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THE AMIGA[®]

Issue 13
Apr/May 1998

INFORMER

A summary of information
and support for Amiga users

**Complete
Amiga 98**



**Show
Coverage**

-Including An Interview with Jeff Schindler & ICOA Report Pages 4-7

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... Which Is Which?** Page 8

Playable TV Switched On Page 9

**HiQ's Interim Solution ...
The Road To Alpha Power** Page 8

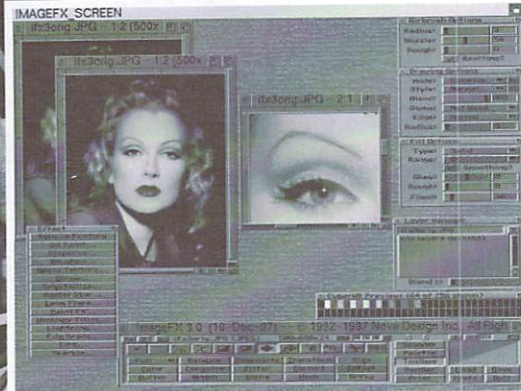
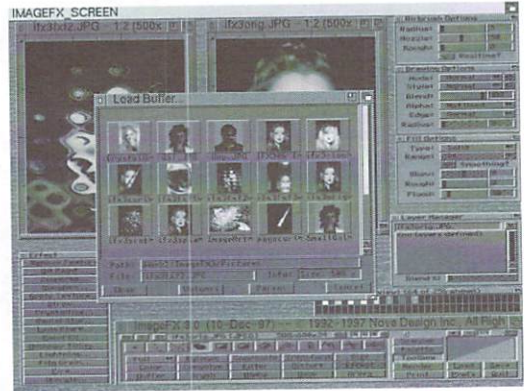
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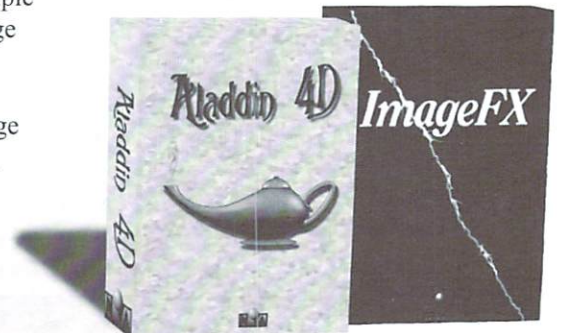
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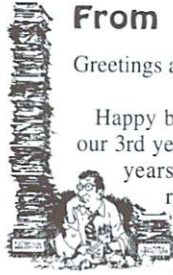
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From the Editor's Desk:

Greetings all,



Happy birthday to us! This issue starts our 3rd year of publication. The first two years have been a real emotional roller coaster ride, but in spite of these turbulent times, our readership is continually growing. From our perspective, the Amiga community wants to know what's going on and we've done our part in getting that information out to our readers. You can continue to look to us in the future for more information as our 3rd year of printing begins.

When Amiga Inc. was formed, many people expected to immediately hear a lot of news. Instead, Amiga Inc. has maintained the tightlipped policy of Gateway and reported very little to the Amiga community. While this is overall a good policy, special care has to be given to the Amiga userbase. Amigans are an optimistic bunch, but they are jaded too. With very little direct information coming from Amiga Inc. during the past year, confidence has begun to fade.

Amiga Inc. states the community is the real strength of the Amiga, so it makes sense they should act to bely the community's fears. I would argue that Amiga Inc.'s next employee should be a communications manager. This person could gather and coordinate information and disperse it to the community, portraying that Amiga Inc. does care and is doing something

about making a solid future. It is important to promote excitement, confidence and enthusiasm among the user base and a communications manager would do just that.

Amiga Inc. needs to directly let users know they are not being strung along and that there is indeed a future. There is nothing worse than a userbase which loses confidence in its platform. They need to publicly give their blessing to major 3rd party developers putting out new products (Phase5, Index, DCE, Siamese, etc.). Amiga Inc. also needs to provide service. Gateway prides themselves on customer service, so should Amiga Inc. They can't possibly answer all emails, but they could set up a mailing list and post some answered questions for all to see. One replied email or phone call can go a long way to restore hope in a disillusioned user. Likewise, they should get a website going and take up the offers by some Amiga publications to include an "Amiga Inc." column in every issue. They need to show that they are responsive and listening to the community.

I appreciate the tough job Amiga Inc. has ahead of them and realize they are implementing some of the above ideas. The fact is they really are watching and listening. However, unless they act quickly, Amiga Inc. will lose what it has publicly said is the Amiga's most important asset—its community. Only one entity can restore confidence within the Amiga community now and that is Amiga Inc.

Fletcher Haug

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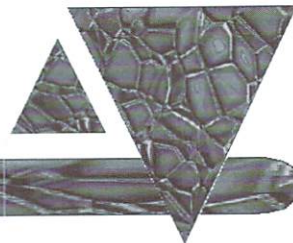
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- Y/C Plus, Topeka, KS



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St. Louis Gateway Show A Success!

By Brad Webb

The Gateway Computer Show, Amiga 98 was bigger, better attended and more positive in tone than its predecessor last year. I felt I had to make that much clear, right away. Amigans are often concerned when it comes to shows, announcements and the future, and it would be cruel to make you wait too long for the overall judgment. However, nothing in life is perfect, and there were some elements of this weekend celebration that weren't as fulfilling as we might have wished. More about that later.

On this weekend the aging Harley Hotel was a cheerful and upbeat place to be. Its biggest problem was its size, being barely able to accommodate the number of Amigans who descended on it. In fact, the hotel sold out a week or so earlier. The show floor was almost impossible to move around on when it first opened and the classrooms and hallways were filled with Amiga owners, developers and vendors. It looked as if neither the hotel staff, nor the show organizers expected such a turnout. Total ticket sales for Saturday and Sunday were 1,002, an 11% increase from last year. That doesn't even include the Friday attendees for which we've not seen any numbers.

The show was not presented by the Gateway Amiga Club this year but rather by Amigan St. Louis, and hosted by company President Bob Scharp. Bob was chairperson of the earlier Gateway shows. He and his staff did a creditable job, keeping up with what were occasionally overwhelming numbers of people participating in events. They managed a full slate of classes and free seminars, as well

as organizing a show floor with some 42 booths housing a variety of vendors, developers, user groups and magazines.

Many of those who arrived on Friday enjoyed the added treat of a party thrown by Amiga Inc. Without question, the well-organized party helped set a positive tone for the entire weekend.

Amiga 98 was also a Developers' Convention. The show was expanded to



Over 1,000 faithful Amigans descended on Amiga 98 showing their support, buying products, and filling the aisles.

three days, at least in part to accommodate the "DevCon" events. Many of the classes and seminars, especially those held on Friday, were intended to assist developers. From what we could see, these sessions were well attended by developers asking pointed and helpful questions. Judging by the participation, there's still a lot of life in the small companies which service the Amiga market.

There were many sessions for non-developers as well, with topics ranging from a Toaster Flyer class hosted by NewTek and targeted mainly at beginners, to a very professional "Digital Imaging in Pathology" class by Peter K.

Shireman, MD. Dr. Shireman's presentation was one of the best orchestrated Scala based programs I've seen, and proves there's still no better platform for multimedia education than the Amiga. All told, there were 41 classes and seminars held during the show's three days that covered everything from ARexx scripting, to developing datatypes, to using Opus. Standing room only was normal for most of the sessions.

Two software firms chose to premiere upgraded products during the show's seminars. Image FX 3.0 was presented by Nova Design's Kermit Woodall on Saturday morning to a packed classroom. Later that afternoon, Paul Nolan provided a special preview of Photogenics Ng. By all accounts, both these new programs will grab Amiga users' attention and they highlight the excellent programming which continues on the Amiga.

Out on the show floor, business was brisk. Several vendors reported they wished they'd brought more items to sell. We spotted several Magic Pack Amiga systems as well as PowerUp cards leaving with new owners. Most attendees were demonstrating their faith in the Amiga's future with purchases, and took advantage of the special deals to be had.

Besides our own Amiga Informer staff, programmer Holger Kruse (Miami) and cartoonist Eric

Schwartz were among those operating booths. Other well-known names who were prowling the premises but who didn't have booths were Mikael Wojeiechowski from GVPm, Bruce Lepper, editor of Amiga News magazine in France, and Joe Torre of Amiga Incorporated. The long distance travel winner was undoubtedly Michael Holten of Ozware, who made the long trek from Australia to set up his booth. This is far from a complete list, but demonstrates the range of Amigans who were in attendance.

