Earth to Apple: Some of us would still like to use your computers

Posted on November 8, 2014

I've been an Apple guy from *way* back, starting with the original Apple II which I'd purchased when these were barely more than a hobby computer. I was on a waiting list for one of the original Macs, upgrading the memory with a soldering iron, developed Mac software in the days when this required mastering five volumes of documentation each described as assuming that you'd already mastered the other four, stayed with Apple during the grim era of John Scully, and subsequently happily purchased a variety of machines—I believe our household has about eight [1], plus an iPad and one iPhone. I'm not just an Apple customer, but—within limits—one of those Apple true believers who actually thought those "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" ads were funny rather than arrogant, and believed that Bill Gates [2] was, if not the anti-Christ, at least, like Dick Cheney, regularly accompanied by the smell of sulfur.

But all this was when Steve Jobs was still alive. My recent experience "upgrading" to the newly-released "Yosemite" operating system—and that phrase should be in some sort of special ultra-snark sardonic quotes that I'm sure have been commissioned for one of*Wired*'s [3] 6-point presentation fonts—has not been at all pleasant.

Okay, so it is partly my own fault: generally I do not upgrade to new operating systems until they've been out for a few months and other people get to find the bugs in them, that vaunted tradition of using the customer as the quality control department. The second mouse gets the cheese. But having settled into my new old office in CVille, I'd decided to get a new iMac with a 27″ screen—replacing the ca. 2008 model I'd bought from Lion Surplus—and I figured it would come with Yosemite installed. I'd been rather lax—albeit in retrospect, perhaps prudent—in upgrading the operating systems on my other working machines so, well, just how bad can it be?

Bad.

The process started inauspiciously when—I was trying to support local businesses—the people at the local Apple reseller advised me not to max out the hard drive, and go with a less expensive machine, despite the fact I thought I'd made it clear this was a working computer, not a toy. I demurred, and figured if folks don't know how to close a sale, and I'd have to wait while the machine shipped anyway, I'd just order directly from Apple.

Harmless, I suppose, though stupid. But…Steve Jobs is no longer alive.

While I waited for the cross-country journey of the new machine, I upgraded the two laptops I

use for work outside the office and things were still going reasonably smoothly, though like many people, I find the new Yosemite "look" inferior to the older versions, and apparently some of the graphical gimmicks extract quite a cost in terms of machine cycles. Apple: I have better uses for those cycles. The main point of Yosemite is apparently to thoroughly integrate every aspect of your electronic life so that it can be completely and seamlessly monitored by Apple and the NSA, whereas except for the hardware, I have chosen to allow my life to be seamlessly monitored by *Google* and the NSA.

It gets worse.

The iMac arrives and is as lovely as I'd expected, and comes with those reassuring stickers noting that everything had been *designed* in the U.S.A., while failing to note that it had been *manufactured* in semi-feudal conditions in China by the sons and daughters of peasants displaced by hydroelectric projects or having their land confiscated by corrupt local "Communist" officials. This as distinct from Google, which merely conspires with corrupt local *capitalists* to drive elderly Asian immigrants from San Francisco apartments they've occupied for decades. I digress.

I plug the machine in, and start it up and…it comes preinstalled with the older operating system, Maverick, not Yosemite.

In the immortal words of [Han Solo in the trash compactor](link) of the Death Star in *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Revenue Stream* "I've got a bad feeling about this."

Well, I'd already upgraded the other machines, and wanted to get everything on the same system, so we will do this one as well. It installs—whew.

Momentarily, whew.

One of my points of pride in being one of those snarky Apple guys was the ease of transitioning between machines, using a [once] marvelous Apple utility called "Migration Assistant." There was a particular point in the early 2000s when the University of Kansas "Computer Support" people—a pre-Brownbackistan public works program for individuals unemployable in Kansas City who nonetheless could diagnose computer issues provided these were no more complicated than discovering the computer was not plugged in [4]—were firing messages across the listservs strongly advising people not to upgrade their Windows machines without taking extraordinary precautions, and even with that, the process appeared a risky venture akin to an emergency appendectomy on a desert island without anesthesia, undertaken by a nervous friend who had

available only the sharpened lid from a can of baked beans and was following instructions in Morse code from a static-filled transmission to a radio with a failing battery. Acquiring a new Mac—about a third of us in the department had Macs, in no small part because that meant "Computer Support" would leave us alone—I fired up Migration Assistant, went off to teach a class, and returned to find my new computer ready to go.

Not this time: Steve Jobs is no longer alive.

I try Migration Assistant, and at first it crashes a couple of times, then seemed to be taking an extraordinary amount of time just prepping for the transfer. Periodically some sort of warning would flash up on the screen but this would disappear too quickly to read—perhaps this part of the interface was never tested on a high speed contemporary machine?—and well, things seemed to be going really really slowly. I finally decided to check the web to see if other people were having these issues and, my oh my, were they ever, some waiting thirty or forty hours—seriously—before giving up. Not me: I killed the process and re-installed/transferred everything manually, a process requiring a number of hours.

Hey Apple, about "Migration Assistant": isn't that something that makes the process of buying a *new computer* (!) painless? Really, reassure me that you want to sell computers , not just provide some sort of amorphous life experience, like, say, *Wired*. Therefore should it not be really important to get this right? Is there some sort of subtle MBA-level marketing ploy I'm missing here: first let's have our sales reps persuade people not to buy our state-of-the-art machines, and if they do, let's make that process really unpleasant?

