Upgrade Your World

The Computer Guide For Parents
"making it all make sense"

B o b M a g n a n t

F o r w a r d

It's now October 2001, six years after I first put this little booklet together to tell people about the Macintosh. While a lot has dramatically changed in the world of personal computers since then, there is still a great deal that hasn't changed much at all. The dot coms of the Internet and the World Wide Web exploded into existence and cyberspace added new dimensions to our lives. The business woes of Apple Computer became the stuff of soap operas and the charismatic Steve Jobs was brought back to Cupertino to become Apple's current CEO, returning the company that he had co-founded with Steve Wozniak some 20 years earlier to new levels of excellence and profitability. Apple's new iMac has become the most successful computer ever built, selling more than five million of them in the last three years. Along with the iBook, the G4 Cube and the Titanium PowerBook, Apple still makes the world's best computers.

Since its seminal release in 1993, Myst and its sequel Riven have become cornerstones of what an interactive computer/multimedia experience can be. To date, both games have had sales in excess of 10 million copies worldwide and another sequel, Myst III: Exile, was released earlier this year. Exile not only draws on the rich history of the series but on new emerging technologies too and represents not just a continuation but also the evolution of this immensely creative and successful experience. However, the technology of the CDROM has opened the door to the DVD – the Digital Video Disk. Feature films and home movies are now stored on these shiny disks with seven times the capacity of the CDROM. The VCR is rapidly going the way of the record player; digital cameras, movie-editing software tools and web-publishing programs are as common today as word processing programs and screensavers once were.

The cost of your Internet service hasn't really changed that much ($20 - $25) but higher speed connections and services are now becoming more prevalent. Each year the machines get faster, slicker, more functional and more reliable and in concert with this, the software programs now help you to do things that you've never dreamed of before. A personal computer is really nothing more than a tool for you to use and it will help a lot if you know what you want to do in advance. My messages are still 'caveat emptor' and 'you get what you pay for'. A high quality/high performance fully functional system can still be yours for less than $1000. Special discounts/deals usually have you paying for something that you don't really want over time.

While the Operating System of the Macintosh, the machine's engine if you will, has been changed several times over six years to keep pace with hardware improvements, the ease-of-use that was at its very foundation has never been compromised. MacOS X (pronounced OS Ten), the latest iteration of its OSs, is state-of-the-art software that has no equals. Similarly, each OS upgrade of Microsoft Windows moves the PC world that much closer to the Apple standard, but still nothing matches the Mac experience.

Bob Magnant
October 2001

This little booklet contains everything you'll ever need to know for -

selecting and purchasing....

understanding and using....

enjoying and employing....

your first personal computer !

What's Inside

You are on the first leg of a journey that will upgrade your personal world. This is a boarding pass for a whirlwind ride down the Information Highway. I hope that it provides some insight, particularly for those who, through no fault of their own, were bypassed by a dynamic computer technology.

I prepared this guide primarily to help the struggling Moms and Dads out there, and Grandparents too, with their first personal computer purchase. Consequently, I've crammed the following pages with direct answers to the most common questions that folks ask me about PCs when they're out shopping in the retail stores. It's very obvious to me that you only want the best of futures for your kids, no matter what their ages are. But remember, it's your world too and the excitement of discovery belongs to everyone. My discussions apply to all ages and my descriptions intentionally bypass the marketing confusion and the sales hype to provide you with practical examples and answers that you can understand.

This booklet will help eliminate those latent fears that, until now, have kept you from looking toward personal computer technology for practical solutions to some everyday needs. A computer is nothing more than a powerful appliance that is now very affordable and can be put to work by you - for you.

Now it's time for you to 'upgrade your world.' Place that element of fascination into your future by bringing something new into your life. It's just like being a kid all over again!

Bob Magnant
September 1995

Introduction

Are you one of those people who tremble in awe when you're confronted with the products of new technology? Of course you are - we all are. It's only natural to fear things that we don't recognize or fully understand. That's a normal human trait. Do you find the magical mysteries of electronics frightening or do you cringe when you hear the word personal computer, or better yet — microprocessor? Maybe it only takes the initials PC or DOS to make you break into a sweat.

If this is a fair description of you, then you're the person that I want to tell this story to. You are exactly who I'm trying to reach. I want to share my information with whoever might be comforted by these experiences. You may even be empowered with a little dose of understanding from my tale.

As you read through the following pages, you should feel good knowing that you have the power to help yourself and learn things that will improve and upgrade your personal life.

Don't be surprised if you find the experience enjoyable!

Empower Yourself

It's a new era; think of this as your personal wake up call. Forget those foolish fears and shrug off any inhibiting ideas. Computers are just dumb machines put together by smart people. Some are better than others (machines); some are smarter than others (people). Understand that computers can entertain you, interact with you and support your individual needs. It's time for you to start dealing with computers. Upgrade your personal world now and taste the future. You can put today's powerful computer technology to work for your personal benefit, with only a basic level of understanding of any hardware or software required.

Let's face it; computer manufacturers and software developers want to sell you things. If they create something with consumers in mind and you find it useful and easy to use, not only will you want it, you'll buy it. All you need to start is a little understanding of what a computer is and what it can do. I like to compare it to driving a car. Knowing where you put the key, understanding the mechanics of driving and having a familiarity with the rules of the road are all necessary items. Once you've learned the basics, be it about cars or about personal computers, there's not much more you need to know.

You shouldn't have to know how to build or fix something just to use it. Most of us would still be riding horses if cars could only be driven by automotive engineers and service mechanics. There's absolutely no need for anyone to be a computer pioneer just to search for information in an electronic encyclopedia or to send someone an e-mail message.

The PC Revolution

If I told you that microprocessors have been helping you to drive your car for years, would you believe me? The fact is that these small chip-based computers have been around for more than two decades. Their number is estimated to be over TEN BILLION around the world; they are everywhere! Not only do they manage your car's engine - just about every car built in the last twenty years contained a half dozen or more such devices - but they also keep extremely accurate time for you, answer your telephone and take messages. They can tune your TV and record your favorite program, even reproduce your favorite music flawlessly, all without the slightest thought of a computer ever crossing your mind.

