got more frequent. Still, live fireworks are always superior to nothing, which is arguably superior to watching fireworks on TV.

As computer enthusiasts, we should all pay tribute to Douglas Engelbart, the inventor of the mouse (the control device, not the rodent), who passed away this month at age 88. He was truly one of the pioneers of computer control interface technology, helping bring computing machines from the era of punch-cards and teletypes to the graphic mouse/trackpad/touchscreen interfaces we take for granted today, enabling the GUI work of Xerox PARC, and by extension, Apple, Microsoft, and of course Amiga.

On the subject of Amiga, I notice the climate of the user base or Amiga-and-the-like enthusiasts is different and fractured compared to the 1990s, and even the 2000s. There seem to be three primary philosophies to Amiga interest nowadays, though it's entirely possible for someone to embrace more than one style either as separate entities or a sweep across a range of styles.

The first philosophy is what I call retro enthusiasm. This group's

primary interest lies in the classic Amiga hardware and software, and may show little interest in the more progressive side of things like OS4, MorphOS, and AROS systems, which may be viewed as little more than general-purpose machines with software being the only Amiga-esque aspect. Ironically, this group seems more likely than the others to draw in people who were not past Amiga users. Some are in for the fascination and nostalgia for a time when systems had more custom-designed specific-use chips in tight designs. Others may be just part of the larger retro-gaming scene, and are as likely to run Amiga software through emulation as they are on real hardware, if not more so. Some may even be interested in new versions of old hardware, like the FPGA chip-based Minimig and all similar devices which mimic the hardware of Amiga and possibly other systems. The common denominator in all this seems to be that the Amiga is what it was, something celebrated for what it has done, but not expected to do more. In the same sense as Commodore, Atari, and Apple 8-bit enthusiasts before, they are content with the niche Amiga carved out, using the same machines and/or software from decades ago and enjoying it for its own sake, and anything greater can be left to those "serious" Windows, Mac, or Linux machines.

I'll call the next step up the "partial-progressive" philosophy. Progressives like to keep the Amiga ball rolling forward into the future, and have embraced the newer (or former Mac) PowerPC systems running Amiga OS4 or MorphOS, or the multi-platform open source

AROS. In varying degrees, these operating systems can run "system friendly" Amiga applications, and new software specifically written to take advantage of the newer systems, but not older Amiga software that directly addressed classic Amiga hardware (usually games, but any old enough or graphically-intensive enough program might qualify). The progressive group are often former Amiga pro users looking to gain more speed and power, but not give up what is familiar to them, be it specific application software or the Amiga-style interface. They'd prefer not to abandon it all for Mac or PC at any rate. They may have given up running old games and "metal-banging" software to take their Amiga-based computing with them into the future, but there are limits to what they may be willing to give up to keep going.

At one time, those two groups might have been the only ones — the old and the new, as it were, but a new philosophical group is forming. For the moment it's based on hypothetical inevitability and a certain reality of the computing world — If you want to keep moving forward, you will sooner or later have to let go of the past (and break stuff). It has become apparent, at least in MorphOS circles, that the transparent support for classic Amiga software places limits on what the operating system as a whole can do in terms of support for larger amounts of memory, storage, or more than one processor core. The same can be said for if the OS were to move away from the Power PC processor family. The basic implication is that the upper limits are starting to be hit, and to surpass

them means Amiga software support would have to be left behind, at least in the easy transparent form it is now. Presumably Amiga OS4 is in a similar boat too. AROS has the edge here, as it is already ported to multiple CPU families, and never had a direct Amiga API for classic software support the same way Morph and OS4 do. This creates the schism. While some would rather stick with their Amiga-compatible systems (placing them in the previously listed group), others are starting to advocate moving forward at all costs, even if it breaks support for the old software. I will call this group the idealists. They seem to want to see the hypothetical future Amiga-like operating system stand toe-to-toe and second to none with the other operating systems, with all the support for huge amounts of RAM or drive space, caching, memory protection, multi-core CPUs, and whatever else they enjoy, even if it means leaving behind a slew of broken software in the wake. To be fair, both Windows and Mac had their large shifts that busted the old software base too, but they had thriving software industries to take up the slack. Amiga and Morph are currently not so lucky, begging the question of what would be the use of an awesome second-to-none new Amiga-esque OS where the only software available is what's out for MorphOS or OS4 right now (if that much)? I don't mean to be a downer or discourage development in the least, but it does place me in the second philosophical group, at least for now. I like the power of the new tech, but I'm not yet ready to lose

most of my software to get a bit more. Maybe the climate will change in the future and the future will be more in favor of Amiga systems. I would enjoy being more of an idealist than just somewhat progressive. Then again, maybe in a few years we'll all be having conversations with computer systems embedded in our eye-wear and won't care about anything that sits on a desk, who knows.

...by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech Gazette,
July 2013

400 Times The Speed of Google Fiber

May 27, 2013

The basic mechanism behind noise-canceling headphones could boost both the speed and reliability of Internet connections, according to researchers that published findings via Nature Photonics.

Noise-canceling headphones use a microphone to pick up any outside noises within range of your ears. It then sends an inverse set of sounds picked up by the background noise to cancel it out. Researchers think they can essentially do the same thing with fiber optic cable Internet, which uses

light waves to transmit data. However, this requires a lot of power to make the process fast, and this results in lots of "noise" that would otherwise slow down Internet speeds and reliability.

Researchers noted that sending twin light beams down a fiber optic cable along with the original transmission of data could basically eliminate that noise, as the light beams would pick up the noise and cancel it out. BBC News notes that the research team led by Xiang Liu of Bell Laboratories used this technique, called phase conjugation, to send a signal of 400 gigabits per second through 12,800 km of fiber optic cable. For perspective, Google Fiber offers its subscribers 1 gigabit per second, and the length Liu's team sent that signal is longer than the transoceanic fiber links.

"At the receiver, if you superimpose the two waves, then all the distortions will magically cancel each other out, so you obtain the original signal back," Liu told the BBC. "This concept, looking back, is quite easy to understand, but surprisingly, nobody did this before."

...Tom Cheredar
<http://venturebeat.com/2013/05/27/noise-canceling-tech-could-lead-to-internet-connections-400x-faster-than-google-fiber/>

August Calendar

August 5 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 PM — Main Grand Prairie Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

August 5 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

August 26 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

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