



# Surrender to the Mac attack — time to switch

Imagine a computer that runs almost all your favorite applications, smoothly and without bugs. A computer that almost never crashes, never gets viruses, never slows down or reports your every move due to spyware, never has any “extremely critical” security breaches that must be patched on an almost daily basis. In short, a computer that you could use for the next three to five years without headaches.

Indeed, you would *love* using it.

Now imagine that this computer could also enable you to do things you’ve never done before, like easily edit video, create your own music, publish your own photo-books and manage huge libraries of digital images as quickly and easily as you can create those images.

Science fiction, you say? Nope.

I’m sitting in front of one right now. It’s called the iMac G5 from Apple, and it’s the best personal-use home computer anyone has ever put out. *Period.*

For years, most of us have relied on Windows machines and stuck by them through thick and thin — thick on bugs and viruses, thin on innovation or any genuine interest in improving the lives of their users. We use them mainly because almost everyone we know, or our workplace, or both, use them.

Because we foolishly believe that due to their popularity, they must be the best (or at least we won’t have to go too far to find a “guru”). This is akin to saying that McDonald’s must, by reason of its volume of burgers sold, be the best restaurant on earth.



The iMac G5...probably the best all-around family computer ever invented.

If our cars or our air conditioners or anything else we owned performed as consistently poorly as our PCs, we would return them and sue the manufacturer. But for some reason, we just shrug and accept the idea that computers are intimidating, impenetrable, unreliable and difficult to use.

The folks at Apple have always taken a slightly different approach. What if you had a machine that *didn’t* require a nearly full-time staff of abusive IT geeks to maintain it? What if ordinary, not-technically-savvy people could, with just the bare minimum of time and effort, learn to do tasks not just *competently* (the Windows standard), but *amazingly well*?

To be fair, it has taken Apple a long time to get to the place where they can say with confidence that their machines, their operating system *and* their version of the most popular applications are in every measurable way better than their Windows counterparts — it’s been 20 years since Apple first caught the eye of the world with the original Macintosh.

But slowly and surely (and quietly, until they introduced the iPod), Apple has in fact been accomplishing this goal, while Microsoft has actually moved *perceptibly* downward in terms of stability, reliability and usability. Mediocrity has been MS’s

steady aim, and they have consistently achieved it. Apple instead went for excellence and sometimes succeeded, sometimes failed, but always came up with something its customers don’t just use, they *love*.

## We Gotta Get Out of This Place

With viruses and particularly spyware now posing a huge threat not just to our economy (over \$10 billion was lost in 2003 due to viruses and spyware, and they were just *warming up* back then) but the ability of the average user to even accomplish the most basic tasks on their computer without incident, computer owners are increasingly looking for a better way.

Some of the more technically savvy Windows users have migrated to an alternative PC operating system called Linux, which has two big advantages: it’s free, and it runs on your present PC hardware. It also has two huge disadvantages: it’s very complex and rather incomplete (it is written by programmers *for* programmers), and it’s *butt-ugly* to look at. Indeed, it’s painful for all but the most taste-challenged of individuals, and no amount of “Windows” dressing seems to help.

(Yes, that was a geek joke. If you laughed, you’re one of us.)

Others, fed up with the increasing complexity, rapid obsolescence and mischief-ware bedeviling Windows, have bailed out and replaced their PCs with Macs running the UNIX-based operating system Mac OS X (pronounced “Mac Oh-Es Ten”). To the amazement of many, their core productivity applications such as Microsoft Office, SQL and Quicken/Quickbooks, AOL and so on are all present on the Mac, often in versions that are superior to the Windows version. Most PC folks have *no idea* that Microsoft started off life as a Mac developer, scored their first big hit on the Mac (Excel), and continue to be the largest single developer for the Mac platform.

Moving to the Mac is not totally painless, but it’s a *lot* less difficult than most people believe. For those who want a simple visual system that works, it’s there. For those that prefer a geekier, command-line interface or want to run complex Unix/Linux programs, you can do that too (but you don’t have to). It’s a simple, or as nerdy, as you want it to be. In many ways, it’s the best of both worlds — so flexible, in fact, that a program called Virtual PC allows you to run Windows and other operating systems on a Mac (even multiple versions of Windows!). Imagine having every major operating system available to you in one machine.

## Making it Easier

Contrary to popular myth, the documents, photos, music and other files that you create using a PC are entirely transferable and can be used on the Mac. While there are a few specialized files that don’t translate easily (certain kinds of CAD files, Access databases, a few oddball graphics formats, and some “vertical market” software), the vast majority (e-mail, address books, databases, pictures, music, video etc) all come across without a scratch.