The highlight of the weekend was the



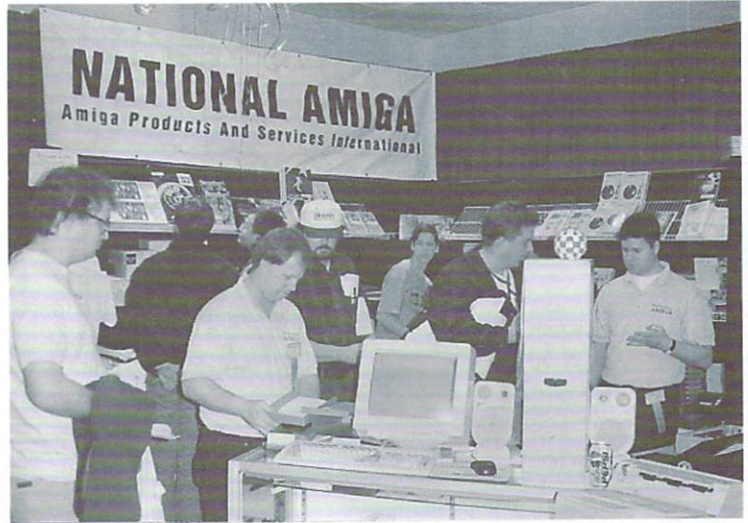
banquet and guest speakers on Saturday night. Everyone attending was hoping to hear something concrete and positive from Amiga Inc.'s Managing Director, Jeff Schindler.

Master of Ceremonies for the event was Jim Singler of local radio station KTRS, who performed his task with polish. The fun began with a speech by Petro Tyschtschenko, Managing Director of Amiga International. Petro's main points were conveyed in three goals he outlined from the lectern: Amiga International will continue to support the existing Amiga community; it will continue to pursue licensing of the Amiga technology and trademarks; and it will assist in developing new products that come from Amiga, and do so using open standards. The intensity of Petro's desire to build a bright future for the Amiga was clearly displayed when he leaned over the lectern to look directly at Jeff Schindler and deliver a line about needing new Amiga products.

The second speaker proved to be a delightful surprise. Mitch Stone is the owner of the Boycott Microsoft website. He proved to be a very articulate historian, and not a loose canon as one might assume. He cited many tidbits from history and economics to make his points

that Microsoft is endangering consumer freedom and passing off "proprietary methods as universal standards." Stone certainly had a sympathetic audience on this evening.

Finally, the most awaited event of the entire weekend arrived as Jeff Schindler, Managing Director of Amiga Inc., addressed the faithful. In a speech which obviously came from the heart, he talked of his past and the Amiga's future but he did not provide the definitive plan for the future so many were hoping to hear. This clearly led to disappointment among some developers and the press. However, what may have been missed by many was Schindler's subtle positive message. In a very significant statement, Schindler told us there is now a business plan for Amiga, one that extends beyond



Business was booming at the National Amiga booth. Here Greg Scott (far right) explains how the boing ball stays atop the 4000T!

the year 2000 and which exceeds even his own expectations. While he avoided details, probably a good business approach to take, that statement alone should prove reassuring to the community. Keep in mind that business plans not only can, but will change in the details. People unfamiliar with this complex procedure must understand it is unrealistic to believe there is a guaranteed plan laid out in detail, and much of any established plan cannot be revealed to competitors. This is frustrating to users, but a reality nonetheless.

The positive message was balanced by a realistic assessment of the current situation. Schindler told us we were still "going into the valley" and we had further to go before we could pull out. Not the most pleasant analysis, but it was reassuring there was no attempt to cover up reality. Although not mentioned by Schindler, Gateway has only owned the Amiga for less than a year, and the fact is it takes time to put a meaningful plan into action.

There were wonderful quotations. "That big competitor may own the standards, but he doesn't own the future," Schindler intoned, no doubt referring to Microsoft. The "big plan" Schindler is working on is for the future, "And if we can get there, it will be one major party," he said. It was clear he's convinced we'll get there. For those developers having problems in the current smaller market, Schindler suggested, "Do what you have to do, but don't lose that corner of your heart that says Amiga!"

Schindler did present some concrete information. Amiga OS 3.5, which he

continued on page 42

GATEWAY AMIGA 98 EXHIBITORS

5 & 10 Budget Software
<http://home.earthlink.net/~macami/amiga>
AEMail
www.calweb.com/~jzachar/
Amazing/Amiga Computing Magazine
www.pimpub.com
AmiCON - www.amicon.org
Amiga Atlanta Inc.
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Amiga Informer Magazine
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Asimware Innovations Inc.
www.asimware.com
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www.infinet.com/~comquick
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www.ncweb.com:80/biz/dan
Digital Quill Graphics & NAK
<http://home.earthlink.net/~digitalq/>
DVS Direct
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E.S. Production/Weingarten Gallery
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FWD Computing
GamaSoft SSC
www.pantheonsys.com/gamasoft
Gateway Amiga Club, Inc.
www.icon-stl.net/~amiga/
Legacy Maker, Inc.
www.xnet.com/~jcompton/legacymaker.html
"Lostman" Shirt Designs
 email: cyber1@noel.pd.org

Macrohard Media
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Magic Box Inc.
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Nova Sector Engineering, Inc.
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www.users.dircon.co.uk/~pnolan/
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Schindler's View Of Amiga's Future

An Interview By Fletcher Haug

On Sunday morning of the Amiga 98 show I had a chance to have an interview with Jeff Schindler, Managing Director of Amiga Inc. Throughout a relaxed hour of conversation, I was able to ask Jeff several pressing questions about the Amiga's status, where it was going, and how they plan to get there.

It is important to remember that Amiga Inc. is basically a startup R&D company. As such, they must lay the groundwork for the entire company and implement all their plans from scratch. However, Amiga Inc. differs from a traditional startup in that it came with an existing userbase, complicating matters further.

The main Headquarters and R&D facility of Amiga Inc. will not be in North Sioux City, SD, because it is hard to recruit people to that location. R&D facilities won't necessarily be at the same location as the Headquarters and research may take place in several places—Germany, Silicon Valley, Colorado—all at the same time.

Amiga Inc. is talking with a lot of development people, but there are no signed agreements yet. However, there are OS consultants under contract. Carl Sassenrath, Olaf Barthel, and Alain Penders are all names that come up, and it is hinted they may become involved with writing future OS code. These consultants are writing the specs for the new OS and filtering out what existing pieces of software are acceptable, what needs reworking, and what can get done in the allotted time frame.

Amiga Inc. is listening to what the community has to say and from this input they will determine what makes sense for the next upgrade.

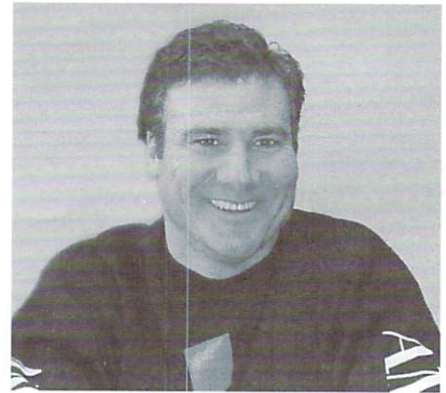
OS 3.5 will definitely appear in the 2nd half of 1998. It is being developed parallel with any future upgrades. Amiga Inc. is not looking to make a lot of money on initial OS upgrades, but they do want to show a profit potential. The number of copies sold is more important than how much money these sales generate.

The 1998 budget is fully approved, but Amiga Inc. has not yet hired all the people they need. Before they do they must first complete all the groundwork. Once that is completed, they will know their exact staffing requirements and hire to them. Amiga Inc. and Amiga Int'l have marketing money, but it will mainly be used for current market advertising, shows, etc. At this phase of their plans, it is not likely Amiga Inc. will be able to help 3rd party companies. It is hoped that once Amiga Inc. gets to a certain phase of their plan, 3rd party assistance will become available. Big marketing will not happen until there is a new product available.

Getting funding from Gateway for current projects has not been a problem, but as more plans are implemented, Amiga Inc. wants to show at least break-even revenues. This is not a requirement, but it will show good faith to Gateway and will show that the Amiga is still alive and being supported by users.

Amiga Inc. is in contact with NewTek's new acting CEO Tim Jenison, who seems to be much more pro-media than their prior CEO. The two companies are getting together to see how their futures integrate. Jeff feels that Amiga's

future plans will really be exciting for NewTek. "I think it will be a good relationship [and] I'm pretty excited where it could go," says Schindler.



Jeff Schindler,
Managing Director of Amiga Inc.

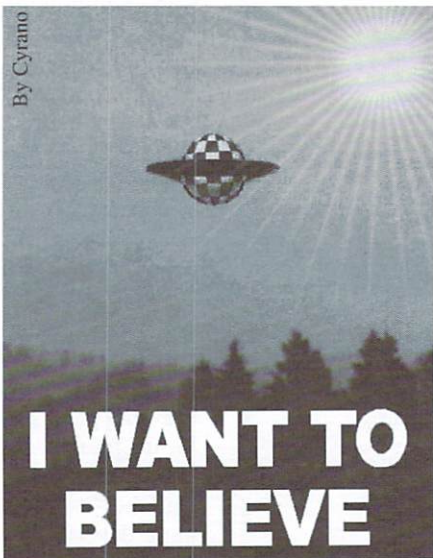
Jeff's first approved plan was used as the framework for his speech at the 1997 Cologne show. However, Jeff was challenged by Gateway to improve it. Gateway felt the plan too risky, and the loss of Amiga advocate Rick Snyder from Gateway's senior management further setback Jeff's plans.

