

MAC vs. PC

Contributed by Mr-Oss
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Advertising campaigns are used to brainwash potential customers into choosing a side. The MAC vs. PC advertising campaign has been an ongoing source of entertainment for quite a while now. Lets take a look at not only the commercials, but the various benefits and shortcomings of choosing one over the other

About a month ago I borrowed an older MAC iBook for personal evaluation purposes. This mac came loaded with (insert cat name here for 10.3???). I was able to get my hands on the media for OS X 10.5 (leopard?). I reloaded the iBook and got it up to 10.5.6 of the OS X operating system. The installation was extremely easy just like most operations on the mac. I say most because I have ran into a few things that I find irritating about the MAC operating system in general.

I wanted to check out a mac to increase my personal knowledge of overall operating systems. I hadn't used a mac computer since the days of the (Apple II?) back in the 90's. I laugh at the mac commercials almost everytime. The commercials portray a very cool character and his not so cool counterpart (the pc). These commercials are great for pushing the mac user image and they appear to be working. The reason I say they are working is not because mac now has (10%?) of the overall user share. The reason they are working is because they are getting responses. Not in the form of sales but in the form of counter advertising campaigns from Microsoft. I must say that Microsoft has to be slowly loosing the ground that they have commanded since the beginning of the computer revolution. The reason I say they are loosing ground is because as of the last couple years I have been seeing an overwhelming amount of things I have never noticed before. The Microsoft advertising campaign which is popping up in large volumes across magazines, web sites, & even television.

Microsoft took the ball and ran with it. The I'm a PC advertising campaign has been quite successful for them when it comes to changing thier image to the general consumer. They took the MAC notion of a PC and ran with it. It started off kind of lame right after the seinfeld commercial flops. The first few installs of I'm a PC were a little corny and had me thinking... Are they seriously dumping money into this? I mean creativity is really lacking in the Microsoft marketing department. Okay, so all these people are PC's and they aren't like the dork in the MAC Commercial... I get it.

This play reminded me of the old beer commercial wars between Miller lite and Bud Light. Miller had the advertisements that would have a referee blow a whistle and call some kind of foul on the beer. Which then replaced the Bud light with Miller lite. They made quite a few commercials which had Bud Light looking kind of dumb. Then it happened... the clever Bud light marketing team shut down the entire campaign. Bud light created a commercial that portrays the referee's as nothing more than Bud light thieves who were switching out people's beer so that they themselves could keep the budlight.

Microsoft was attempting to pull a Bud Light and make the entire commercial campaign backfire on the Apple squad. This didn't play out the same way as the beer commercial wars but it was somewhat effective.

Following the introduction the the I'm a PC campaign from Microsoft they turned it up a notch. After taking the idea and running with it I noticed a silence from the Apple side. It seemed that I'm a PC was everywhere I turned. On all kinds of television channels were playing the I'm a PC and I'm a human being... Then everything calmed down for a bit and we heard again from Apple. I don't remember what mac commercial came next but it was the usual satire of mac is cool and pc's are dorky. Following those advertisements Microsoft kicked the marketing into high gear. The next commercials Microsoft created were designed to stimulate personal feelings and relate to high volumes of consumers who might be thinking about getting a Mac. The commercial I'm talking about stars a little girl kylie who is doing some amazing things with pictures.. And she is a PC . WOW... that one just got the swing vote of every parent on the planet who happens to see that commercial.

After they appealed to the parent customer market base, they moved on to the college level appeal. I say college level appeal because that's what it felt like to me. It most likely appeals to anyone with a budget who isn't truly informed about the innerworkings of the two operating systems. Microsoft's latest commercial campaign seems to effectively portray the mac as a very limited and extremely expensive choice that the consumer shouldn't consider as an actual option. They show various people going into the Apple store and then talking bad about the cost at the end of which they settle for a PC instead that has everything they ever needed. Then Microsoft pays for the PC and the consumer wins because it was less than \$1000.00. I have seen multiple spins on this same commercial just starring different characters. One thing to note here is that not only the characters have changed but also the PC that they purchase. The first couple PC's that are bought during the commercial end up being HP laptops. The last one I saw was showing a happy customer who had a

Sony VAIO box. These commercials are starring various hardware vendors along with actors.

