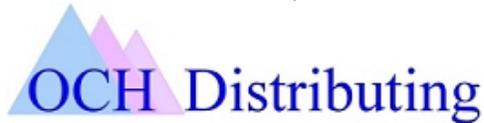


## Make Mine Mac

*Mike Royko*

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Most of the people who write about computers for newspapers and magazines are very knowledgeable about all the blips and beeps and other techie stuff.

On the other hand, I'm not a computer whiz, although my job has forced me to learn how to use them. I can muddle through most programs and even fool the totally blip deprived into thinking I'm some kind of hacker. In a strange way, that makes me better qualified than most experts to give advice to those who don't have a computer, know little about them, but are thinking of making the leap.

For the experts the computer holds little mystery But for people like me and possibly you, it can be a source of endless confusion and frustration.

Because I've been through the mental misery of DOS and RAM and ROM, I know what a tortuous journey it can be. So I offer any computer novice some good advice: Buy a Macintosh and you won't go nuts.

As you may know there are basically two kinds of computers, the PC and the Mac.

The PC types are made by many companies and dominate the market, especially for business use. About 80 percent of all computers sold are PC's.

The Mac is made by one company, Apple, and has only about 10 percent of the computer market, most of it artists, schools and homes.

This lopsided edge has nothing to do with quality, because the very best PC is nothing but a poor imitation of the Mac. The PC became dominant only because of disastrous marketing decisions by Apple in the 1980s.

But the Mac is still better. How much better?.

When I bought a PC with Windows about four years ago, it was almost two months before I could get it to run the way it was supposed to. There were dozens of calls to the manufacturer, the modem maker and other jargon spewing blip brains.

It wasn't functional until this paper's computer genius came to the house and spent most of a day tinkering with it. And even he had to call the manufacturer a couple of times for help. Without his expertise, that PC would have ended up in a closet. No, I would have dropped it out the window and killed it.

Imagine buying a new car and discovering that the door locks don't work, the steering wheel makes the car turn in the wrong direction, and it sometimes goes around and around in circles. Then it stops dead and all the air comes hissing out of the tires.

And then being required to read confusing manuals and phoning Detroit to ask how to get the car running properly and being made to feel like it was all your fault for having failed to get an advanced degree in automotive engineering. Then finally having to bring in an expert mechanic just to get the new car out of your driveway.

That roughly, is what my experience with a PC was like. And it never really ended. It was like having a car that required an oil change and tuneup about once a week. And if you didn't put in just the right octane gas, it would croak in heavy traffic.

So several months ago, I took the advice of a friend and bought a Mac. I had never even looked at one before.

But in less than an hour, it was unpacked, hooked up and running - color printer, modem and all. It has worked almost perfectly since, and I haven't had to call the paper's expert even once. Most of the manuals are still in their wrappings.

With little fuss, it does all the things a computer is supposed to: crunching numbers, stringing words together and letting my blips float through the phone lines so I can study the strange wildlife that lurks in the Internet jungle.

My success has prompted three computer-illiterate friends to get Macs. They figure that if I can do it with ease, anyone can - and they're right.

One of them, a woman in her 70s, had never touched a computer and is a two finger typist. In a few days she had designed and printed out a professional-looking newsletter, including a bawdy cartoon.

Another runs a business out of her home. She was quickly running off invoices for her customers.

The third had only limited experience with a PC computer in his job. Yet the same day his Mac arrived, he had it hooked up and was linked to one of the big on-line services and was throwing insults like a veteran cyberspace lunatic.

Of course, there is another question: Do you really need any kind of computer?. Probably not. Families have survived for centuries without their own spreadsheets, database or collection of fonts.

But that doesn't matter. We're talking about stuff. If we bought only what we really needed and didn't load up on a lot of new stuff, the economy would collapse.

So if you have a craving for stuff - and what decent American doesn't? - get a Mac and you won't be sorry. Just think: You can become a nerd without having to learn to talk like one.

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