This setback and delay resulted in what Schindler considers a much better plan, one that is less risky and more streamlined than the original, and has the backing of Gateway. This plan shares the visions of the Amigas founders (i.e. Carl Sassenrath, RJ Michael). Schindler believes the current plan—hatched by Schindler in close consultations with Carl Sassenrath, RJ Michael and several key figures at Gateway—will launch Amiga Inc. into the future.

Amiga Inc.'s ultimate vision for the future (becoming known to many as the Unidentified Future Objective, UFO) is not something rigidly solid or necessarily on paper. There is no huge investment up front with a green light saying "spend." What they have is an end goal, and various things need to be implemented in phases to achieve it. As the results of one phase are achieved, it will likely change what the next phase includes.

Amiga Inc. is currently in phase 0, as Jeff calls it, which is to determine any obstacles and deal with them. This is a difficult phase, but once it is done they can move on, hiring as they go. There are other companies involved with this project, both manufacturing and technology firms, who don't wish their involvement to be disclosed. As frustrating as it may be, it is vital that no information on future products be revealed to competitors.

It's obvious Schindler sees an amazing future for the Amiga. He thinks the Amiga has the perfect architecture for the



ACK! This must be the Unidentified Future Objective talked about by Amiga Inc.

ICOA Holds DevCon At Amiga 98

By Fabian Jimenez

The Industry Council Open Amiga (ICOA) held another DevCon at the Amiga 98 Show. Access to this meeting was restricted to a pre-approved list of developers. Administering this meeting was Fleecy Moss (ICOA), Dean Brown (ICOA), and Lee Stanford (Amiga Developer Network). Representing Amiga Inc. were Jeff Schindler, Joe Torre, and Marilyn Flint.

The ICOA's purpose is to improve communications between developers and Amiga Inc., and to determine future standards for the Amiga OS. Fleecy noted that



Joe Torre,
Amiga Inc. Senior Hardware Engineer

major Amiga developers like Index, Haage & Partner, and Phase5 are now members of the ICOA.

The ICOA plans to attend as many upcoming Amiga shows as possible. Their

goal will be to get the word out about the ICOA as well as to hold a "Seminar Set" of meetings for the developers. Eventually the ICOA hopes to have professional DevCon's in the same style as Commodore. These DevCon's are to be 4 to 5 day events, and will not be part of an Amiga consumer show.

Currently the ICOA is undertaking several projects including the processing of membership applications, establishing internet mailing lists, and administrating work groups. These work groups comprise of ICOA members whose goal is to provide Amiga Inc. with a set of prioritized suggestions and specifications for improving the OS. Working groups have been created to focus on items such as Retargetable Graphics (RTG), DevCon planning, documentation standards, and others. Fleecy announced that the RTG workgroup, which includes Tobais Abt and Alexander Kneer of Picasso96 and Frank Mariak of Cybergraphics, has reached an agreement on a common RTG standard.

The ICOA will soon hold elections for the new Steering Committee (SC). The elections will have a five week nomination process, and will culminate in a one week period of final voting. The permanent SC will include an elected user representative along with a permanent seat for an Amiga Inc. official. It was Fleecy's hope that the elected members will come from around the world to stave off suspicions that the ICOA is an American-oriented entity.



Fleecy Moss, Member of ICOA
Temporary Steering Committee

Jeff Schindler addressed the conference with his reasons for the importance of the ICOA. First, Jeff explained the ICOA provides a very important communication channel between Amiga Inc. and the developers. Second, the ICOA helps organize developers since Amiga development is so globally diversified. Third, due to the lack of focus from a parent company for the last few years, the ICOA will help determine a set of standards for the future. Fourth, despite ownership by Gateway, Amiga Inc. is a startup company with limited resources, and the ICOA reduces expenses by eliminating the need for a large staff up front.

Fleecy closed the meeting stating he foresees the ICOA helping the smaller developers by providing valuable resources including expertise, supplies, and legal help. Dean Brown added that it would help if end users encouraged developers to join the ICOA. Get more information on the ICOA at www.amiganet.org/icoa/. You can also find related info at www.amiga.org/developer/.



future of computing. One often hears phrases like "open standards" and "convergence" from Amiga Inc. These are catch phrases for the next generation of computing, and Amiga Inc clearly sees the Amiga leading the way to that future.

Jeff Schindler is sincere in his beliefs. He doesn't want to lie to the Amiga community and therefore has made the tough and painful decision to tell us very little. However, after this show, I am certain Jeff and Co. are keenly aware of the Amiga community's views and what it is demanding. For now, we must listen closely to the comments and read between the lines, but as the pieces begin to fall in place, I am convinced a clear picture of the Amiga's role in the future will emerge.



Open Standards: what are they?

While there's no formal definition, some things are generally associated with the term. Open Standards are systems of standards that allow diverse computers and software to work together, regardless of manufacturer or software author. Common examples are HTML, Java, Javascript, and the X-Window system. The standards are often maintained and promoted by groups organized just for that purpose. All companies are allowed to use the standard, generally for low or no cost—hence, they are "open." A drawback of open standards is their tendency to deal with the lowest common denominator. They work well for perhaps 90% of all possible uses, but sometimes aren't adequate for special purpose computing. Nevertheless, adhering to Open Standards allows a computer or piece of software to interact with the larger computing world in general, while retaining its own operating system and features. Open Standards are more common in workstations and larger computers than they are in smaller desktop computers, largely due to the dominance of Microsoft, which frequently ignores Open Standards in preference to its own proprietary methods.

Java Or Javascript?

By Paul Morabito

The difference between Java and Javascript is often a point of confusion. Java and Javascript share little in common, with the only real link being the name. Javascript was developed independently of the Java language and both have very different uses.

Java is a fully functional object oriented programming language similar to C++ but geared towards network computing. Therefore, it is possible to write full fledged programs in pure Java and run them on any platform that has a Java Virtual Machine (JVM). Work is in progress by both Haage & Partner and Finale Development on an Amiga JVM.

On the other hand, Javascript is a scripting language similar in its capabilities to Perl, Sun's TCL, Visual Basic, and closer to home, ARexx. It was solely developed by Netscape to create interactive and dynamic web sites. The vast popularity of Javascript can be attributed to it being an open standard: anyone can use it anyway they like without paying a license fee.

A scripting language is generally much easier to learn and code than the more structured compiled languages, but its uses are much more limited. Programs written in scripting languages have limited capabilities and are often used to tie two or more compiled programs together, as witnessed by ARexx.

So how does Javascript work? A Javascript program is embedded in a webpage and interpreted and executed by the WWW browser. The time and nature of

execution are controlled by the scripter and can be determined by moving the mouse pointer over an object, clicking on an object or by many other actions. Interestingly, Javascript can be used to control all facets of both Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. This is often used by website developers to add their website to a user's hotlist or set it as the default page.

Javascript is in wide usage all over the World Wide Web. Largely it is used (wasted?) as eye candy to increase a website's visual appearance and for advertising purposes. This is often in the form of a pop-up window advertising a product or website. Javascript has many other useful purposes such as instantly updated stock prices, or news and sports scores. For example, I am an avid follower of cricket (a sport probably unknown to most of you). I can connect to the Australian Cricket Board website and get a live broadcast of the match in progress. Many web-based games, tutorials, live on-line chat channels, and other interactive features use Javascript. All this in addition to improving the look of a website without dramatically increasing download times.

Currently AWeb 3.1 is the only Amiga WWW browser to support Javascript. All major Amiga browsers have plans to incorporate Javascript. IBrowse 2.0 will fully support Javascript as will the yet to be released WebCruiser. A plug-in for Voyager is also in the works. It won't be long before all Amiga web surfers can experience Javascript.



HiQ Integration

By Paul Morabito

Innovative Amiga developer HiQ released the details of "Project Alpha," an ongoing project to integrate the Amiga with the DEC Alpha processor. With the full backing of Amiga Inc., HiQ hopes to have the Amiga OS fully ported to the Alpha processor by the first or second quarter of 1999. In the meantime, HiQ plans to create interim solutions using available technology to smooth the transition. Already the project is making progress with the excellent Siamese Systems software and the soon to be released Siamese v4. Unlike previous incarnations of the Siamese, v4 is based around a complete AGA Amiga on a PCI card which will take either a 33 MHz 68040 or a 50 MHz 68060. As with previous versions of the Siamese, the Amiga integrates fully into the PC using the PC's mouse, keyboard, hard disk, CD-ROM, and even the clipboard. HiQ expects Siamese v4 to be faster than a normal Amiga. This is possible because all I/O, graphic displays, and sound and file operations will be performed by the host PC/Alpha processor, leaving the remaining operations for the 68k to process. HiQ expects between 50%-100% speed increase or the equivalent of a 133 MHz 68060. Unfortunately, HiQ won't continue to develop the product unless they receive 500 pre-orders. There is a special pricing scheme for those who choose this option. The Siamese v4 is due for release in 3 to 4 months. Price, excluding CPU, will be US \$499. Get complete information on this exciting development at www.siamese.co.uk/.



