
Subject: Re: Mac OSX

Posted by [John-David T. Smith](#) on Thu, 11 Oct 2001 16:06:44 GMT

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John Boccio wrote:

>
> In article <MPG.162e8aaf5237957a989700@news.frii.com>, David Fanning
> <david@dfanning.com> wrote:
>
>> Randall Skelton (rskelto@atm.ox.ac.uk) writes:
>>
>>> There are alternatives. I'll admit that none of them can compete with the
>>> wide cross-platform support that IDL has enjoyed over the years but it
>>> looks like RSI's cross-platform marketing approach has vanished.
>>
>> Gentlemen,
>>
>> I am sympathetic. I really am. I especially
>> dislike the cheesy way this whole decision
>> was announced. It denotes a lack of...well,
>> respect...for the people who really do pay
>> the bills it seems to me.
>>
>> And from what I hear at least half the folks
>> at RSI are sympathetic. I don't think this was
>> a unanimous decision, not by a long shot. But
>> I don't think scientists are running the company
>> anymore. And I don't think the people who made
>> the decision really stopped to consider the--for
>> lack of a better word--cultural significance of a
>> decision like this.
>>
>> Quite frankly, losing a platform like the Mac matters
>> to a lot of us, whether we use a Macintosh or not.
>>
>> But given all that, I don't think this decision
>> will be changed. I don't know the leadership at RSI,
>> or anything about them, but I don't expect them
>> to change their mind for this reason.
>>
>> The Mac right now, today, is not a serious
>> scientific computing platform.
>
> This is a load of utter garbage!!!!

I'm sorry David, but I'm going to have to agree with John here. You are really off base, but in a way which is perfectly and painfully understandable, and represents the same attitudes and set of false

impressions we're likely up against with the Kodak management right now. The MacOS is a niche market player, 5-10% at best. Linux, while also quite small (2-5%), represents a privileged child, free of 15 years of derision and scrutiny, and is seen as a rising star. But look at Sun Solaris, long regarded (for better or worse) as a top notch workstation platform. But in terms of total user base, Solaris is **tiny** compared to the other two. Yet its support remains firm. Why? Because it is so popular among the scientific user base that foots the bills at RSI. So, as we see, popular market share is a very poor measure of importance for scientific computing.

While the Mac was mired in several years of poor marketing choices, things really have turned around in the last couple of years. The substantial impression that Apple is a vanishing company has so firmly entrenched itself among Windows users, that they haven't had time to look up and take stock of reality. I really hate these "Macs are slow, expensive, unpopular, and have no software, " vs. "Macs are the best things since biscuits and gravy" arguments, but I feel compelled to dismiss at least **one** of your somewhat underinformed notions about Macs. I encourage you to try to find "a new Dell" laptop which can compete with the Apple iBook in price to performance. With built-in wireless networking, ethernet, a fast processor, superb display, long battery life, and lightweight, attractive packaging, all for around \$1250, I think you'll have some trouble.

Regarding the unsuitability of Macs for scientific computing, lets let quotes from RSI's own press releases from the likes of David Uhler, director of product marketing, weigh in on that question:

"The Macintosh is now our fastest platform for basic binary operations on arrays in IDL."

"AltiVec will definitely play an important role in IDL's future."

"For example, basic binary operations on arrays in IDL run almost five times faster on Power Mac G4 systems than on otherwise comparable computers."

"Mac OS X brings the speed, stability and power of Unix to IDL's Macintosh users. In combination with the G4 processor with Velocity Engine and hardware OpenGL support on cutting edge graphic accelerators, IDL on Mac OS X is a best-of-class scientific visualization application."

"The Power Mac G4 gives us anywhere from a two- to five-fold boost in performance for computationally intensive tasks."

This turn of events represents a startling and inconsistent about face, and, for me at least, casts a pall of doubt over the stewardship of IDL's future direction.

JD