Typically, the image of a personal computer that many people have is 'a gray box on a desktop, connected to a TV-like screen and a keyboard.' Such computers could be compared to 'tricycles in the transportation world.' While these 'boxes' may be some of the more visible PCs around today, in reality they're mostly old technology and just the tip of the iceberg. Microprocessor-based personal computer systems are all around us. Their potential for changing an individual's life is growing rapidly and just starting to be realized around the world. These systems - coupled with and driven by modern telecommunications services - have advanced the way we communicate and the application of personal computers. However, it's my guess that no more than one person in ten has a true appreciation of what these tiny devices are or how such marvels of engineering skill and silicon help them.

Don't feel like the Lone Ranger!

Let Me Help You

Remove any doubts and fears you may have. Let me show you how to take advantage of opportunities that are now available to all of us through personal computing for the very first time.

How can I be sure of what you're saying? Where's the catch? What's the secret? Are you trying to sell me something? Actually, there's no secret and no catch. You've taken the first step and bought this book. If you borrowed it from a friend, you already understand what information sharing is all about. From here on out, it's merely a question of modifying how you see the world around you. All I'm attempting to do is provide you with a little understanding of some complex and powerful tools through the use of some simple descriptions. These tools can help you to take advantage of the power that information resources can bestow upon you.

Because of computers, I have personally helped myself to a richer and happier life and I've become optimistic about our future. I hope that by reading this, you will discover new opportunities for yourself, too. I hope to convey to you not only what I've found and seen, but also what I've felt as well.

Appreciate this incredible phenomenon for what it is - a major technological shift - and you are very much a part of it.

Some call it the Information Age.

What Is Information Technology?

After World War II, electronic technology brought many wonderful innovations into our lives. But fifty years later, very few people, particularly in the over-forty-years-of-age bracket, are truly aware of how they benefit personally from these advances. The information technologies, computers and telecommunications, are the driving forces behind most of the changes and are the basis for many of the improvements that are advancing our lives and our world every day.

Telecommunications is the process of communicating over a distance by the use of electronics. It started with the telegraph and the telephone, which supported the growth of the railroads in the US during the mid-1800s and has reached the stars via satellite. Telecommunications makes the distance disappear and makes the communication instantaneous. Since this technology is over 100 years old, telephones have essentially blended in with our lives. Even though a phone can sometimes be very pesky and intrusive, it could hardly be considered threatening by anyone.

I know you're not afraid of using electronic communications. Telephones are full-fledged members of every American family, just like their radio and television cousins. Radio has been entertaining us for at least 75 years and network television is just over 50 years old. As a matter of fact, do you realize that you spend about 50 hours a week listening to the radio and watching television? With all the electronic hardware that surrounds us, it would be hard to imagine a world without all the wonderful links that instantly connect us together.

The Mysterious Computer

Computers have most often been seen as overwhelming and mysterious; they are sometimes perceived as embodying ominous forces. Many seniors actually fear the intrusion of computers into their lives. They see them as menacing machines that steal away jobs and make billing errors. Some probably even fear being enslaved by computers and becoming mindless drones in a terrifying world, in the same way that such things were portrayed in the old classic science fiction movies - with lightning bolts and mad scientists.

Do today's kids have such nightmares? Never! They're the vanguard of the video generation. They've grown up in this highly visual world, looking at an assortment of images on one type of screen...picture tube or monitor...or another. The computers of their world are the non-threatening kind, nothing like HAL - that sinister machine from 2001 - A Space Odyssey. Rather, their machines are the friendly Apple, the PC for the rest of us, and those personable androids of the Star Wars sagas, the stubby R2D2 and the professorial C3PO.

On the next few pages, I've highlighted how I have personally, at the age of 50-plus, gone about discovering a fun-filled world of computers for myself. My words were distilled from my first hand encounters with several people of various ages and are a product of our collective adventures and experiences with Apple Macintosh personal computers.

Learning With Computers

Because we are not the only social creatures on Earth, our ability to learn and communicate is what distinguishes us from some of the other animals that roam this planet. But you might ask, "What does that have to do with computers? Why did you include the 'c' word in the title of this paragraph? What in the world do computers have to do with learning?"

Computers now make it possible for us to change the way we learn as individuals; they can help us grow at our own pace. A computer is another learning tool - just like an inkwell, or a blackboard, or a flash card, or lined tablets, or a textbook- except better!

'Computer' is only a name that some of us use to describe what could be called an electronic helper. Don't let a name bother you; understand that this is my attempt at describing my discoveries while making a personal journey down a new road. I hope that in sharing some of my perceptions of PCs with you, that it will eventually help us all to distinguish ourselves from the lesser beasts.

Please don't panic; this is not a dissertation on electronics. It is simply a collection of real world experiences, with personal computers playing a major role.

Using New Tools For Sharing

There seems to be only one thing that we, as humans, enjoy more than learning about something new and different - and that's telling someone else about it and sharing our newfound excitement and information with them. We were born to communicate. As I tell my story, I may occasionally get excited - even passionate. Please bear with me; but don't ever be intimidated by any words that I use. They're just a part of today's vocabulary and I'll do my best to explain them. Sometimes people like to throw strange terms around in an attempt to intimidate; that's not my intention here. Never let the people who throw words around bother you.

Everything is relative to the way you look at things. I see today's multimedia computers as communications tools that can help you to think, express yourself, create ideas and link you with others. Not only can they send notes and letters for you, but now they can convey your sounds, pictures and emotions too. What I want you to do is to see this new world of computers from your own personal perspective. Things have to make sense to you first. If you've never been exposed to computers before, it's not too late to start. As a matter of fact, it's probably a lot easier today. Now these computers will actually help you by doing much of the hard work and leaving the more enjoyable parts for you.