Ooops . . . Issue 12 Corrections

Our apologies to Bohus Blahut for misspelling his name in the Catalyzer Video review.

The Video Turtle review should have listed an "A-" at the end of the review.

In the picture of the BoXeR motherboard on page 4, the caption should read "ISA slots," not PCI slots.

In the "Choosing the right Monitor" feature on page 11, paragraphs 2 and 3 should say "horizontal" scan rates, not vertical. Likewise, paragraph 5 should say "23-pin," not 25-pin.

Amiga Shows

World of Amiga: May 15-17, 1998 - Hammersmith, London, UK. Ticket Hotline (+44) 01369 708029. More info available on CU Amiga's website: www.cu-amiga.co.uk/news/woa98.html

International Amiga 98: May 29&30, 1998 - Plaza Hotel and Conference Center, Toronto, Canada. Full details at: www.randomize.com/oa98.html. Email: sales@randomize.com

AmiWest 98: July 10-13, 1998 - Ramada Inn at Haggin Oaks, Sacramento, CA, USA. Full details at www.sacc.org/amiwest. Email: alanwall@sonic.net



PTV Launches Revolutionary New System

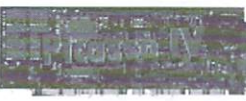
By Fletcher Haug

Playable Television (PTV), of Pasadena CA, will officially launch their revolutionary video presentation system at the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) show in Los Angeles on April 6, 1998. After a long and difficult road, PTV is now a reality.

Based around NewTek's Video Toaster/Flyer system, Playable TV is being marketed as a proprietary system built into a Storage Path rack array. An important part of PTV's success will come from their business arrangements with Storage Pack. Storage Pack has been making disc arrays and other storage systems for over 17 years and enjoys a solid reputation as a top manufacturer in its field.

PTV is unmatched by any other multimedia presentation system. Through its integration of custom software and NewTek's Video Toaster/Flyer, PTV is able to provide four channels of 16-bit CD quality stereo sound and two channels of full screen 24-bit broadcast quality video, simultaneously with real-time interactivity from a touch screen

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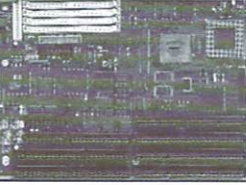


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monitor. In addition, full moving videos or animations can be displayed in all screen icons at the same time. With multi-linked units, remote configuration, and the reliable stability of the Amiga OS, this system will lead the way in interactive services.

In the past PTV had difficulty getting product guarantees from NewTek, which caused massive delays for the project (see Issue 10). However, after the March 2 resignation of NewTek CEO Dwight Parscale, a meeting between Playable TV executives and NewTek acting CEO and founder Tim Jenison was arranged. The outcome of this

meeting resulted in cooperation and agreements between the two companies which allows Playable TV to get back on the fast track. This cooperation spells a win-win situation for PTV, NewTek, and the Amiga.

Once PTV is officially launched on April 6, we can all expect to see the full potential of this product. Stay tuned to The Informer for complete coverage. In the meantime, visit www.playabletv.com with a Javascript capable web browser (AWeb 3.1) to learn more of Playable Television.



IN BRIEF

Contrary to popular belief, **DKB products are still available**. Mr. Hardware has picked up all sale and support for DKB and can be reached at 516-234-8110. **Y/C Plus and Faroudja** have teamed up to offer the **YCP-200 video encoder**. This free standing S-Video converter generates to any composite video source to produce remarkable images using Faroudja's patented 3D adaptive Comb Filter. Visit www.ycplus.com for full details. **GamaSoft introduces WebFTP**, the website management application. WebFTP allows you to do all your site administration locally, then selectively uploads site changes with its built in FTP client. For full details visit www.pantheonsys.com/gamasoft. **Europress** has released the source code to **Amos and AmosPro** to a small team of developers who aim to add support for AGA and gfx cards, AHI, PPC, and GIF, PNG, JPG and other image formats. For more info visit www.mushy-pd.demon.co.uk. **AsimWare released version 3.9 of CDFS**. The update adds support for many more CD/CD-RW drives as well as fixing bugs and adding improvements. Visit www.asimware.com for full details. Right on schedule, the **Aminet 23 CD is now available** and it contains a full version of TurboCalc v3.5 in addition to its thousands of FD software. Check out www.schatztruhe.de for info on the Aminet CD series. As a result of the official approval of the 68k+PPC multiprocessing solution and productive talks with Amiga Inc., it is rumored (repeat, RUMORED) that **NewTek might restart LightWave** updates on the Amiga. No confirmation at time of print. The **Global Posse** Internet programming team, started by Bodhan Lechnowsky, has nearly completed **Greeting Card Workshop** with programming being finalized by Curt Esser. An art competition will soon be sponsored to get greeting card designs for the program. **Gateway2000**, parent company of Amiga Int'l and Amiga Inc., announced fourth quarter **earnings of \$93 million** or 59 cents a share. This exceeded all expectations. To celebrate the release of Genetic Species, **Vulcan and Amiga Advis**, are giving away ten copies of the game. For more information on the competition visit www.marble-eyes.dk. **MPDMailpost v2** allows you to create and send the same email to many people. It supports many email programs and can include up to 200 attachments. It's available on Aminet in Comm/Mail or visit www.mushy-pd.demon.co.uk. Sadly, **Fred Fish of Cronus** is finally calling it a day and leaving the Amiga. Except for the Geek Gadgets CD, Cronus will stop selling Amiga products. Great sale prices can be found at www.ninemoons.com. **Futronics Research & Development** are apparently reverse engineering the **OpalVision** graphics board. They plan to release certain add-ons for the board and want to hear from OpalVision owners. Visit www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Lab/2056 to take part in their survey.

Phase5 and Index Information will be working in cooperation to bring PowerPC technology to the upcoming BoXeR Amiga clone. As a result of this the BoXeR will ship with a special PowerPC expansion slot solely for adding a Phase5 PPC card. Additionally, the BoXeR will incorporate a graphics card expansion slot compatible with the CyberStormPPC accelerators allowing for inexpensive high resolution 3D graphics. Visit both company's websites at www.phase5.de and www.cix.co.uk/~index.

On March 2, NewTek, Inc., makers of LightWave and the Video Toaster/Flyer, announced the resignation of its CEO Dwight Parscale. NewTek founder Tim Jenison stepped in as interim President and stated the search has already begun for a replacement. Parscale did not immediately leave the company, and is reported to be helping in the transition. The company states it is searching for someone with an established knowledge of the industry and experience managing high growth companies. Parscale had been CEO of NewTek since 1994, and drew up the original incorporation papers for NewTek in 1986.



Schatztruhe is set to release a memory protection system for the Amiga OS called Bodyguard. Memory protection can greatly reduce the number of crashes and improve the overall stability of a system. However memory protection on the Amiga has often been touted as being impossible. Bodyguard is due for release in May '98 and requires a 68030 or higher CPU with MMU and 4 Mb Fast RAM. Details can be found at www.schatztruhe.de.



F1 Software USA is now officially open and operating. F1 Software contains Amiga software never before seen in the US and includes a diverse range of titles including games, utilities, and educational software. A free catalog is available from www.mushy-pd.demon.co.uk/f1software/index.html that includes detailed information about all titles. For more information, contact Andrew Kellet at mushypd@redrose.net.



The Informer staff met many wonderful people at the Amiga 98 show. Just two of these folks were Tim Grooms and Wes O'Neil of GO Computers in Mayflower, AR. Tim and Wes want to help people having trouble getting their Amigas connected to the internet. They asked that we let our readers know that anyone needing help or advice getting on-line with their Amiga should call them at either 501-470-1517 (Tim) or 501-470-3305 (Wes). Of course you can email them also at: tim@gocomputers.net or wes@gocomputers.net. These guys are just two reasons why I'm glad to be a part of this community.

In a somewhat emotional press release, Paul Carrington of Vulcan Software attempted to explain why Vulcan is cutting back on their Amiga support and why they are now also developing for the PC and PSX. In short, Vulcan invested heavily in the Amiga in 1997 thinking Gateway's purchase of the Amiga would reignite the market. However, this wasn't the case and sales plummeted to all time lows. Vulcan will still be supporting the Amiga and releasing new games, but there have been some cancellations. Hell Pigs, Breed2000, Valhalla IV, 3D Games Creator and the Jet Pilot expansion have all been cancelled. Wasted Dreams, Genetic Species and all other titles are proceeding as planned. Visit Vulcan at www.vulcan.co.uk for more details.

