

It is now a well known fact that in the early days of Macintosh, Apple strongly discouraged any notion that the Mac should be used for gaming. Perhaps it was because the DOS crowd was incessantly slamming the Mac as a “toy” that the Apple execs weren’t gung-ho to see it become a game machine with even more “toy” connotations. Maybe it was because the Mac shared the 68000 processor with the fluffy Commodore Amiga. Then again, it could be that Apple’s shoes were too tight. It could be that its head wasn’t screwed on quite right. But I think that the most likely reason of all, may have been that its heart was two sizes too small. Alright alright, I’ll stop with the “Grinch that stole Gaming” analogy and get to the meat of the matter. Apple’s stance with game development in the early going totally sucked.

Which brings us to present day. A kinder, gentler time with lots of happy fluffy consumers buying their Macs in droves as the Wintel platform withers and dies. (Man, I HAVE to stop fantasizing like that!) Although Apple isn’t exactly winning the war, it is holding its own. And, finally, after all these years, Apple is actually starting to really support gaming. Not only has it accepted the idea of games on the Mac, but it has actually started to think about bundling games in with its machines as a selling point. Pinch me.

Of course, it isn’t Apple’s duty to make sure the gaming scene is healthy and happy, but it certainly behooves them to lend a helping hand from time to time. Someone at Apple finally realized that a very large percentage of people buy computers with games on the brain. It’s estimated that as many as 80% of folks that buy a new machine for home use have the intent to use their bucket of circuits for blasting aliens. Whether for education, relaxation, or just plain fun, it’s clear that games play a role not only in consumer’s decisions, but in driving hardware technology forward (but that’s another column).

Apple has started to support gaming companies by letting them be registered developers (this is not new, actually), by bundling games in with its machines, and by helping game developers out with technical info. But the main breakthrough that is perhaps the most glowing example of gaming support is the development and implementation of Apple’s Game Sprockets. This move has conclusively shown that Apple is really serious about gaming, and not only boosted the moral of developers and gamers alike, but probably extended my career by at least five years.

These Sprockets are specific tools that enable any software using them to have such niceties as real-time 3D graphics, 3D sound, Internet support, speech recognition, and input device/monitor control. For example, if you are developing a game and want to include network play, you need only to plug in the network sprocket, and voila! The networking is in. This not only takes a large amount of the programming burden off of Mac game programmers, but it also will serve to standardize the sprocketed areas. Have you ever ran into a situation where your Thrustmaster or Flightstick wasn’t working right from program to

program? What if all games used the preset sprocket that made joystick control stable and standardized, wouldn't that be nice? Well, in a year or so we'll all be benefiting in just such a way from the advent of game Sprockets. Game companies are just now implementing the Sprockets. Bungie, for example, is planning its first sprocketed game for later this year, and other companies are sure to follow.

The other area where Apple has really improved the gaming situation is in the implementation of the Game Evangelist. There have been evangelists around for several years now, and without a doubt they have made a very positive impact for the Mac. Craig Fryer, Eric Klein, Yves Martin and now John Wiling have all done an excellent job of helping game companies see that the Mac is a solid and viable platform for them to develop their games on. This support will continue and hopefully the evangelist efforts will continue to produce more conversions of DOS gaming companies to the Mac realm.

Is Apple doing its part? A hearty "yes" to this question. Apple has turned the tables on its 1980s gaming attitude and has made a solid effort to rekindle gaming on the Mac—and frankly, it's worked. Will Apple continue in this direction when it comes to games? Apple has seen the light, so to speak, and realizes that games are important for any platform. This means that nothing's gonna change in near future, and that's good news. Kudos to Apple!

art Farkas is MacSense's Associate Editor/Entertainment and is the co-author of the newly released Macintosh Bible Guide to Games (from Peachpit Press). He welcomes your comments at MacSenseGE@aol.com.