Early Childhood Development

I believe that my earliest attempts at communications and learning were in kindergarten. I was involved in a storytelling session with my class and a question-and-answer exchange. I don't think that we were actually trying to read, but I do seem to recall that at least the teacher had a book. This was the first time I remember formally sharing information with others. Later, those activities were described to my Mom and Dad in the following manner - "he is constantly talking out without permission." That definitely did not make me feel that I was being praised for my excellent communication skills and my willingness to share my ideas with others.

You mean to tell me that each kid was supposed to take a turn at answering the questions that my teacher was asking? That seemed ridiculous - and what's more, I knew that it could take forever! After all, this was just the beginning of my personal education and there certainly wasn't any time to be wasted. It made absolutely no sense to me at all. Nevertheless, for my outbursts - as they became known; I had always thought of them as contributions, my teacher sent me to the cloakroom. There she made me stand in an empty wastebasket! For what seemed like an Eternity. And to do God knows what. Waste? This happened to me more than once.

Alone in my basket, I began to realize that from now on, life was not going to be as easy as my first five years had been. Having the ability to communicate was definitely going to be important. If my enthusiastic responses hadn't conveyed to my teacher all that excitement within me that she was responsible for, then I guess I really didn't understand what communicating and the learning process were all about.
This made a lasting impression on me.

Hopefully, things would get better; and they did.

Building Something

Such are my early memories of the formal education process. I take that back; that's not all of it. I can also remember another facet of my kindergarten experience. It had something to do with a large pile of multi-shaped wooden blocks in one corner of the classroom that could be used to build things. One day, armed with a simple picture diagram, I constructed a complex railroad train and trestle system from these random pine blocks As I remember it, this tribute to my latent engineering interests turned out to be quite a formidable structure, even if I do say so myself. Of course, time may have distorted my sense of proportion; but I do remember this project as a positive learning experience. In addition, as a bonus for the teacher, those blocks and that diagram kept me enthused and interested - and even quiet - for quite a long period of time. I was forging ahead at my own pace, I was creating something and I was interested in what I was doing. Perhaps there was more than one lesson to be garnered from that experience, but it did show me how learning could be both engaging and enjoyable.

Reflecting on those events now, I can easily recognize that even then, the processes of learning and communicating took on several forms. Since I bought myself a PC, I find that my 'ability to learn' has gotten much better. Today, I have the electronic equivalent of what you might consider to be my own personal, gigantic collection of

blocks and plans. I'm having the time of my life, using what I'll call a 'thinking machine.' This friendly appliance is helping me, teaching me and entertaining me each day. Sometimes I think that I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do when I grow up. There are whole new worlds out there to be explored.

But I Don't Need a Computer

If you believe that you don't need a computer, then I agree with you. I think that you're absolutely right. Since you don't need a computer, let's just add 'computer' to that long list of things that you can live without. Now let's say that you are an average person, but curious, and you don't want to place yourself at any disadvantage around others who you respect and may have personal computers. Whether they actually understand anything about them or not is not the question at this point. Perhaps there might be new things for you to learn through a computer. Maybe there's something a computer can do for you that you haven't thought of. A computer should be able to make some things easier for you, maybe even save you money in the long run - I know you'd like that. It just might be worth taking a chance, as long as it doesn't cost you much time or money to get involved.

For his book The Children's Machine, Seymour Papert, an MIT scholar in the areas of media and artificial intelligence, has used the subtitle Rethinking School in the Age of the Computer. His phrase sets the tempo for a proper challenge of traditional ideas and concepts of learning. I believe that every parent, every teacher and every educational system around the world should consider his ideas. In a multiple media world, his book challenges us to rethink traditional definitions of words like 'literacy' and 'knowledge'. I highly recommend that you read it.

Call these boxes knowledge systems, thinking machines, personal assistants or just plain computers. Today, PCs are the household tools of choice that can assist you in ways that you couldn't have even imagined just a year or two ago. What are most important are your needs; they should be the first and only consideration when it comes to choosing a computer. These machines should meet your standards, not vice versa.

You should be able to say, "My PC works for me."

So Much To Do - So Little Time

What might you do with a computer? Or better yet, what can a computer do for you? Maybe you would like to increase what you know about a certain specialized area or even exercise some hidden creative abilities. How is your memory? Perhaps you'd like to improve your thinking processes in general; a little brain stimulation has never hurt anyone. Could you use some help in keeping track of some of the things that you have? Stocks? Stamps? Real estate? Maybe just making a list for yourself, one that you could easily change or update, might be helpful for you. That's exactly how many people get started; just making lists of things to do, tracking names and addresses for Christmas cards, or phone numbers - or even compiling a family tree!

Maybe one of these ‘smart boxes’ can provide you with a new way to connect and interact with other people - or help you to better understand the people around you - be they your mate or your children or some of your friends. While their practical uses may not be immediately obvious, here are a few ideas of how computers can provide actual solutions to some of your simple, everyday needs.

- They can quickly track things, such as phone numbers, names and addresses, birthdays and appointments.
- They can search your files, manage your money, they can even reconcile your checkbook math.
- They can improve your thinking - you can easily reflect on your ideas and refine your thoughts when you write them down on a PC.
- They can give you instant help in spelling, typing and grammar, even offer examples.
- They can increase your productivity - automated processes now put tremendous power at your fingertips.

The Business of Entertainment

The traditional business worlds are continuing to take the most advantage of computers - primarily by increasing their use to cut their administrative and management costs. However, it’s within the entertainment industry and some of the more creative areas, such as film, television and publishing, where the most innovative applications of computers are being pursued. The fulfillment of personal needs is big business and information is the commodity. Many computer software companies have been scrambling to buy up the digital rights to paintings, pictures, sound bites and even animation talent. They figure that it’s more important to own the content than it is to own the software codes that manipulate it. Trends are clear; licensing arrangements range from Funk & Wagnalls to Hanna-Barbera.