Amiga International announced that Phase 5 of Germany was granted a license to use Amiga OS 3.1 in their new Pre/Box computers. Phase 5, the developers of the PowerUP PPC accelerator cards, believe this will lead to better integration of the PowerPC into the Amiga OS. The Pre/Box models will be a new range of medium and high end Amiga compatible workstations. Phase 5 claim the new computers will each use at least four PPC processors running at speeds up to 300 Mhz. An industry standard PCI expansion bus, 100 Mhz memory bus, and 8 Mb of graphics memory are also featured. In addition, a special slot for a Voodoo2-based 3D accelerator card is directly coupled to the built-in GFX chip. The system will use CyberGraphX for the actual displays. An Ultra-Wide SCSI-II controller and a fast Ethernet (100 Base T) networking connection are also listed as standard features.

The new computers are scheduled for release during the fourth quarter of 1998. Posted base prices range from US \$1,995 to \$4,495, plus \$375 for the minimum memory configuration. With this license, Phase5 can now begin selling their own brand of Amigas equipped with the PowerPC as standard. A full listing of the stated features can be found at www.phase5.de.

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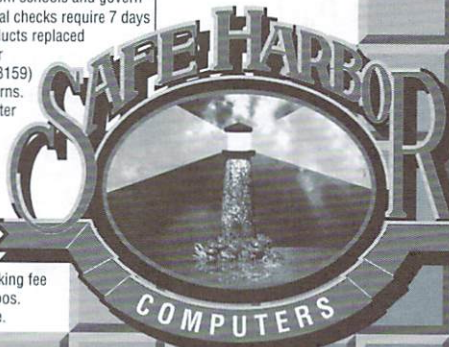
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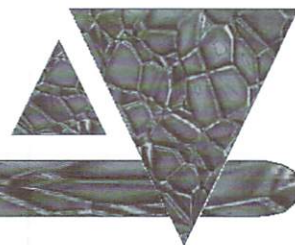
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Announcements



The descriptions and opinions stated in this column are not necessarily those of The Informer. We are not responsible for the validity of these announcements.

IBrowse v1.2

From: HiSoft

URL: www.hisoft.co.uk

England's HiSoft Systems announced the release of the latest upgrade to IBrowse. The new version, 1.2, is available from the company's web site as an upgrade to version 1.12a. The upgrade is free of charge. Among the new features are PNG and XBM support, a new global history window displaying visited URL's, the ability to save documents in plain text form, improved color handling, support for the Amiga's clipboard, and bug fixes. The new IBrowse avoids the Amiga's 2 Mb limit on chip memory by storing images in Fast RAM. The image decoding software has been reworked to reduce the possibility of software crashes. You can buy IBrowse from most dealers for around US \$40.

Miami 3.0

From: NordicGlobal

Email: kruse@nordicglobal.com

URL: www.nordicglobal.com

NordicGlobal released version 3.0 of Miami, arguably the Amiga's most impressive TCP stack. The program is renowned for its power and advanced features. It has a very intuitive interface making it perfect for beginners and advanced users alike. Version 3.0 has many improvements including: separate GUI's for MUI and GTLayout; support for SOCKS v4 and v5 proxy servers; and support for DHCP used by cable and ADSL modems. MiamiInit, the connection "wizard," has also been updated with more support for K56Flex, x2, and ISDN modems. Miami 3.0 is shareware with a registration fee of US \$35. It is available from Aminet (comm/tcp) or NordicGlobal's website.

OxyPatcher

From: Dimensions Computers

Email: dimensions@nrex.net

URL: www.nrex.net/dimensions

Phone: 888-534-6367 or 203-234-1487

New Generation Software of Germany

has authorized Dimensions Computers to distribute OxyPatcher software. OxyPatcher enhances the performance of any Amiga using an 040 or 060 CPU by handling calls to the 68882 math coprocessor much more efficiently, resulting in a performance increase of up to 20 times. It works on all 040/060 CPU's except those in Phase 5 products. Phase 5 uses CyberPatcher instead, and CyberPatcher only works on Phase 5 accelerators. Further information on OxyPatcher can be found at [http://home pages.microdata.de/~michael/OXYPAT](http://home.pages.microdata.de/~michael/OXYPAT). Pricing information is not yet available.

Picture Manager Professional v5.0

From: PerSuaSiVe SoftWorX

Email: Andreas_Kleinert@t-online.de

URL: http://home.t-online.de/home/Andreas_Kleinert/

PMPPro 5 is a universal graphics tool for administration, processing and conversion of bitmap graphics and IFF animations. Images are shown as thumbnails on the screen allowing a complete overview of all graphics files on your hard disk. Features include support for more than 25 graphic file formats with the ability to export in 15 formats, read off PhotoCD's, support GFX cards in resolutions up to 1280x1024, and integrate image processing functionality. PMPPro requires 3 Mb+ RAM, Amiga OS 2.04+ and a hard disk. The English version is distributed by Blittersoft UK (www.blittersoft.com). It's available from many retailers and sells for about US \$75. Upgrades from earlier versions are available.

Pyromania Classics CD

From: Bill Panagouleas

Email: billpana@internetmci.com

URL: www.vce.com

Phone: 800-242-9627

Ported from the PC to the Amiga by Bill Panagouleas, Pyromania Classics brings to your productions all the firepower of the top-gun visual effects companies. This CD contains over 30 explosive visual effects sequences including explosions, fire, smoke, Zero-G explosions, and depth shockwaves. Individual files in sequence are provided for maximum usage in a variety of programs such as

ImageFX, Photogenics or Toasterpaint. All files are photographed in 35mm motion picture film, scanned at 2k resolution, and down sampled to full overscan video resolution. In addition, the Amiga/Toaster version includes sequences in native FlyerClip format and Real-time Color Toaster Effects/Wipes. Toaster Effects can be used Real-time in your project, and FlyerClips can be used for advanced compositing in LightWave 3D & Toasterpaint. AGA Amiga or Graphics card required. A Video Toaster 4000 with an A4000 or higher spec Amiga is required for Real-time Effects. The Video Toaster Flyer or LightWave 5.5 is required for FlyerClips. Dealer inquires welcome. Check with your dealer for pricing.

REBOL Technologies

From: Carl Sassenrath

Email: brenda@rebol.com

URL: www.rebol.com

Carl Sassenrath, best known for his Amiga multitasking OS architecture, announced the formation of REBOL Technologies. REBOL Technologies is a system software company focusing on the research, development, and marketing of a groundbreaking new computer scripting and messaging language called REBOL. REBOL, which stands for Relative Expression-Based Object Language, will enable individuals to create and customize network-ready software in a form that's simple, flexible, and easy to maintain. It provides a standard method for the exchange and sharing of information and programs between people, applications, and computers. REBOL programs can function independently or in conjunction with other applications and are designed to directly access the primary internet protocols such as email, web, FTP, and others. REBOL Technologies will be releasing its first product, REBOL/Share, by late summer and REBOL/Core by early fall. The software is expected to run on a wide variety of platforms and operating systems from the Amiga to UNIX and everything in-between. REBOL Technologies is busy recruiting software and system engineers as well as other "true renegades" to join the company in Ukiah, CA. Visit their website for full details.



Stealth FlyerWire

From: MegageM Digital Media
Email: megagem@megagem.com
URL: www.megagem.com/stealth1.html
Phone: 805-349-1104

MegageM announced the release of its first product based on Stealth technology, the FlyerWire. The FlyerWire is a hardware based editing and controlling system for the NewTek Flyer. The FlyerWire fully integrates into the Flyer software and includes MegageM's LayerPlayer® technology. The FlyerWire hardware includes seven buttons and has a solid-feel jog wheel. The FlyerWire is available now from MegageM for a special introductory price of US \$299.95. The FlyerWire will retail for US \$349.95.

Wordworth 7

From: Digita International
Email: sales@digita.com
URL: www.digita.com

Digita is continuing their Amiga support with the release of version 7 of Wordworth, the biggest selling Amiga word processor. Included in the update is improved RTF support, better drawing tools with the introduction of "QuickShapes," improved spell checking, improved interface using Digita's proprietary DigiSense, and improved Undo handling. Version 7 requires an Amiga with at least WB 2.04, 4 Mb RAM (any type) and a hard disk. It will be available on both disk and CD-ROM. Retail and upgrade pricing are not yet known for North America so contact your dealer for further information.



What 'is' this file? Sometimes you can find out what filetype a given unknown file is by reading it into a Hex viewer (double clicking on a file from DirOpus uses a Hex viewer). Right at the start of the file, the characters 'lh5' indicate a LHA archive, 'GIF87' or 'GIF89a' are self-explanatory, 'JFIF' is a JPEG, 'FORM' indicates an IFF file of one variety or another (picture, sound or text), and an ASCII file will be downright readable!

