

## THE PUBLISHER'S VIEW

## Microprocessors Meet Madison Avenue

## Ad Expenditures and Distortions Skyrocket as Battle Escalates

As the desktop microprocessor battle has intensified, a strange thing has happened to microprocessor advertising: it is aiming at computer users as well as computer makers. Microprocessor makers are spending tens of millions of dollars to create demand from computer buyers for systems based on their chips. These efforts have led to an unprecedented level of misinformation.

PowerPC wins the prize for the most promoted RISC architecture in the past year. Motorola and IBM began their high-intensity campaign for architectural recognition at Comdex last fall, and it has continued with many millions of dollars worth of advertising.

As a Macintosh user, I'm delighted with the performance boost that PowerPC will offer. The PowerPC story is compelling enough, within the Macintosh context, without resorting to gross overstatements and distortions. But Apple wants more.

Attempting to lure users from the Windows camp, Apple has gone way overboard in some of its advertising claims. The most egregious example is the second in its series of "informational" PowerPC ads, which explains the advantages of RISC over CISC. An "S-curve" graph shows CISC performance as having leveled off, its abilities exhausted, while RISC performance is just starting to take off on a steep slope. This is a nice fantasy for the marketer writing the ad, but it is simply false.

The reality is that Intel has done a remarkably good job of keeping up in performance; the performance range of the latest Pentium systems is comparable to that of the first Power Macs. Although we expect the PowerPC 604 to create a significant gap between Pentium and PowerPC performance, to imply that x86 performance won't continue increasing is simply dishonest. RISC systems will maintain a performance lead, but the x86 will lag by only a year or two.

Apple has characterized PowerPC as providing a "whole new level of performance." A recent ad states, "Add RISC performance to Macintosh, and the result is a level of human performance no other personal computer system can touch." But the differences in performance between Pentium and PowerPC systems are minor, and certainly not enough to make a qualitative difference in the sorts of things the systems can do.

Apple has also overstated the value and performance of Windows emulation. Apple implies that this is a new capability, enabled by PowerPC, but emulation software has long been available; the only real change is an increase in performance. The speed of the emulator is

still insufficient to satisfy most Windows users, however, especially now that Pentium systems are reaching high-volume price points, and the requirement for 16M of RAM makes the cost premium substantial.

Motorola and IBM have been more careful in their advertising, but they too have created unrealistic expectations. Motorola, in particular, has created the perception that PowerPC is going to be a factor in the Windows PC market quite soon. Despite the optimism of Motorola's Comdex slogan, "Coming soon to a computer near you," the architecture is unlikely to make a noticeable dent in the PC market—outside of Apple's Power Macs—for at least two to three years. Windows NT and Workplace OS are unlikely to take much market share from Windows 3.x and 4.x. And despite Apple's belated and halfhearted desire to license its operating system software, it appears that the Macintosh will remain largely proprietary and that Apple will be hard-pressed to do more than maintain its 10–15% market share.

Intel has led the way in end-user advertising, enabled by its enormous bankroll to far outspend its competitors. In an attempt to take advantage of Apple's transition to pull users from the Mac camp, Intel is running a two-page ad in Macintosh publications headlined "It's time to stop and ask directions." At the heart of this ad is a statement that is just as false as Apple's claims of dramatic performance superiority: "Everything you want to do on a Macintosh, you can just as easily do on a PC." This just isn't true, as anyone who has used both systems will attest. It's the "just as easily" part that is the problem.

It is an inevitable sign of the microprocessor's deepening role in society that advertising for architectures has dropped to the level of dish soap and artificial sweeteners. The advertisements, as well as many executives' public statements, have become pervaded by posturing, wishful thinking, and outright deception.

I understand Apple's and Motorola's need to make a splash, but credibility is important too. The companies are setting expectations that aren't going to be met, and this could cause a backlash. Intel's anti-Mac advertising isn't much better, but it isn't likely to have much effect one way or the other; most Mac users look upon anything from Intel with such skepticism that it doesn't matter what the company says. ♦