But what exactly do we mean by content? Why all the fuss? In a computer intensive world, content becomes defined as digital data that can be displayed by a computer and is of interest to many users. Text, sound, animation, graphics and video - taken together - are computer content and usually referred to as multimedia (there’s that word again). Code on the other hand would be the collection of computer instructions that make up a word processing program or the database management program; code can move and manipulate content.
Without getting technical, know that digital content is oblivious to its means of transformation or transportation. It doesn’t care who manipulates it or if it’s networked by cable, broadcast by satellite, stored to tape or transported by VCR, video game or interactive CDROM. If you don’t know what CDROMs are, jump ahead to page 26 for details or continue to read on for a bit. Just be aware that the population of CDROM drives (an estimated 17 million at last count) is currently growing faster than VCR players did in the 1980’s.

Buy It For Yourself

It is an investment in your future, but it’s not the purchase of your lifetime. Unfortunately, I have seen too many people agonizing over the purchase of a personal

computer. It's as if buying a PC was their last chance for legitimacy in a technical world. You should think of buying a PC as more like choosing your first date. I've found a few courageous souls within the senior population who were spared this trauma of the 'first computer purchase'. Their stories are simple and similar. "Our kids gave us this computer for Christmas and we don't have a clue as to what we're supposed to do with it. Can you help us?" Buying a computer was the furthest thing from their minds. Like you now, they wanted to make sense out of things and become involved. Isn't that why you bought this book? You should see them now! They're my inspiration for writing this booklet. And the kids spur me on, too! Like ten year old Kimberly, who stores the voices of her best friends on her PC, and young Cy, who diligently calculates his way through 'uncharted worlds' just to keep a jump ahead of Kathryn and Lindsey, his two very sharp sisters. They all keep me honest.

Buying a computer is like making any other purchase; you're trying to match what you think you want to buy and what's available to you with the amount of money you want to spend. Naturally you want the best value, too. I'll speak to each of these factors, but what you want is the most important issue by far. I'm always amazed at some of the considerations that people wrestle with and where they place their priorities. What this is all about is meeting your needs. You'll be amazed at how simple it really is to take one of these machines home, set it up and put it to work for you. They're designed to be both reliable and enjoyable.

Are You Being Sold?

Did you decide that you want a computer all by yourself or did your brother-in-law just buy one? Or are your kids pressuring you for one to do their homework with? Or has a salesman made you feel prehistoric for not having 'the best' and 'the fastest' and 'the biggest'? Let's go on the assumption that you've determined that you do want a personal computer; we can put that factor aside for the moment and concentrate on some other considerations:

- Are you focused on the tasks or the tool?
- Do you know what a computer system is?
- What's your budget? what do you want to do?
- Do you have someone who can teach you?
- Will social pressures dictate what you buy?
- Do you want simplicity? Reliability? Guarantees?

Let me explain what's important about each factor.

Are you focused on 'the task' or 'the tool'? - This is an extremely important question. As you ask it of yourself once again, let me elaborate on it in the context of your relationship with your car. Do you use an automobile functionally, to go for rides on weekends, to drive back and forth to your job, or to run occasional errands? Maybe you're a more-involved type, who's mechanically inclined, intrigued by 'what hardware's under the hood' and, in addition, your brother-in-law just happens to be in the service station business?

This booklet was written specifically for people in the first category, who want to journey from point A to point B, in relative style, safety and comfort, with essentially no hassle. If you fit better into the second category, you probably won't like this book. You should buy one that talks about 'hardware configurations' and 'software specifics'; then you can learn all about computer 'nuts and bolts' and 'codes and scripts.' It's your choice; but such information is definitely not included here.

This booklet was written specifically for those people in the first category, who want an enjoyable journey from point A to point B, in relative style, safety and comfort, with essentially little or no hassle. If you fit better into the second category, you probably won't like this book very much. You should buy yourself a different one that talks about 'hardware configurations' and 'software specifics'; then you can learn all about computer 'nuts and bolts' and 'codes and scripts.' It's your choice; such information is definitely not included here.

What's Your Budget?

What follows is my three-point, money-back guarantee for you to use when choosing your first PC. It's unscientifically based on rumor but you can absolutely bank on it.

1. This PC will be the first computer that you own; it will not be the last computer that you will buy.

2. A new computer with more capability will be introduced within six months of your initial purchase.

3. The next computer that you acquire will probably have at least twice the capability of this first one and it will cost about half as much.

