



MCCC News



Fort Worth

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Dallas

The Amiga Development System

Johnny Kitchens sent me a link to an article about “The Amiga Before the Amiga.” I’d love to include it here, but because of the numerous photos in the article it isn’t really a good fit for print. I do highly recommend it.

What follows is from the introductory section of the article:

“The original Amiga computer was launched to the public on July 23, 1985, in a legendary demonstration at Lincoln Center in New York featuring the likes of Andy Warhol and Debbie Harry.

Prior to that epic event, however, there was another Amiga—a lesser-known member of the family most have never even heard of. Back in 1984/1985 Commodore created a few hundred “Development Edition” machines called the Amiga Development System. Sometimes, due to a very unique early design, they are also sometimes referred to as “Velvet” which was a name for a particular motherboard layout some had.

Commodore sent these computers to companies around the world in the hopes they would decide to support the new platform in the form of creating software and tools.

Thus, the Development System is a very unique machine most of which have been lost to the sands of time. Prior to this writing it was believed that only 5 Development Systems remained around the world.

Assuming that’s true, there are now six.

I now have in my possession one of the rarest Amigas ever made—one that was never sold to the consumer market. And this one appears to be entirely unique from its brethren, which I shall soon explain.”

Check out the rest of the article with all the associated photos at <https://amigalove.com/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=1031>

The Amiga Doesn’t Get The Respect It Deserves

One of the things that’s nice about the internet is that, while the Amiga may play historic market second fiddle to the Windows PC or Mac, there still continues to be content covering the platform to this day, from videos to podcasts and more. My “link of the month” this time is the Arcade Attack retro gaming podcast from the UK.

Listening to podcasts like these are partly interesting, partly infuriating... listening to these people sharing their fond memories for the Amiga from the perspective of young (at the time) gamers, and somewhat

butchering their information on Amiga hardware and history.

Arcade Attack UK Podcast: <https://www.arcadeattack.co.uk/podcast-march-1-2019/>

In my bit of old man ranting for the month, I’ve been thinking a bit about how the Amiga is remembered today, especially among those who may not have directly experienced the platform, due to either being too young or users of other systems back in the day. Of course, enthusiasts of ‘retro’ systems, games, and software are quite common today, with some even being too young for first-hand knowledge of whatever they’re collecting or emulating. Part of this is probably thanks to “retro” media attention on YouTube and other internet venues showing off the good (and not so good) stuff from the past.

Still, when people, especially newer people, get into retro stuff, they do it from the viewpoint of someone without much historical perspective. As we know, history is written by the victors. As we all know, (depending on who you ask) Windows 95 invented multitasking and Apple invented smartphones and the GUI. It’s only those nutty conspiracy theorists that would deny that, right? Sometimes I wonder if this is why Atari doesn’t have quite the retro clout of Nintendo or Sega nowadays, despite being the first game console to hit it big. Either that, or the limited 1977 hardware of the Atari VCS restricted the complexity and variety of games that the later game systems would be known for, and retro enthusiasts may prefer a certain level of play over the older and simpler fare.

I tend to get more annoyed when people look at older games without proper perspective for the time in which they were made, or worse, an ignorant and incorrectly confident sense of wrong perspective. An example is when people like to toss around ideas like Atari's 2600 version of Pac-Man, and/or the E.T. Game caused the American video game crash of 1983/4, when they were little more than convenient missteps to point to in a swirling mass of market forces. Another is saying Atari Pac-Man was a poor representation of the arcade original because the console was incapable of doing better, when later efforts by homebrew games makers and Atari themselves prove the 2600 can do a perfectly serviceable Pac-Man game given the right effort.

I guess what I'm saying is there's a lot of ignorance out there regarding past computers and game systems, borne out of propagated misinformation and a lack of real experience.

Looking at various media on the Amiga, especially in retro-gaming circles, there seem to be two types of coverage. One type comes from Europeans, which tends to be more fond and nostalgic, and the other comes from Americans, which frequently treat the Amiga more as a curious bit of obscurity. These attitudes make sense in context, as the Amiga was never the big force in North America that it was in the UK and many other European countries. US gamers tend to look at past games through the lens of Nintendo and Sega and Japanese game creators, and have been

seen to balk at Amiga games with their single-button joysticks, and their 'European' feel. Throwing around those misconceptions, many write off the Amiga CD-32 as a terrible, failed game console, and their not entirely wrong, as it failed to turn Commodore's fortunes around enough to prevent bankruptcy. They're not entirely right either, as for its short life the CD-32 was a top seller in the UK, and definitely outperformed Commodore's previous attempts to turn computer hardware into home and game systems, such as the C64-GS and the CDTV. That doesn't prevent a lot of US-

based YouTube game channels from dumping on it however.