It wasn't like this when Steve Jobs was alive.

It gets worse.

As noted, I'd already upgraded my MacAir—my traveling computer [5], designed when Steve Jobs was alive, absolutely love it, love the battery life that will easily outlast a trans-Atlantic flight, love walking into meetings (and coffee shops) and seeing everyone under the age of 35 [6] has a MacAir—probably my favorite computer ever.

But not with Yosemite.

I was giving a presentation in front of a fairly large audience [9], and I'd made a few last-minute changes to the slides—Beamer, so a PDF file, presented using Adobe—and decided to present from the MacAir. The usually straightforward set-up seemed a little weird—I should have bailed

and transferred the presentation at that point—but we finally get the connection to the projector working and for the first dozen or so slides, no problem.

Then the machine freezes. Totally. I restart, get the presentation up, freezes again. Restart and try the presentation in Preview: won't even go past the first slide now [7]. We bring up another MacAir—running Maverick—download the presentation from the Parus Analyticssite, and finally get underway again.

In the middle of all this mess, someone calls out "Hey, I thought this only happened with Windows!"

Ouch.

[At the break, we finally traced this to the HDVI connector, or at least the problem went away when I switched to VGA. I had a second presentation in the next hour, which went fine on my MacAir, but presenting while wondering at every click whether I was going to have to finish the talk without the slides is not my preferred mode. At the lunch break, several folks mentioned they'd concluded that Yosemite thoroughly sucked.]

This sort of thing didn't happen when Steve Jobs was alive.

Look Apple, I know you've got other priorities. There's apparently an issue with the polarization of the dilithium inverters on the iWatch [8]. Or something. And even with your absolutely massive off-shore cash hoard, your company lives in fear that sometime we will find out just how much money God has, and Apple won't have as much, and that just can't happen. And, of course, endless to attention to the Yellow Peril: the end of Western civilization that would occur were Samsung to use rounded-corners on an interface.

But seriously, releasing an operating system which provides only marginal changes to the user experience, an interface that no small number of people think is a tad ugly-sucky, which seems have had its origins in nothing more complex than a whole bunch of people in focus groups thinking:

> Well, Maverick, Snow Lion, they all seemed just fine to me but you people seem really eager and you gave us these really nice sandwiches so I've got to say *something* so... uh, make the window-buttons flat? Is anyone planning to eat that last cookie?

Waiting another three months or six months, or whatever it would take to get the operating

system working without endless bugs would not disappoint us. Really. But instead you're now in a situation you've got tens of thousands of experienced users reporting hundreds of problems, and a deepening suspicion that "Yosemite" is "Windows" in proto-Hittite. It's all very embarrassing.

Did I mention this wouldn't have happened when Steve Jobs was alive?

Apple: please get your act together.

Footnotes

1. Several purchased at bargain prices from Penn State's Lion Surplus, gradually being donated to various groups who are in need of computers.

2. Before he was lured away from the dark side by Warren Buffett and Melinda French. Anti-malaria campaigns: I'm okay with that.

3. And hey, *Wired*, I'm not going to re-subscribe to your silly magazine because it is impossible for me to read—those oh-so-cool 6-point type white-on-yellow and blue-on-green text boxes and your way-too-cool-for-you graphics that are giving the concept of "info-porn" a bad name. On the other hand, I'm not planning to purchase $300 aviator glasses which I will wear while sipping an 18-year-old single malt as I drive my Tesla to the airport to catch my Emirates Air flight to, well, wherever, as I'm mainly there to chat up supermodels in the first-class lounge while they admire my $2000 wristwatch. But it's not the wristwatch: supermodels just can't resist a guy who can read 6-point blue type on a green background: drives'em wild. But that's not me: I'm not really your target audience. So stop sending me increasingly desperate requests to resubscribe. It's pathetic: sort of like a guy from a few years back who was once way-too-cool but now is sending messages on Linked-In hoping Parus Analytics needs a public relations consultant. Go away.

4. Okay, they knew a little more than that: one guy we hired spent about thirty hours a week in his darkened office playing first-person-shooter video games. As for being called in about a "computer problem" that was traced to the machine not being plugged in: I was once asked to assist someone and indeed, that was the issue.

5. I travel: this was drafted on a Delta flight from Madison to Atlanta, and is being finished at ATL. Which finally has excellent free wifi. Delta serves tasty little cinnamon cookies in-flight, unlike United, whose service model is clearly Aeroflot. I digress.

6. I'm not. *Wired:* stop asking me to resubscribe—I'm not cool enough.

7. Yes, I'd gone through the entire PDF on Adobe before coming to the podium: what kind of idiot do you think I am, someone from College of Liberal Arts tech support??

8. "iWatch"…is this just a little insider joke? You know, like "We've got a great watchdog: someone tries to break into the house, the dog'll just watch."
Hey, iWatch…I-Watch!…yuck, yuck yuck…

9. Best observation from the conference:

> "Globalization? You can be sure that by the end of the month every militia in eastern Congo will be wearing "Kansas City Royals: 2014 World Series Champions" t-shirts."

Posted in Ramblings | 3 Comments | Edit