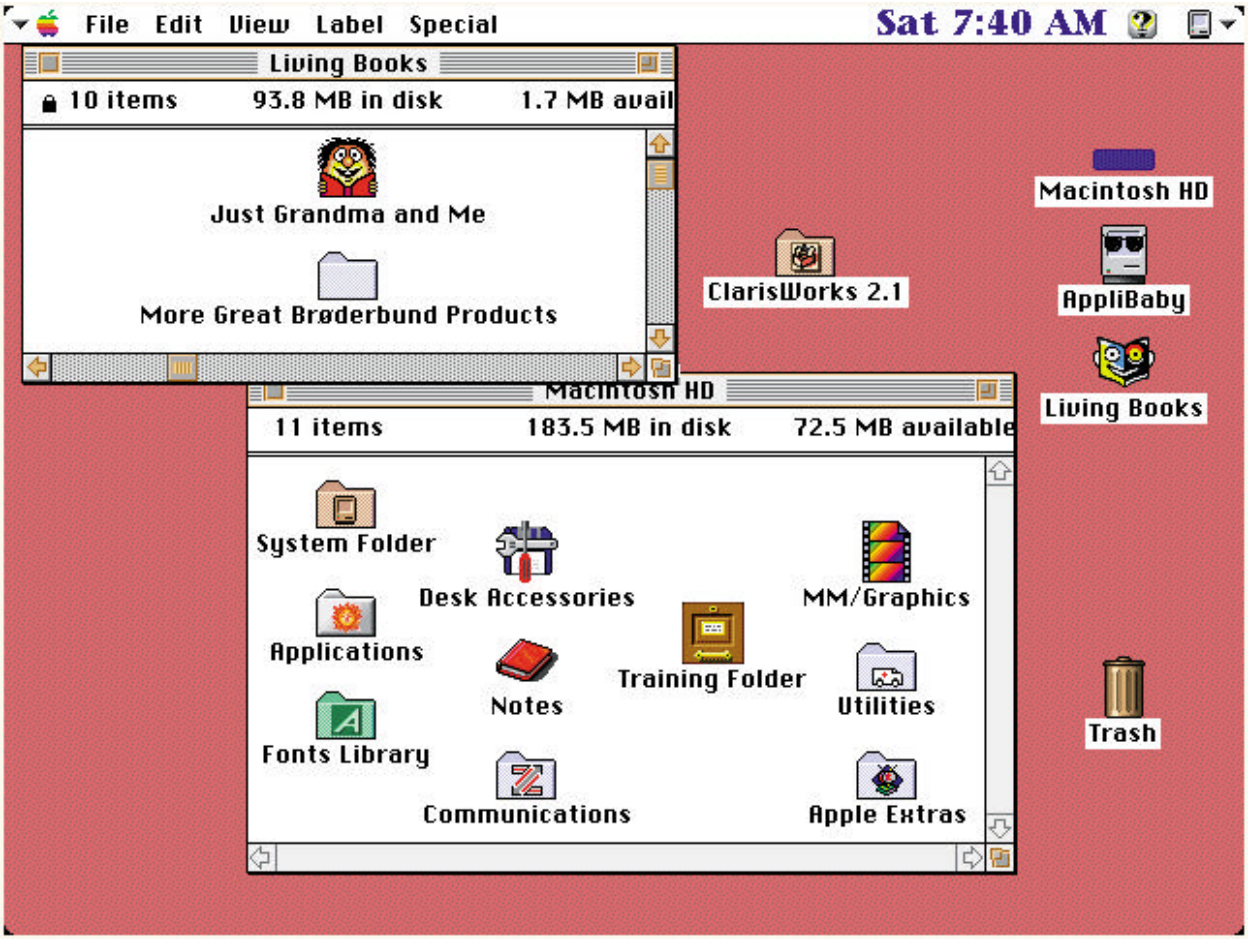
Don't let such facts distract you from buying the PC you want now. Did I mention that I own two $1200 VCRs? They were some of the first ones on the market. They gave me what I wanted when I wanted it at a price I was willing to pay. Today you can buy that same capability for $300. So what?

Initially, PCs were very expensive, particularly the Macintosh. However, its sound and graphics capabilities were way ahead of the other machines. Today, all personal computers are truly consumer items - available from tens of thousands of retail stores, dealers and mail order outlets. Cost is now the least significant consideration for you. Pick yourself a reasonable budget and any number of systems will fall within your reach.

Don't buy a used computer. You usually end up with either old technology or someone else's problems - or both. If at all possible, let a reputable manufacturer stand behind your first PC purchase.

What Is a Computer System?

A system describes all the pieces of a computer - plus you. The computer's components are the hardware and the programs (or applications) are the software. Your inputs and software change the way the system performs for you. The keyboard and mouse (a pointer) allow you to give instructions to the computer. Monitors and printers and speakers provide the output. You communicate with the computer through the keyboard and mouse; it responds to you through the monitor and speakers. The picture below shows today's typical graphic interface on a Macintosh computer.



The wonderful thing about electronics is that they constantly get better and cheaper. About 30 million homes, one-third of the Nation's households, have PCs. Some estimate that this number will increase fifty percent within the next five years. I bought my first computer in the Spring of 1992. Today, I can buy twice its capability for roughly half the price. But because of what it has given to me over the past two years, I think it's priceless.

What Is Important

Ultimately it's what you want to accomplish with your computer that is still your principal consideration. You can have anything you want and at today's prices, with a little prudence, you will get exactly what you're paying for. If someone is offering you a deal that seems too good to be true, it probably is. Know what you want and be willing to pay the market value for it; you're making an investment in yourself.

Can someone teach you? Just because some PCs are simply hard to use, don't feel that you have to resort to a '. . . . . for Dummies' book. Don't put yourself down before you start! You're not a dummy about anything that's complicated or unfamiliar to you. If you have good information and the right tools, you can teach yourself about PCs. Built-in, interactive help is available for most machines today and should be a part of whatever you buy. You shouldn't have to struggle with the inner workings of a computer just to put it to work; it should be easy for you to operate.

Do social pressures dictate? If you're a person who's easily influenced by others, maybe your mind's already been made up for you. The three largest manufacturers of personal computers are Apple, IBM and Compaq. They've taken turns in the No. 1 position for several years. Additionally, since 8 out of 10 people own IBM or IBM-compatible machines, the correct answer must be . . . now don't jump to conclusions. You want simple, reliable and user-friendly. When I told my Mom once that I was searching for a girlfriend who was good looking, intelligent and personable, she said to me "Gee, you want everything, don't you." And my response to her was, "Why not? They're out there." It's the same with a PC. Since your time is as precious as your money, how much time you spend learning to use your computer must be a significant part of any evaluation of its cost to you. Be practical; if you can't easily use a PC, then it's worth absolutely nothing to you.

My First Computer

I bought my first computer almost three years ago, sight unseen; it was a Macintosh. I was in the midst of a career change and was essentially unemployed. First, I needed all the help I could get to increase my personal capabilities. I also wanted to see if these new machines were really as 'user-friendly' as people claimed they were. In addition, I hoped that there were opportunities for me within a booming PC industry; I had some technical background. I quickly realized that what was happening for the computer industry -

was happening everywhere!