This trend is quite a change from the traditional advertising scenarios that I remember. I recall when hardware vendors were running advertisements and at the end of the commercial, they would make a reference to Microsoft. This is quite the role reversal. I remember how Intel would always get a summary plug during commercials with the sound playing and displaying the Intel Inside thing. Microsoft was getting the same kind of summary plug at the end of other commercials. The hardware vendors were including the Microsoft tags during thier commercials but I don't ever remember Microsoft television commercials until Vista.

Apples latest commercial that is getting play has to do with PC traveling through time to the future and running into a future version of itself. When the PC asks Future PC a question future Mac points out that Future PC just froze up. HAHA... we get it... even years from now the PC's will still be freezing up and Macs will be chugging right along. Interesting approach to the same thing you've already been saying over and over. Perhaps stepping your marketing game up might serve to swing a few votes in your favor. Maybe when he gets to the future and steps off the time machine... Everything is Mac's and they've never seen a PC before so they all start asking questions to the PC and then PC locks up. HAHA at least it's a little creative.. Most of the Apple ads I can now predict in the first 2 seconds. Step your game up... your getting slandered over your high cost in the last set of ads from Microsoft. That's what people are starting to think based on the testimony of paid actors who are getting free PC's.

Analyzing commercial advertising is one of my unspoken hobbies. Good advertising and marketing will penetrate into untapped markets appealing to the consumer on some common view followed by a warm and positive portrayal of the company product. Advertising is only the beginning of the consumer and company relationship. The acquiring of a product and the end user satisfaction with that choice are played out once the advertising has been effective. So when you identify with the commercial, realize your a pc, go out on the hunt for a new computer, identify the best one for your needs, and finally make a purchase, the courtship has now ended and you choose a side. Following your purchase you will have a real users perspective because you actually have taken the steps to obtaining the machine of your choosing. This brings out the real issues that the Advertising never tells you about. Until you have a chance to put either of the computers into your everyday life you don't truly have a real world scenario view. The overall hype is gone once the purchase is made and you have to live with the decision for better or worse.

If you thought that the MAC was too expensive and opted to go the PC route congratulations. If you opted to spend a few extra dollars to get the MAC instead of the PC then congratulations to you too. Neither choice is right or wrong but depending on the person choosing, they could make a choice that wasn't quite right for them.

If you are a hardcore computer gamer then guess what... you are most likely going to be a PC. Not because the MAC hardware couldn't meet the game requirements but the software will most likely not be compatible with your favorite games. Alot of games require technologies such as DirectX which can only be found on a Microsoft platform. On the other hand, if your not a gamer and use your computer for photo and video editing then you might want to consider a MAC. The Microsoft ad showing how easy pictures are directly attacks one of the Macs biggest selling points... multimedia capabilities.

If you are a business person who needs a computer to do your work then the line starts to get hazy when it comes to choosing a side. Most large businesses will require the ability to run programs from the Microsoft Office suite. Weather it's excel files, word documents, or even powerpoint presentations. At some point doing business you will encounter and have to be able to handle information in these formats. This dependence on applications starts to swing business people toward the PC side of the argument. However, nowadays most corporations have made large strides when it comes to Mac compatability. The corporate "Microsoft or nothing on our networks" philosophy has been forced to cater to the Mac crowd. The Mac user has been given respect in the corporate landscape and created the Mac friendly trend across businesses everywhere. It only makes sense that organizations open up the ability for people to use Macs on the networks, especially when the CEO of another company shows up at your location needing to use his laptop which happens to be... a Mac.

Now Macs can be handed out to users and setup in such a way that they are joined to the corporate Active Directory domain structure. With Macs being able to communicate directly with your existing corporate network repositories they are free to come and go as they please. They even have the ability to run Microsoft Office natively on OS X thanks to Microsoft porting Office to the Mac. Now Mac has become a possiblity for business class users who want to get basic business functions done on thier machine and that's it. The problem still exists when it comes to in house applications for mission critical services. If your company has a program that was designed to enter customer information and track contact mailings. The proprietary software that was purchased has to have the client installed on every machine running XP or Vista. Ooops, can't quite pull that off with the Mac. Now your beautiful machine that was going to help you get so much done has been reduced to the point of uselessness. If you spend your day running that application you better be

able to continue running that application if you switch platforms. Workarounds do exist such as wine, parallels and even boot camp. However, why buy a mac if your just going to have to turn around and make it a PC? Sometimes, legacy business apps keep you locked into a certain computing environment weather you like it or not.