I have little choice but to live with it, as trying to explain the merits of the Amiga era to someone who someone who didn't experience them just makes you look like the crank living in the past. I can even understand to an extent, as it's not unlike a hardcore basketball fan covering a

baseball game, or a scholar covering 1940's swing music asked to give opinions on death metal. Still, I know how ahead of its time the Amiga was even if others might not, being a first consumer system to offer a multitasking OS AND multimedia capabilities AND graphic acceleration at a time when most other computers were lucky if they could put more than 8 colors on the screen at once. It pioneered the style-over-substance type of "Who cares if it plays like crap? Look at those graphics!" Games with releases like Shadow of the Beast and the Cinemaware games. It birthed several franchises that outlived it in games and graphic software, like Lemmings and Worms,

or Lightwave 3D and TV Paint. It provided templates for the modern approach to PC design, such as a video/graphic and sound co-processors that can operate independently of the main CPU for better performance all around. For many out there today, it's the most important computer system they might never have heard of.

...Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette,
April 2019

Badly Behaving Tech Companies

Ever since Sony admitted installing root kits on CD buyers' computers in 2005, I've kept a sort of Tech Company Sh*t List. While Sony has finally been removed due to a 14-year hiatus, others live on in glorious ignominy. Here's my list:

AT&T

Way too much to list! This company has an over-hundred-year history of monopolistic practices and screwing over its customers in the pursuit of revenues. Even after being forcibly broken up by the government in 1982 (it was THAT BAD!) their corporate culture is seemingly still in the 1940's, voraciously abusing its customers.

Asus

The Federal Trade Commission put Asus on a 20-year sort of probation in 2016 because their routers had numerous security vulnerabilities and Asus did not demonstrate much interest in addressing the flaws in a timely manner—even after being notified multiple times.

Recently, Kaspersky revealed that Asus' Live Update utility for PCs was used to distribute malware to its customers. There are still questions about whether the malware may have actually originated from inside Asus.

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BLU phones

Chinese Android phones were found to ship with malware/adware—right out of the box, according to security researchers.

Belkin

This company thought so little of its customers in 2003 that it installed adware in brand-new, out-of-the box routers. As users surfed the web, Belkin would inject ads into the customers' browsers right from their Belkin router advertising Belkin services. An opt-out mechanism was included but many users felt that when they buy a router, they should not be forced to opt-out of advertising to avoid interruptions when using the Internet.

Comcast

Another AT&T with dozens of examples of squeezing their customers to increase and sustain revenue levels. Their pricing is very opaque and few can figure out what they charge for most services. The truth is, Comcast will charge you as much as they possibly can. There's no such thing as one price for all. In early 2019, media reports surfaced stating that instead of greeting more competition in the TV market with better value, Comcast would simply raise remaining customers' TV prices to make up for the revenues lost to cord-cutting.

While they are raking their customers over the coals, Comcast apparently could not care less about what those same customers think about them. Comcast has been voted by various consumer groups as the worst company in America multiple times. Many feel since they enjoy monopoly-like status in most communities, they don't feel the need to keep satisfaction scores high.

In 2010 many Comcast customers noticed that they were unable to stream Netflix in high definition. The company blamed the problem on payment disputes among carriers but some customers noted that the problem cleared right up when using

Netflix/Comcast over a VPN hiding the traffic. This evidence supports many customers' suspicions that Comcast was purposefully throttling the Netflix traffic since it competes with Comcast's TV product. This case comes up often with proponents of net-neutrality as an example of unfair behavior by ISPs.

On the other hand, Comcast's high-speed Internet product in Central Illinois is far superior to what most people can get and many are still forced to give this sh*t-hole company their money. Luckily there are competing services on the horizon in the C-U area.

D-Link

In 2017 the FTC stated that D-Link, "Consistently failed to take reasonable steps to protect its routers and internet-linked security cameras from hackers." As of this writing, FTC lawsuits against D-Link are still ongoing.

Hewlett-Packard Printers

In 2010 HP settled a lawsuit alleging that some HP printers either reported low ink or simply refused to print even when plenty of ink was still available, forcing consumers to spend money on ink replacements they really did not need.

In 2017 many reports surfaced that HP had launched a DRM time bomb—a software update designed specifically to disable competing printer cartridges starting on a set date. As a result, HP Printer owners using third-party cartridges woke up one day to warnings about a "cartridge problem," or errors stating, "one or more cartridges are missing or damaged," or that the user was using an "older generation cartridge." It's not legal to prohibit competing brands' ink cartridges but HP sure does plenty to discourage this.