I found personal computers being used in business, education, law, entertainment, advertising and publishing. There were applications and opportunities springing up all around me. In May 1992, I brought home the boxes and plugged my first Mac together. It's same machine that I'm typing on right now - and I never learned to type. Then I set out to prove to myself just what a PC could do to help me. I quickly discovered that it helped me get organized. Since then, it's helped me to learn about all kinds of new things and it's helped me to think clearly. It has already opened several new worlds to me and has given me at least one new career - and maybe even a few more.

If a computer can offer some valuable advantages to you today, need I say anything else? Look at how other people just like yourself are turning to personal computers and using the power of the PC to help themselves. Then, turn your focus to some of the reasons that you might want to have a personal computer working for you and prepare yourself for some fun.

Choosing Your First Computer

You're any age, either sex; you possess no previous computer skills, or any special technical skills for that matter. Actually your VCR has sometimes been seen blinking on 12:00AM. If you have some computer background and it's over a few years old, forget it. The information is out of date. Now, in addition, you are energetic, open minded and willing to explore something new. You are interested either in upgrading your life or helping to make this a better world in one way or another. Your budget ranges from $1000 to $1500, you've shopped around and you are ready to make your move! Say no more. *Buy a Macintosh.*

But what about megabytes? And CDROMs? Does it take WordPerfect? *Buy a Macintosh.* Is it expandable? Is it compatible? Does it have a sound card? *Buy a Macintosh*. Is it a 486? Does it have Windows? Is there software already installed in it? *Buy a Macintosh.* It's my firm belief, after having gone this route myself, that if you're serious about buying a computer for yourself, one that can adapt to your individual needs, your specific personality and your changing demands, you'll bring home a Macintosh. Then you can begin to understand how a box full of electronics can have a significant influence your life.

Getting involved will help you to understand the language. Remember, they're only words - learn them. Then map out some paths in this new world for yourself. Until you have some feeling for what computers can make possible, there is just no way for you to describe to others what you want from a computer or what you need. Once you've befriended a Macintosh, your abilities will increase dramatically and you'll start to understand where a Mac enthusiast comes from. Believe me, there are millions of us to be found in every corner of the world.

What's the Advantage?

I won't ask you to accept the choice of a Macintosh on faith alone. However I do feel that I can give you a better understanding of the issues involved by discussing the important considerations in the context of the best choice. Why should I fill your head up with detailed information about things that are really of no importance to you? For instance, do you know anything about those microprocessors in your car? Of course you don't and why should you.

The most important consideration of any shopper is the cost, and by that I mean the total cost. For the purposes of this discussion, I've picked the bottom line to be approximately $1000.

Total cost means:

- You're buying a complete system - I'll define that.
- You'll use it because it's simple to operate.
- There is nothing extra you will need to buy.
- There are no hidden costs - like training and support.
- This investment can easily grow with you.
- You are covered for equipment failures for the first year - which is all you really need.

What more could you ask for? A built-in teacher? For $1000, you can buy a Macintosh with built-in Help along with toll free phone support for you to call on anytime. As for the built-in teacher, the built-in Help menus are a function of many of the better programs, like **ClarisWorks**. In addition, several interactive CDROM tutors now demonstrate just how powerful these multimedia systems can be as formal teaching tools and knowledge sources in their own right. This price also buys you:

a complete system - this includes all the computer hardware with operating system software, a variety of applications software including ClarisWorks, which I think it is the best integrated word processing/graphics/database program available, and the popular Quicken checkbook and money manager, a 14"color monitor, inkjet printer, keyboard, modem and mouse.

no hidden costs - with the exception of expendables, printer paper and ink, there are no other expenses. Because your time is extremely valuable, ease-of-learning and ease-of-use are most important to you. A Macintosh gives you the maximum advantage in this area by virtue of its standard interface and integrated system design. Subscribing to an on-line information service, like America Online, is well worth the additional $9.95 per month access fee (see the discussion of Information Outlets).

user-friendly - Apple invented the user-friendly computer. Because of its ease of acceptance by children, the Apple was quickly labeled by some as 'a toy', no doubt in part due to the spirit of competition. Now that ease-of-use is well recognized for the additional power that it can provide to the user.

lifetime support - retail sales personnel do both the shoppers and themselves a favor by pointing a first-time user toward the Macintosh. Because of its 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week coverage, the Apple support that comes with the purchase of a Mac is one of their best bonuses. That information and support number is:

1 (800) MY-APPLE

Does More, Costs Less

Macintosh computers are now sold in more than 5000 retail outlets across the country and come in an assortment of sizes and shapes. If you know what you want and you know your priorities, you can buy the system that I've described for approximately $1000 (or even less if you're a persistent shopper). Maybe it's one of last year's models and it doesn't have a CDROM, but there are bargains out there. If you're just starting out on your electronic adventure, it's all you really need. Before you can get the most out of a personal computer, you have to understand what they can do for you. Decide where you want to start and buy something!

Our $1000 system can help you do all the things I listed under *So Much To Do - So Little Time*, but we all have our own ideas of what is important. After you've introduced a computer into your lifestyle, the better you will understand your own needs and applications. You will then be able to derive the greatest number of benefits from these powerful little boxes. Understand that all choices are yours. If you think you'll want a computer to do more, either add more capability now or add it later, but make a move! I strongly recommend a machine with a CDROM capability (soon all PCs will have CDROM drives). The added value you'll get for an additional $200 is well worth the money (see my listing of *Some of the Best*).

The power inside a computer, like the engine of a car, is yours to control. With a minimum of understanding (like how to drive your car) you can make your Mac conform to you (adjust the seat, fix the mirror) and put it to work for you. Just point it in the direction you want to go and let it take you. The software programs (the applications) are the maps that you follow. The next two pages have some common questions that people like you have asked me. I've also included some of their comments to help you choose your personal routes (see How Others See Them).

The Burning Questions

Many of the things that people typically ask me about buying computers just aren't important anymore if you're purchasing a Macintosh. Nevertheless, let me echo some of the more common questions here and give you the simple answers to them just for your general knowledge and understanding.