“Switchers,” as they are known, report that Mac applications (particularly in the areas of photos, video and desktop publishing/graphic arts) are considerably easier to

## Tech Talk

By Charles Martin

use than their PC counterparts, and the operating system is more elegant and user-friendly. Creative types in particular are drawn to the Mac for these reasons, and the lack of viruses or spyware is an increasingly important selling point that vastly increases productivity and efficiency, which was originally the whole *point* of computers.

Apple has recently sweetened the pot in attempting to lure PC users into the Apple style of thinking. Their first gambit was the iPod, a hugely popular device we talked about in this space last week. Suffice to say that Apple has sold over 10 million of the units, and has just introduced, at last, an ultra-low-cost (\$99) basic model.

While the new “iPod Shuffle,” which is worn around the neck and is sure to be a hit with young people, doesn’t hold as many songs as its big brother (up to 240 compared to 1,000-15,000 in the more expensive models), its simplicity and functionality assure that it will continue to dominate the market (where Apple holds at least 70 percent market share).

To match the success of the iPod, Apple’s current lineup of computers has made it more tempting than ever to jump ship from the slowly sinking USS Gates. The iMac G5, where the computer is built right into a two-inch-thick LCD screen, is a marvel of efficiency and design — no tower to klunk your legs against, but speed and functionality to spare. It’s been widely praised as the perfect home computer, and indeed it is, particularly if you buy a home computer because you want to *accomplish* things rather than act as your own volunteer troubleshooter.

Their latest gambit is a bold, but beautiful, move called the Mac Mini. You’ve never in your life seen a fully-functional computer this small — roughly the size of a box of chocolates. Apple is selling the unit “raw” (without a keyboard, mouse or monitor) for \$499, offering huge savings to people who have already acquired these parts from their previous computers. The speed, power and, most importantly, *software* included with this new tiny Mac places it far and away above other \$500 computers, most of which are, let’s face it, junk.

## The Secret is Software ... That Works!

The third facet of Apple’s sudden and future success is the under-appreciated but nonetheless amazing suite of software collectively referred to by the company as iLife. The iLife Suite, which is included with every consumer-model Macintosh, includes iTunes (also available on the PC), iPhoto and iCal — each designed to simply and quickly help you manage your music, photos and appointments, respectively — along with iMovie and iDVD (you — yes, *you* — can edit home video and create DVDs that don’t suck! Honest!) and Garageband

(you — yes, *you*, Butterfingers McFly — can create music that doesn’t suck! Really!) and more.

You can sync your calendars, appointments, contacts and more to a cell phone or Palm-based PDA without trouble, you can hook up a webcam and actually talk to moving (yes, *moving* — not like that cheap webcam you’re using now) images of people in other states and countries, and you can even choose to keep your personal data “synchronized” across multiple computers (like the home unit, the laptop and the work computer), all without tearing your hair out, spending eight hours on hold with tech support, buying your own weight in boring tech manuals or hiring some \$75/hour freckle-faced teenager to make you feel stupid.

Yes, *really*. It’s not a dream — it’s real, and it’s here today. And that’s just the beginning.

## So ... Should You Switch?

If you’re swamped with viruses or spyware, or are on the verge of replacing your PC for whatever reason, there has never been a better time to take a trip to the Apple store at the Mall at Millenia or your nearest CompUSA (there are also independent dealers such as Connecting Point in Winter Park). You owe it to yourself to at *least* consider it. Talk to any neighbors or friends you know who use Macs — they’ve probably been trying to tell you their story for years.

Macs are more secure from the ground up and this, combined with their smaller market share and other factors, means that virus writers don’t find them very attractive. To date, the Mac has had *no* viruses for OS X at all, and the last major virus for the ’90s version of the operating system last cropped up in 1997. Compare this to the 10,000 new viruses users had to deal with in 2004. This factor alone will save you *immense* amounts of money, time and anxiety — freeing you to *use* the computer rather than *fear* it.

If you are or know someone who is involved in creative areas such as digital photos, digital video, professional audio or video or publishing/graphics, you and they *really* need to be looking at a



The incredibly small Mac Mini, a fully functional computer roughly comparable to a 2.5GHz PC, starts at \$499, but it’s BYODKM ... Bring Your Own Display, Keyboard, and Mouse.

Macintosh. The Mac is not the ideal platform for *every* area of endeavor — if you’re primarily using your computer as a game machine or run very specialized software, you might need to stick to that PC. But for the rest of us ...

If you’ve had it up to here with crashes and problems you can’t explain or easily fix, or know someone who wants a computer but is afraid of the issues they’ll encounter, a Mac (particularly this new affordable Mac Mini) might be just the solution. Macs aren’t perfect, but there’s a surprisingly large user-group community, both here in town and out on the Web, who are knowledgeable, patient and friendly.

In short, Apple has really come up with the goods and should now be considered a viable — and in many ways superior — alternative to the hell of Windows. There’s some cost involved, and there’s a little learning to do if you do switch ... but there are people out there to help. After all, nothing brings folks together like being an oppressed minority.