The Mac costs around \$500.00 more than a comparable PC. However, is the so called "Mac Tax" worth paying? I think that in the long run it just might be. \$500.00 initially up front could end up saving you time and money down the road and here is why. The PC might be quite a bit cheaper than a Mac but when it comes to the additional hidden costs associated with the PC it might be cheaper to go with a Mac. When you purchase your PC it comes preloaded with Vista Home edition for example. It also comes bundled with various trial software typically. These usually include some type of antivirus, internet providers, or anything else you can think of like photo editing software. Once X amount of days pass the trial period ends and you will be expected to purchase the full version of the product in order to keep using it. Lets say you get a 30 day trial of Norton anti-virus. The trial runs out and your machine slows to a crawl with pop up ads telling you to go buy the full version or uninstall.. blah blah blah. Now you end up buying additional software just so you can keep your computer running. That is like a maintenance fee. Anti-Virus is only the beginning of the hidden fees associated with being a PC. Bring on spyware, malware, backup protection, cd burning software, etc etc etc... and you might end up with a bill that is larger than what the "Mac Tax" would have cost you. Furthermore, if you want to really unlock some of your computers potential you will need to upgrade your Home Basic operating system to the Premium multimedia monster edition. That alone might make up the difference that has come to be known as the "Mac Tax".

Day to day Internet use can be done on both the Mac and the PC. If you use Internet Explorer and cruise the web it will only be a matter of time before something goes wrong with your operating system to the point where it gets infected and has to be serviced or reformatted. Then if it gets reformatted you have to chase down all your applications and the license keys and reinstall everything to get your computer back to the level it was at before you had the incident. Internet Explorer has been historically plagued with issues due to it's need to run at a higher privilege level behind the scenes of the operating system. So you could use firefox to help avoid this situation but sometimes even that won't help you. The spyware fills up and viruses take over then pretty soon your PC is a very frustrating experience. Now there are some free software utilities that can be used to address areas of concern which would save you money but it can still be a hassle. Mac isn't free of viruses either so don't start thinking that the Mac is unhackable. In fact, the Mac was the first computer that got hacked in the most recent Pwn-2-Own contest. No computer is immune to vulnerabilities.

PC makes things extremely easy for the end user and that has alot of appeal. For the most part, software programs have a wizard that guides end users through the installation. This series of next, next, Yes I agree, next, next, finish, and restart are very common across all applications. Almost anybody can install a program on a PC and get it running correctly without assistance. The Mac however, is so dumbed down it's almost rediculous. I am amazed at how simple the Mac truly is when it comes to installing applications. I downloaded a copy of firefox so that I could replace safari. It saved to the desktop and after clicking on it I was greeted with a window that displayed the firefox file and my applications folder. I must admit I was confused as to what is going on or what just happened so I had to go and ask a seasoned Mac user and advocate. To my surprise he came over to my computer, clicked the firefox file on the left and dragged it over to the applications shortcut on the right. Then using the finder he went to the applications subdirectory, located firefox, double clicked it which launched it, and then dragged it down to the Dock at the bottom of my desktop. Promptly, firefox loaded up for the first time asking a few questions and going on it's way. Now I have firefox installed under applications and as a shortcut on my icon dock. Wow, that was too easy.

It was so easy that it was almost embarrassing. I wasn't prompted to ask where I would like to install firefox, the Mac already knew that applications will always be found underneath the /Applications directory. Wow, it is so dumbed down I was in disbelief. I though ubuntu was dumbed down but this is on another level of easy. I fiddled with the mac over the next few weeks and began trying to understand the underlying operating system and how to run this puppy from the command line. I did however run in to some walls that I wasn't expecting to find since the Mac is supposedly based on UNIX. The first thing I did was visit the mac ports homepage the I installed mac ports based on the instructions and then began installing more useful application for the mac. I pulled down nmap and kismet along with all the dependencies and various other pre-configured packages as needed. Mac ports is the Mac based spin off of BSD ports. Ports is basically the equivalent of apt-get in the debian or ubuntu world. It fetches programs to install based on command line input. Once the program is found it gets downloaded and installed. Any pre-requisit dependencies are resolved in the correct order and applied prior to installing the application that was requested. This makes installing large cumbersome package sets very easy.