Does it have Windows? Apple Computer brought 'windows' into our vocabulary by introducing the graphic interface into the PC world in 1984; that was the birth of the Macintosh. The Mac uses easy-to-understand, standardized graphic images called icons for operation and control (like the examples on page 17) rather than esoteric codes and text. Windows is a software program used on IBM/IBM-compatible computers to make them look and perform like Macs - almost.

Is it a 486? No, it is not. The number '486' describes a microprocessor chip that's manufactured by Intel and used in IBM and IBM-compatible machines. Macintosh computers use chips made by Motorola, called the '68000' family (and now a newer technology family called 'PowerPC'). For all intents and purposes, for the average user, both perform comparably in speed and function. It's the Mac's integrated design of its operating system and interface that makes the 'better performance' difference.

What's a megabyte? When a computer converts your input (the information that relates to you) into its own language (which is called a digital format), it's measured in bits and bytes. Eight bits strung together make one byte. Approximately a thousand bytes make a kilobyte (actually it's 1024 bytes - but don't worry about it, the computer keeps track) and a thousand kilobytes make one megabyte.

What can I do with all these megabytes? Anything you want! You can keep lists, addresses, thoughts and reminders, send and receive mail, write checks, paint pictures, keep a photo album, create your own private library! Since it takes about six kilobytes to store four pages of typed text, you can store thousands upon thousands of pages of information in a PC. Pictures and sounds take up a lot more space; megabytes! But what do you care; the computer worries about those things.

What's a Hard Drive? A hard drive is a magnetic/mechanical memory device normally inside your computer that's used for storing permanent information (software applications and digitized data representing documents, sounds, images and animation); it's like a file cabinet full of papers. Because of the clever way that the Macintosh operating system was designed, the Mac typically uses about 40% less hard drive space for storage of its programs and your data than the other machines do.

Does it have enough RAM? First of all, RAM is nothing but temporary storage space that the microprocessor uses when it's running a program (it's also known as random access memory). It's like having lots of counter space in the kitchen; the more you have, the more things you can be working on at the same time. When you run out of memory, it only means that you are trying to do too many things at once. If you want to do more things simultaneously, you may need to buy more RAM! The first PCs could ONLY do one thing at a time.

How fast is it? For the typical user, any Mac sold today is faster than you'll need. You won't see any difference when you're using a computer for routine applications. If you decide that producing and creating high quality graphics is going to be one of your primary interests, ask a consultant to specify for you some system options that will fall within your budget. Ninety five percent of the graphic design industry uses Macs.

Why do I need multimedia? Multimedia is a buzzword that describes the use of more than text, something that you've been doing all your life. Until the Macintosh was introduced, PCs were exclusively text machines. With the click of a button, computers now communicate with you using sounds and dynamic images in addition to the traditional text. Not only can a multimedia computer read a book to a four year old, but it can also respond to the child's directions. Not only can they entertain, but they can also teach, tutor and interact with you. They will definitely open new doors for you.

What are CDROMs? CDROMs are plastic discs that utilize the same technology that made records disappear. CDROMs can store tremendous amounts of data (3 to 4 times more than what can be typically stored on a computer hard drive). They're also inexpensive to manufacture (about $1 each in large quantities). This can be particularly useful with computers, which can quickly search, sort and manage large amounts of data. With CDROMs, you can have sets of encyclopedias, art galleries or powerful data references (like medical books, assorted collections or parts lists) at your fingertips. Some CDROMs are even shopping references; they're the Sears catalogs of today and many of them are free once again.

Why do I need a modem? A modem is what turns your PC into a telecommunications tool. Modems let you connect your computer to other computers or to an online service, like America Online (or CompuServe) over your telephone line. For a minimum monthly fee, you're connected to millions of people around the world (through international mail gateways). The cost of having an e-mail (electronic mail) capability is a monthly access charge for the account - typically less than $10 a month for five hours of service. Your network connection is a local phone number accessed over your existing telephone line. For all intents and purposes, your connection to the Information Highway is as easy as making a phone call.

Information Outlets

With the population of computers booming, networks of computers (or described another way, communities of computers connected to each other) have come into existence. These information utilities are huge information repositories that can help you to fulfill personal interests and continue to enjoy the learning process at your own pace. They include business networks for services and support, the Library of Congress, the National Geographic Society, the Stock Market, the growing public data networks and thousands of other online communities of users and special interest groups.

I like to point out the similarity between these computer networks and cable television, which might be considered a video information utility. If your TV only has access to over-the-air signals, then you'd only receive a few channels of information. With cable services, your access to programs increases dramatically and you can choose from literally scores of specialized sources. Instead of thinking of a PC as a toy or a typewriter, see it as a powerful information outlet with virtually unlimited access.

Telephones gave us voice connectivity, and then the television gave us access to multiple video sources - either from (1) broadcast signals, (2) cable services or (3) from the combination of the video store and the VCR. Now computers can directly connect us to electronic information services, to each other, to people around the world or to new electronic publishing, storage and entertainment products. Computers are your information windows into an ever-shrinking world. They are the miracle makers of both today and tomorrow. Get used to them, learn to understand and employ them and most of all - don't be afraid of them. Dare to be bold; you really can't hurt them and they can't hurt you. But they can help.

The Way Others See Them

"I'm a small, independent businessman and the Mac has made it possible for me to stay in business."

"I use ClarisWorks on our Macintosh for my personal correspondence and to keep track of our friends. My husband stays on top of our real estate investments using Quicken."

"We always use America Online to send electronic messages to my son, no matter where he is. It's that easy."

"I can even exchange documents over the Internet with my friend who's studying in China for essentially no cost!"

"I would have never believed that a mystery game on a CDROM (The 7th Guest) could captivate me, my wife and my 13-year old and excite us for hours on end."

"At 71 years old, this machine has opened up a whole new world to me; I'm not afraid of a computer anymore."

"I was 'sold' an IBM-compatible; I was convinced that it was the easiest computer to learn and use. I now recognize that that's not the case and I'm switching to a Macintosh."