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Software Hut Authorized Amiga International Distributor

We are happy to report to our customers that Software Hut has been appointed national distributor for Amiga International for OS 3.1 and A1200 computers. You can check out all the latest info on Amiga International's Web site at www.amiga.de

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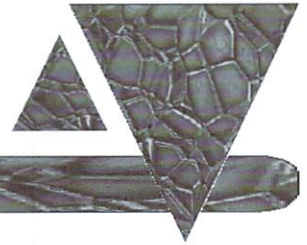
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Site Seeing



PD Pick

Web Browser Plug-in's Part I

By Davis Sprague

What is a plug-in? On Amiga web browsers a plug-in is an ancillary program that allows translation and display of a type of data that the programs don't normally have the capacity to display. HyperText Markup Language makes allowance to include data of virtually any type inside a document. Although there are countless standards for graphics, audio, video and formatted text, the average web browser can only display a few of these. Plug-ins allow expansion of this capability.

Because this is such a large and detailed topic, we will cover it in two parts. The first part will deal with the broad subjects of MIME and still image plug-ins. We will be concentrating on plug-ins for IBrowse, but most of the information given here should be applicable to other browsers as well.

The native version of IBrowse allows viewing of GIF and JPEG image formats, including progressive loading, transparent backgrounds, animated GIF's, and progressive loading of the JPEG format. It will also allow viewing of the Amiga standard IFF type of images. It has no internal sound support, no support for Javascript, and only allows display of HTML 3 compliant documents, and a few Netscape extensions. Although this covers the majority of information available on the internet, you'll inevitably run up against something you want to see or hear that just isn't displayable on a native web browser. In this article we'll see how to modify IBrowse with the help of plug-ins, so it can display just about any format of data you might find on the world wide web.

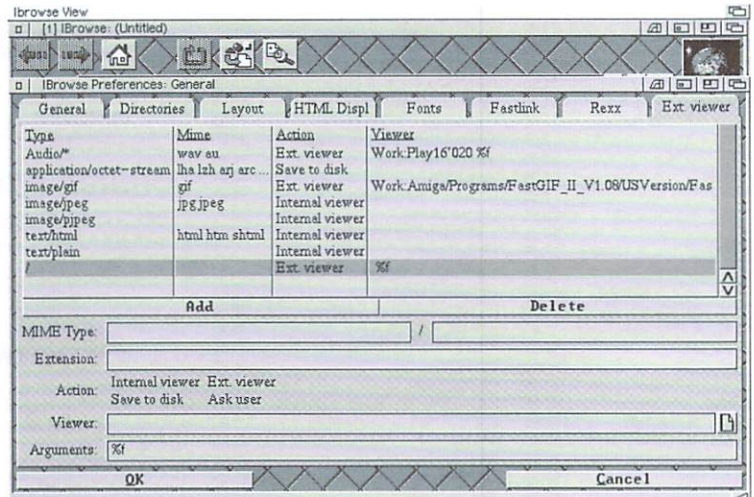
First it's important to discuss what MIME types are. MIME is a multimedia format that allows specification of what type of data is in a file. For example, if you have a GIF image, its MIME type is

"image/gif." For JPEG images, it would be "image/jpeg." When your computer receives data from the Web, it is sent with a label as to its MIME type, and this is how your web browser knows how to display it. Files labeled "text/html" are parsed by the web browser directly, as is "text/plain."

These four MIME types are the ones that IBrowse can parse internally. Any other type of file requires various external programs, or plug-ins, to decipher.

The easiest way to add graphic still image types to IBrowse is through the use of Amiga datatypes. One of the newest graphic image formats is the PNG (pronounced "ping"). It combines the progressive loading features of JPEG and GIF with the transparency of GIF, and adds an alpha channel. All this jargon means that it is an enhancement of the current formats. It also has a big advantage over GIF in that the compression algorithm it uses isn't patented, so its use doesn't carry the possibility of future lawsuits. Anyway, in order to display inline PNG images from a HTML document we will use IBrowse's ability to read Amiga datatypes.

An Amiga datatype is a short program that allows information to be converted to a displayable format on the Amiga (see Issue 12). They are similar to the Amiga shared libraries, in that they are part of the system, and can be used by any system compliant program. Many varieties of datatypes are freely available



Add functionality to your browser through Plug-in's. Once installed, you can handle nearly all file formats on the web, including audio and video.

from Aminet (utils/dtype) and most install easily. When a program uses a datatype, the datatype program converts the information to a universal format for display.

To use a datatype to display PNG files in IBrowse, first find a PNG datatype on Aminet, download it and install it. I'd recommend akPNG-dt.lha in the utils/dtype directory, but any of them will work. Next, start IBrowse, select the *Preferences/General* menu item, and go to the *Ext. Viewer* page of the preferences editor (see screengrab). You should see items set up already for "image/gif," etc., as mentioned above. Click on the *Add* button. When you do this the input fields will become unshadowed and are ready for adding the PNG MIME type as follows. Type "image" in the first field, and "x-png" in the second. In the *Extension* field, type "png". Set the *Internal Viewer* radio button, and put "%f" in the *Arguments* field. Now save settings. That's all there is to it, except you'll have to either reboot or run the "AddDataTypes" CLI command from the Shell to let the system know that you



added the PNG datatype. You can follow the same procedure for any still image datatype, such as TIFF, PCD, FAXX and XBM for example, just be sure to replace "png" with the type of file you are installing.

This whole process works because IBrowse's internal viewer can use the datatypes to make any format viewable. One thing you may want to do to tweak this a bit is to go back and make another entry in the preferences editor exactly the same as above, except with "png" in the second field instead of "x-png." The "x" in "x-png" means that it is an external standard, i.e., not one of the commonly accepted formats for graphics in web documents. This is evolving, and PNG is being accepted as a new standard, so some system have dropped the "x-" extension from the MIME type.

Well, that's it for now. Look for part two in the next issue where we will discuss plugging in animation, audio and video. Now it's time to get plugging!



When naming a file or directory, never leave a blank space. While they will still be understood by the OS, they can wreak havoc when certain applications look for a file name. A good way to separate info when naming a file is with the underline "_" and period "." symbols. For example: New_Database.txt

Holding down both mouse buttons while booting brings up a screen from where you can: view add-on boards installed in your Amiga; select what chipset version the machine will use; disable and select partitions and disk drives; run in PAL or NTSC modes; and, boot the machine with no startup sequence.

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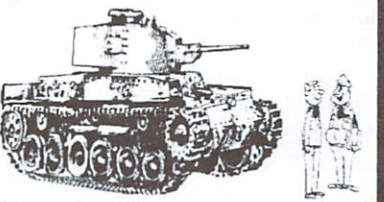
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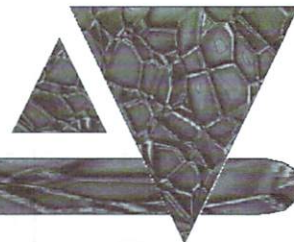
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REVIEWS

Informer rating scale:

A: Excellent. Nearly flawless product.

B: Above average. Minor complaints or flaws.

C: Average. Passable, but needs some improvement.

D: Below average. Major complaints or flaws.

F: Not recommended. Of little use or value.

VisualFX

Visual Inspiration and Merlin Software's VisualFX (VFX) is a series (vol. 1-4) of add-on programs for ImageFX. In addition to the many features of VFX, it provides a complete ARExx interface, allowing for endless possibilities. With VFX, author Jeff White has devised a simple-to-use way for non-programmers to harness the immense graphics power of Image FX.

Each VFX volume comes with a small manual, floppy disk and a CD. This review focuses on volumes 1-3. The manual that comes with VFX is clear and complete. The installation process for all 3 volumes is the same and you simply insert the CD and run the standard installer script from the floppy.

Once installed you will find an intuitive interface that allows you to select a wide range of professional visual effects. Once an effect is selected, a custom ARExx program is run using ImageFX as the "graphics engine" to create the effect as a series of frames. These frames can then be assembled into an animation. Each volume of VisualFX comes with 20 predesigned visual effects. A few of these effects are: Volume 1 - Liquid Stretch, Earth Quake, and Slide Bar; Volume 2 - Clock Wipe, Split Crawl and Bubbles; and, Volume 3 - Board Game, Burning Image, and Dream Sequence.

Once you configure VFX to either a 4, 16 or 256 color display, ImageFX is automatically launched. Each Volume of VFX consists of one screen with 20 icons (see screen shot) and each Icon represents a different visual effect. Below the icons is a bank of four buttons that control the whole environment. Next to

these buttons is a small window for previewing any of the effects and an area where the currently chosen effect is described. If you click on any of the icons you'll immediately see a preview animation of the effect.