Lenovo

Many PC companies are criticized for including unwanted bloatware on customer machines. In 2014 Len-

ovo machines shipped with actual adware. Masquerading as a piece of typical manufacturer bloatware, Superfish Visual Discovery was a browser extension that analyzed images, checked if they were products, and then injected ads into the customers' browsers. To make matters worse, Superfish was uninstalleable, terribly insecure, and allowed hackers to monitor encrypted web browsing.

For 20 years, Lenovo will be required to put in place a "comprehensive software security program for most consumer software preloaded on its laptop," subject to external audits, the FTC said.

Linksys

Now owned by Belkin (see above).

Microsoft

Many despise Microsoft's monopoly tactics used during the 1980s and 1990s and those practices are well documented. As a result, some people to this day refuse to use ANY Microsoft products.

If you believe the company's new leadership has turned the corner and is now less evil all you have to do is look at the strong-armed tactics the company used to force its Windows 10 software onto users of Windows 7 and 8.

When Windows 10 was released in 2015, Microsoft was aggressive about getting devices to upgrade. In some instances, it pushed several gigabytes of upgrade files to customers without their knowledge or consent. Consumer backlash caused the company to stop the practice, but two years later, Microsoft is still facing legal repercussions. While the company claims the tactics were in customers' best interests, the company's forced upgrades turned into a PR mess for Microsoft.

Last year, three Florida men filed a lawsuit against Microsoft, stating that the company "coerced" them into the upgrade which resulted in

damaged PCs, as well as lost time and money. Some customers even complained that a red X option that appears in the Windows 10 update box actually initiates an upgrade, rather than dismissing it as users would commonly expect.

Microsoft has since backed down from some of its more aggressive tactics, and now offers customers options, including "upgrade now, schedule a time to upgrade, or decline the free offer for the new OS."

Office Depot

Between 2009 and 2016 Office Depot tricked customers into buying unneeded tech support services by offering PC scans that gave fake results, according to the Federal Trade Commission. Consumers paid up to \$300 each for unnecessary services.

"Defendants bilked unsuspecting consumers out of tens of millions of dollars from their use of the PC Health Check program to sell costly diagnostic and repair services," the FTC alleged in a complaint that accuses both Office Depot and the company that supplied the software, Support.com, of violating the FTC Act's prohibition against deceptive practices.

Oracle

In 2015 Oracle agreed to settle Federal Trade Commission charges that it deceived consumers about the security provided by updates to its Java Platform. According to the FTC's complaint, since acquiring Java in 2010, Oracle was aware of signifi-

cant security issues affecting older versions of Java SE. The security issues allowed hackers' to craft malware that could allow access to consumers' usernames and passwords for financial accounts, and allow hackers to acquire other sensitive personal information through phishing attacks.

Many have accused Oracle of attempting to profit from its own software's insecurity by pushing customers to install unwanted software such as third-party toolbars during the update process necessitated by the poor security of older versions.

In 2015, Oracle's chief security office Mary Ann Davidson threatened security researchers with vague consequences for examining Oracle code for vulnerabilities.

Turbo Tax/Intuit

The 2003 version of the TurboTax software contained digital rights management that tracked whether it had previously been installed on a computer by writing to sector 33 on the hard drive. This allowed it to track if it was on a computer previously, even through reinstalling the operating system. This also caused it to conflict with some boot loaders that store data there, rendering those computers unbootable.

Vizio

Vizio, a popular smart-TV brand, settled a lawsuit that accused it of using its TVs to track what its owners watched, then selling that informa-

tion to marketing firms, all without customers' knowledge or consent.

At least one CUCUG member reported that their recent-vintage Vizio Bluray player fell out of favor with the company and software updates were discontinued prematurely. Because disc copy-protection schemes are constantly being updated, this rendered the player unusable for newer movies.

[Editor's Note: My thanks to Kevin Hisel for writing this article for the newsletter.

I'll just add my own personal contempt for Comcast which centers on their despicable corporate torpedoing of the democratic process by packing FCC public hearings with ringers back in 2008 to choke off the public's ability to testify against them.

Comcast acknowledges paying 'seat-warmers' at FCC hearing
<https://www.mercurynews.com/2008/02/26/comcast-acknowledges-paying-seat-warmers-at-fcc-hearing/>

Also, I give you one guess who owns the orphaned Bluray/DVD player.]

...article by Kevin Hisel
Editor's note by Kevin Hopkins
From the Status Register of the Champaign-Urbana Computer Users Group, April 2019

May Calendar

May 11 — MCCC Meeting
2:00 PM — Burlison Public Library
248 SW Johnson Ave., Burlison

May 11 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 4:00 PM — Location TBD

June 1 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

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