Terminal access is available but in the tradition of the ubuntu faithful you need to use sudo for most commands. That's okay because the theory behind sudo is to keep users who don't know any better from easily trashing thier systems. At least with sudo they have to take the extra steps and enter a password prior to ruining thier system. As I previously stated the Mac puts programs under /Applications which is usually full of files with a .app extension. This is nice and tidy but might someday prove to be quite a problem if there was ever to be a virus or work that removed /Applications once users are infected. Other than that, the users home directory is very similar to that which is found on the PC. A desktop, documents, and the most typical stuff end users are greeted with during thier computing experience.

There are some complaints about the Mac that I have found during hands on testing of the operating system. I can't seem to find a way to start and stop services from a terminal session. The typical /etc/rc.d directories or /etc/init.d. It seems as though all the system administration must take place using the extensive menuing systems inside the operating system. Finder is your friend. There are a lot of unix style commands and configuration files which are available. However, coming from a heavy Linux/Unix background I found the Mac to be extremely limited when it comes to command line administration. I guess this is all by design to keep the system easy to use and not as easy to break. Whatever, I just want to launch an ssh server so I can hit this Mac remotely. I still have yet to look any further into getting that accomplished. I had some other complaints about various behaviors encountered using the Mac but was able to overcome most of those shortcomings. I did not find an easy way to change the mac address of the wireless card. I tried many variations of commands along with the traditional ifconfig usages. None of these seemed to work, I can't complain too much because most people shouldn't be changing their mac address anyways... but I'm not most people. I have various reasons to do such things like testing arp timeouts on a router or gaining other sessions which are tied to the hardware Mac address. Most of all I just like to change the mac address prior to running kismet.

I must say that the mac hardware is quite nice. It is limited when it comes to customization of internal components such as fancy graphics cards, sound cards, larger hard drives, etc... Memory is about the only thing you can add to the mac and maybe a hard drive with a little work. These computer components found in the mac have been chosen by Apple and the end user doesn't have as extensive number of choices as you would find for the PC. Apple is a hardware and software company. They bundle the hardware and software to bring you a higher level of computing experience. With a PC, your software is one half and the hardware is another story entirely. The hardware vendors use the Microsoft software to create the PC. That means your choices for running a PC with Windows software are almost endless. This also introduces the problem of driver support, incompatible configurations, and various other headaches that can arise when you piece together a computer. Since apple controls both sides of the computer it can bundle extremely reliable systems to sell to consumers.

In conclusion, Mac vs. PC will be a war for years to come. Apple computers cost more up front but have the potential to return more value than a PC in the long run. PC's are affordable and compatible with all kinds of applications and hardware. They do have a few shortcomings but are still the standard when it comes to personal computing. Macs are so dumbed down that I find it amusing how proud the Mac faithful are of their beloved systems. It is understandable that they find pride in using something that works and remains reliable. I would say Apple hardware is superior when it comes to the feeling it gives you when you're using it. The keys seem to be softer than my HP laptop, the design is also superior for the most part. I would have to say I understand why Mac lovers love the Mac. I can also understand why PC users don't care for the Mac. Coming from a PC background some of the Mac quirks can take a little getting used to.

I myself do like the Mac computers but don't have enough money to buy one for personal use. Unfortunately I'm stuck with my 4 year old HP laptop. Which is currently getting backed up because the XP installation is a virtual petri dish of viruses due to basic internet use. Once everything is backed up I will be reinstalling the operating system. This time however, I will be installing ubuntu 9.04 instead of reloading my XP recovery cd for the nTH time. I am a current MAC tester and will continue to learn more about the Mac's inner workings. When it comes down to it, in my personal computing experience, I will be reverting back to the HP. The Mac vs. PC war draws a line in the sand for people to choose a side. They should realize that there is also a third side, the side to which I belong. I am a PC and I run LINUX.