The four buttons at the bottom of the screen are: Load Volume; Preview Effect; Set Up Effect; and, Render Effect. Since all volumes of VFX work together, you can load any volume by clicking on the Load Volume button to view all installed volumes. Once you select an effect icon click on Preview Effect to see a small 30-frame animation preview.

After selecting an effect click on the Set Up Effect button to select variables like which images you'll be using to create an effect, how many frames you want to generate, where to store them and what to call them. Once this is all set, simply click on the Render Effect button and VFX gets to work creating its magic.

VFX also allows you to set up as many effects as you like before beginning the rendering process too. This way you can set up all your effects, click Render Effect, and walk away.

VFX has another very powerful feature.

When you go through setup, you are asked whether you will be using a frame or a sequence of frames for the effect. With this feature you can apply any of the visual effects to any animation, not just to still frames (the input animation needs to be disassembled into individual frames before VFX can "operate" on it). This opens the door to some of the most spectacular effects you have ever seen on your Amiga... or on TV.

I had one problem with VFX and Jeff White was very quick to solve it. It had to do with applying effects to animations. VFX worked flawlessly for single frame-based effects, but I couldn't generate the animation-based effects. It turned out that it's very important to name the frames you're "feeding" to VFX with a 3-digit extension numeric extension. For example, WipeOut.001, WipeOut.002, etc. This isn't a big problem, just a minor annoyance, but it wasn't covered in the manual.

Another point worth mentioning is that if you want to create standard size IFF frames, you need to turn off the "Use Field Rendering" option when setting up an effect. Otherwise you will get huge sized frames. This is also not mentioned in the manual.

In spite of the thoroughness of VFX, I feel its features list could be improved by adding the ability to actually create an animation. It only creates individual frames that can then be assembled into various animation formats using other programs. It would be nice to have an option at the end of the setup to create ANIM animation. Until then, the simplest way to do so would be to use AutoFX, a supplement program that comes with ImageFX, or Scala's AnimLab feature.



Each volume of VisualFX comes with 20 effects accessed through an intuitive and unpretentious interface. VFX is clearly aimed at Toaster/Flyer users, but can be used by anyone to good effect.



I didn't put much emphasis on how useful this package is for Flyer owners, mainly because I don't use a Flyer. But for those who do, VFX allows loading and saving of Flyer clips and is very much geared for use with the Toaster Flyer.

In conclusion, I think VisualFX is a professional, easy-to-use program for anyone who wants to easily create elaborate animations. If you only work with single frame images you will find it useful too. Most effects are creative and impressive looking. Considering the program's ease-of-use, flexibility, stability, continued support, and superb functionality, I highly recommend VisualFX and give it an A

rating. Nonprofessional user may find its US \$129 per volume price a bit steep. However, Adobe add-on products for Photoshop, which don't do half of what this does, cost a heck of a lot more.

VFX operates on any Amiga, running Workbench 2 or higher with 1 Mb RAM and a CD-ROM. You will also need Nova Design's Image FX. You can buy VFX from most Amiga dealers for a street price of around US \$130. Visual Inspirations can be found on the web at www.vionline.com.

Rating: A

By Oleg Moskalensky



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Melody Sound Card

Let's face it. The Amiga's built-in 8-bit audio was great a few years ago, but the rest of the world has moved on to 16-bit and beyond. Fortunately, numerous developers have produced hardware to overcome this shortcoming.

The Melody is a Zorro-II 16-bit audio card which uses a dedicated DSP (Digital Signal Processor) chip for hardware-decoding of MPEG-2 audio files. The package includes the card, a 20-page manual, a pair of audio cables and a recordable CD-ROM with the required software, a sample MPEG file, and some extra utilities.

The manual is written in the same translated English we're all so used to from products of European origin. The hardware seems well constructed with the notable exceptions of the rear cover plate and RCA-type audio connections. The plate is attached to the board by only a single screw, and the RCA jacks are not all that well supported. If you'll be swapping cables often, take special care to not break the solder connections. Jacks are thoughtfully provided for passing the Amiga's audio output through the Melody unmodified, which keeps the total number of audio cables reasonable.

The provided CD-ROM is cheesy, to put it bluntly. It's a CD-R without even a label—just the insert card that comes with every recordable CD. There's no clear organization to the files, but at least the really

necessary ones (Install and MPEGPlay) are easy enough to find.

The disc is multisession and includes the sample MPEG file on the audio portion of the disc, which makes direct listening comparison fairly easy. Digging deeper, there are some neat utilities on the disc like a special version of OctaMED (1.03c), a program for encoding MPEG files (MusicIn), and a demo version of MakeCD (1.5). Software installation is a snap with the provided installer script, which puts the necessary drivers in place and sets up Toccata emulation and AHI options, if you're so equipped.

So fire up the MPEGPlay program, load in a MPEG-2 (or AIFF, WAVE or MAUD) module and listen away. If you're using a reasonable sound system, playback will start instantaneously with no clicks, and will be of exceptional fidelity. The MPEG audio quality was every bit as good as the CD-audio version, and even seemed to have a little more dynamic range than my Toccata card. MPEGPlay multitasks beautifully (the advantage of a dedicated card), and continued uninterrupted playback even when switching screens.

Moving on to AHI, I was greatly disappointed by the Melody/AHI driver. This combination failed to deliver anywhere near the fidelity of the Toccata/AHI driver which work much more efficiently.

Funny thing about standards—they keep



changing. MPEG-2 has already been eclipsed by MPEG-3, and I was hard pressed to find MPEG-2 samples on the web for testing purposes (the few I did find are linked from my web page at www.calweb.com/~cyrano). Reportedly, implementing MPEG-3 support would dramatically increase the cost of the card, and is not planned. MPEG-3 support is through software only, and therefore cannot take advantage of the hardware DSP decoding. In light of this, the Melody's usefulness declines quickly.

The Melody is a one-way card. It decodes and plays only. No recording is possible, nor does the DSP support MPEG encoding. Encoding is left to software (and the CPU) only. An encoder called MusicIn is provided on the CD-ROM, but don't expect real-time performance. A one-minute 46-second MAUD file took three and a half hours to encode on my 68030/25 MHz equipped A3000, though the 18.7 Mb MAUD file did compress to a 2 Mb MPEG-2 file.

Current sales rates reportedly don't justify another production run of the card, and without MPEG-3 support, recording or upgrade capability, I can understand the sluggish sales. A little more money can buy a lot more features in other audio cards. If you can dedicate a precious Zorro-II slot to

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Software that comes along with the PowerUp accelerator boards

The PowerUp accelerators will be shipped with a comprehensive software package. Beside the powerful and comprehensive RISC support multiprocessing library which allows the transparent integration of the PowerPC processor into the Amiga multitasking OS environment, all boards are shipped with CyberGraphX V3 Native including PowerPC-optimized CyberGL 3D libraries and MPEG functions which allow fast 3D applications and multimedia tasks to run on the high-performance PowerPC processors. Also available are comprehensive software tools including a public domain GNU C compiler with PowerPC support as well as free demo software and utilities and developer support via the phase 5 FTP site. With these tools the PowerUp boards are also a perfect solution for all creative users who want to actively explore the performance of a modern RISC multiprocessing system while staying with the advantages of their preferred Amiga OS.

Cyberstorm PPC (3000/4000(t))
 Blizzard 2604e (A2000/1500)
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PowerUp specials for owners of phase 5 accelerators

Owners of a 68030-, 68040- or 68060-based accelerator from phase 5 digital products can make use of special PowerUp upgrade offers which make the PowerUp accelerators even more attractive. The PowerUp upgrade offer is available to original customers of one of the mentioned phase 5 accelerators (except the Blizzard 1230-I) and requires only the proof of purchase and serial number of the product (please note that second-hand purchased products are excluded from the PowerUp Upgrade offer). Registered owners of phase 5 accelerators will receive an upgrade offer by mail shortly before the release date of the PowerUp accelerator that is available as an upgrade to their existing phase 5 accelerator.



Cyberstorm MK III (A4000/4000T A3000/3000T) 68060 @ 50mhz \$ 659
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PowerPC 604e Accelerator Board for AMIGA 3000(T) and 4000(T)

The Cyberstorm PPC is the high-end PowerUp accelerator for Amiga 3000/4000(T) systems and systems with a compatible processor slot. It features a high-performance PowerPC604e RISC processor in different clock speeds and a socket for either a 68040 or 68060 companion processor, a memory expansion option for up to 128 MByte of ultra-fast 64-bit memory, a Wide-Ultra-SCSI controller on board and an expansion slot for high-performance expansions such as the CyberVisionPPC. This board is ideally suited for all A3000/A4000 users who already own an accelerator with either a 68040 or 68060 processor; for Cyberstorm users it will be the PowerUp upgrade offer.