"This is Cy, Kathryn and Lindsey; we've been to three ages on Myst (a CDROM adventure story - see Some of the Best), we're in the Stoneship Age and we have some information for you about what the lighthouse does!"

"I've taken computer courses before and learned nothing; this is actually fun and now I understand what I'm doing!"

"They should have Macintoshes at my school; the computers that we have are hard to use and they don't do anything."

Sources of Help

Software packages for a computer are its rules and operating instructions; they define and dictate each machine's functionality. They contain the codes that you modify to make a computer system perform to your needs and specifications. There are Macintosh versions of essentially every major program ever written. Since all Mac programs conform to the same rules, once you understand how a few of them work, you will understand how the more than 6000 Macintosh programs that exist work!

System 7.5 is the current Operating System software of a Macintosh. It's actually a program that runs the computer and does all housekeeping and internal management functions. It includes a self-help capability called Apple Guide, which consists of built-in, step-by-step training and tutoring functions. It also includes Shortcut Menus to further simplify the fundamentals of the Mac. System 7.5 makes it possible to include built-in tutors as part of the functionality of each application program as well. These "Help" menus (as they are called) make learning to use the Macintosh child's play. Manuals become a necessity in only the rarest of circumstances. However, don't confuse 'simple to use' with 'simple'. These are powerful, sophisticated computers that you can operate with just a keystroke or the click of a button.

In addition, there are several information sources on the market to help you learn about computers. They are easily available and can greatly assist you. Some of my favorites out there are:

The Little Mac Book by Robin Williams
How Computers Work - Warner NewMedia CDROM
Nautilus - the monthly CDROM
Macworld, MacUser and NewMedia magazines
The Peachpit Press series and QuickStart Guides
MAC TODAY- the Southeast's Mac publication
Macworld Expositions - yearly gatherings of
50,000-plus Mac enthusiasts where you see it all!

Some Of The Best

Broderbund's Living Books - leading the way in interactive CDROMs for the past three years, from Just Grandma and Me to Little Monster at School. Quite simply, they're all great. They've added dimension, charm and excitement to the original books - not an easy feat!

Myst by Rand and Robyn Miller - the first blockbuster CDROM (with over 1,000,000 copies sold. It's pure adventure - both visually and intellectually stunning - no shoot 'em ups and no killings. The worlds of Myst and its characters grew out of the creative genius of the Miller brothers; their talents are expanding the minds of future generations.

From Alice to Ocean by Rick Smolan - this CDROM paved the way for serious electronic publishing. It's a great adventure told with wonderful images, backgrounds and narratives in what was 'a brave new medium' in 1992. His latest work, Passage to Vietnam, is equally stunning and captivating.

Casey's Tutors by Mike Casey - personal interactive instruction for high-powered graphics manipulation and drawing programs (specifically Adobe Photoshop™ and Adobe Illustrator™)

The 7th Guest by Virgin Interactive - this fine combination of puzzles and interactive graphics adds a whole new dimension to traditional game play and storytelling.

Freak Show - The Residents - an avant-garde example of what happens when creative musicians (The Residents) join forces with an award-winning designer (Jim Ludtke) to explore and exercise a new technology and new mediums.

The Madness of Roland by HyperBole Studios - Greg Roach's pioneering effort into electronic theater and storytelling. His subsequent efforts, Quantum Gate and Portals, have continued to break new ground for entertainment.

We Never Stop Learning

Please don't be shy. While I've tried to pack as much as I could into these pages, I may have overlooked something that has been a stumbling block for you - or at least a point of personal curiosity. I try to recognize all of those little subtleties that can make the difference between 'ease of understanding' and 'total confusion.' Unfortunately, I can't claim to be able to recognize all of them. Around computers, you're quickly humbled when you realize that you can learn something new every day. It was actually a wonderful interactive game, Jordan Mechner's Prince of Persia, that taught me how to see the world differently. It opened my mind to the power of computers and to the optimism and satisfaction that their use can instill in you. In the process of teaching other people about PCs, I've also found that each interaction becomes a learning experience in itself for everyone. Hopefully, we never stop learning.

If I didn't make personal computers meaningful to you, then please contact me and let me know what it is that's still puzzling you - or perhaps even missing. We can both learn something from the sharing of our different perspectives. I promise you my personal attention and any special clarification that you may need. I want all the advantages of personal computing become yours.

If these words have helped to get you over the first hurdles, drop me a note. Better yet, you can send me an electronic message at (bobmagnant@aol.com). I'd love to hear from you and become a part of your new world.

One final thought - if you'd like an overview of where the Information Highway is taking us, I'd encourage you to pick up a copy of Nicholas Negroponte's new book, *Being Digital*, and get a sneak preview. I just finished reading it and found his snapshots of the upcoming digital world to be exciting and full of fun. I have no doubts for tomorrow; the best is yet to come for all of us.

About The Author

Bob Magnant is the founder of KidsWorld™ **an information and educational services business that specializes in interactive technology, focusing on multimedia and the application of computer-based teaching and training tools and instructional services.** KidsWorld™ **provides technical expertise, educational services and alternative applications of electronic technology to educators, institutions, businesses, and children and parents alike. Bob specializes in CDROM technology, educational software and Macintosh computers. He is an active writer, speaker and engineering consultant, a director of the Electronic Design Association and contributing editor for See M, Why K? - its award winning color magazine. He lives in the Palm Beaches and works as an Authorized Apple Product Representative for South Florida.**

Afterword

Time waits for no man and events have overtaken the daily pursuit of KidsWorld™, **although it does live on in the hearts of many a free spirit who sees the future of their world through the eyes of a child, with mouse and keyboard in hand, seated in front of a Macintosh. My new world is now my website where you can visit anytime at:**

http://homepage.mac.com/magnant

For Questions About Macs You Can Call Me at (561) 575-4564

Bob Magnant
PO Box 4275 • 111 Norwood Road
Tequesta, Florida
33469-9275