Technical Data CYBERSTORM PPC Accelerator Board:

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Clock Speed	150-200 MHz
Companion CPU	68040/68060 25-50 MHz
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Melody con't from page 23

16-bit playback of the supported formats only, the Melody does have application. Beyond it's intended task it quickly becomes useless. I give it a B- rating for being exceptionally good at a single task but very limited in doing anything else.

The Melody is distributed in North America by Power Solutions of Canada (www.PowerSolutions.mb.ca) and sells for about US \$175. It requires a 68000 Zorro-II equipped Amiga with 1 Mb RAM and OS 2.04, but a better system will only improve performance. It was tested on an A3000 running OS 3.1, with 18 Mb RAM, CyberVision64 and Toccata 16-bit audio card.

Rating: B-

By Robert Pigford



AHI

What is AHI? AHI (pronounced 'Ahh chee') is an audio subsystem that is to audio what CyberGraphx is to display modes on the Amiga. It acts as a 'go-between', allowing programs to interface with it, and it redirects audio to any of several supported audio cards (including 16-bit cards like the Toccata and Melody). You can download a copy of AHI and learn more about it at: www.lysator.liu.se/~lcs.

What is Mpeg? Mpeg (pronounced "M-peg") stands for "Moving Picture Expert Group" and is the name of a family of standards used for coding audio-visual information (e.g. movies, video, music) in a digital compressed format. The major advantage of Mpeg as compared to other video and audio coding formats is that Mpeg files are much smaller for the same quality. This is because Mpeg uses very sophisticated compression techniques. On the web, Mpeg video files have the extension 'mpg', while audio files have the extension 'mp2' or 'mp3'. Several Amiga Mpeg players can be found on Aminet in the music/play directory.

MPEG

CrossMac

For years Amigans have relied on Consultron's CrossDOS to allow them to survive in an MS/DOS dominated world. But what do you do if you need to function in a world with Macintoshes? You rely on Consultron's other cross-platform product, CrossMac. Like CrossDOS, CrossMac is a file system which can be added to your Amiga to allow it access to non-Amiga disks. In the case of CrossMac, you acquire the ability to read, write and format some types of Macintosh disks.

We say "some" because of the variety of Macintosh disk formats used over the years. If you have an Amiga with just the standard 880K Amiga drive, there are virtually no Mac formats available to you. That's not a lack in CrossMac, but rather due to the weird way Macs have handled disks. Macintosh floppies come in two basic varieties: 800K low density, and 1.44 Mb high density. The 800K variety requires a special disk drive with variable speed motor. If you wish to read such disks using CrossMac, you will need either a Mac disk drive and an old Amax cartridge, or an AmaxII plus or Amax IV board with your standard Amiga drive.

If you have an Amiga with a high density floppy drive, you will be able to read, write and format 1.44 Mb Mac floppies. Finally, you can use the hybrid Amax and Emplant Mac emulator floppies with a standard

Amiga 880K floppy drive.

After all that, how well does the file system work? Very well indeed. In several weeks of use, I never had a problem or failure with the product. I worked with 1.44 Mb floppies, the most likely variety for current Amiga and Mac users. CrossMac performed flawlessly in all instances. CrossMac worked well with disks created on both real Macs and those produced by the shareware emulator ShapeShifter. People who need to transfer files between Macs and Amigas by floppy can be assured this product will meet their needs perfectly. You'll find Mac disks with Mac icons sitting on your Workbench, and as accessible to you as native Amiga disks.

CrossMac also provides support for Mac format hard drives and partitions. According to Consultron, this is one of the principle uses for CrossMac. The moving of interchangeable hard drive media (Syquest, Iomega, etc.) between Amigas and Macs is made very simple using CrossMac. This can be vital to multimedia and publishing operations which rely on both computer types.

A number of useful utilities are provided with CrossMac. There is a CrossMac commodity which can optionally translate text characters when using international character sets. This should never be used when working with binary files, since it will alter

them. I found it a good idea to have the translation of text characters active even when working with non-international text files, and to be prepared for some reformatting. This commodity can also be used to eject media from devices which support software ejects.

Other supplied utilities allow you to check the validity of disks and report errors, force a disk change on removable media drives which don't readily support it, view the hexadecimal contents of files, and even extract resource data from Mac files. Many of these utilities are fairly complex programs in their own rights.

When things go wrong, there are programs to help you out. Dr_CrossMAC can help you diagnose problems with CrossMac, and Mac_File_Salv can sometimes recover data from corrupted Mac disks.

If you transfer data to the Mac from the Amiga, File_Type_Manager may become vital to you. It allows you to manipulate information for the Mac's Finder. You can create a database of extensions, FTypes and Creators on the Amiga to be used when transferring Amiga created files. If the files originated on the Mac in the first place, Finder information will be stored in the Amiga's comment (filenote) for the file. As long as you preserve the comment/filenote during copying, the data will be available

continued on page 30

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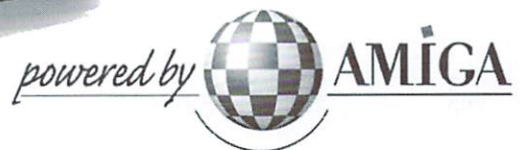
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to the Mac when the file is transferred back.

Finally, ConfigDisk.CrossMAC can be used to create mountfiles so Mac disks can be mounted on the Amiga. This is not necessary for floppy drives, but is required when working with hard drives and partitions. A ConfigDisk.CrossMAC_CDROM is also provided.

Like Consultron's CrossDOS, new versions of the Amiga's Format, Mount, and DiskCopy commands are provided. I experienced no problems using these new versions with either Amiga OS devices or CrossDOS devices on my Amiga OS 3.1

equipped computer.

The manual that comes with CrossMac is small, but adequate. Be sure to read the "ReadMe" file on the distribution disk to catch up on changes made after printing. Some of the utilities such as Dr_CrossMAC are not installed to your hard drive. They must be used from the distribution disk or better yet, a copy of that disk.

CrossMac, like its sister program CrossDOS, rates an A. It's difficult to imagine how this package could be improved. It does the job well, integrating the Amiga and Macintosh file systems as seamlessly

as possible given their differences. If you work with both computers, a purchase of CrossMac is a must and money very well spent. CrossMac is a commercial product from Consultron. It will run on any Amiga with 512K of memory and a single floppy drive, plus Amiga OS 2.0 or later. It can be purchased from most Amiga dealers for around US \$70. Visit Consultron at www.cucug.org/consultron.

Rating: A

By Brad Webb



AmIRC 2.0

AmIRC is an Internet Relay Chat client written by Oliver Wagner of VaporWare. VaporWare is renowned for producing very high quality Amiga Internet and Comms programs, and AmIRC doesn't disappoint. It first appeared in 1995 and has matured very well. The current publicly available release is version 2.00.

AmIRC requires MUI 3.6+, OS 2.0+, and a minimum of 2 Mb of RAM. There is a 68020 version of AmIRC provided for those with expanded Amigas. Using AmIRC on anything less than a 68020 with Fast RAM is not recommended. It is compatible with all major Amiga TCP stacks and tested on an A1200 030 28 MHz with 18 Mb RAM.

After the painless installation you are greeted by the main screen where you enter your 'nick' (the name you go by in IRC). Up to three nicks can be entered in case your first or even second choice is already taken. You must also enter your real name, email address and username (your login ID for your ISP).

There is a hierarchical phonebook-type listing of IRC servers on the main AmIRC screen. A range of servers are already entered into the hotlist and these can easily be edited. After selecting a server, AmIRC attempts to connect to the server and specified channel. The user is fully aware of all communication between AmIRC and the server through the output window.

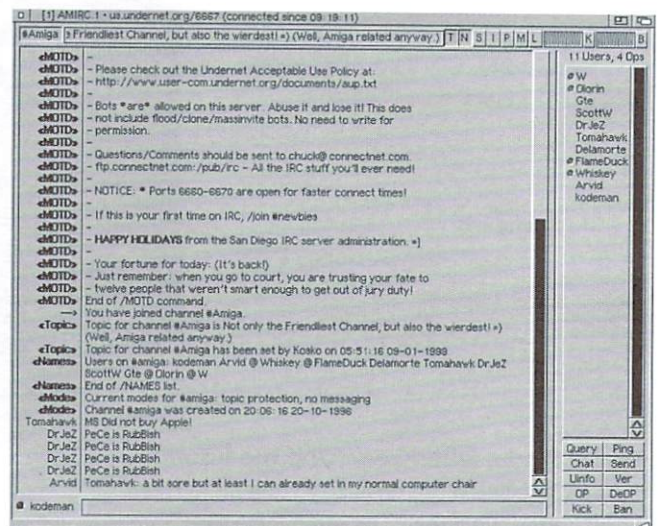
Once connected to the server and in your channel you are presented with the main screen. The GUI is logical and intuitive. On top of the screen is the topic input/display gadget and the operator buttons. The main window is the text listview where all incoming text from your channel is displayed. To the left of that is the user listview. This is where all the users on the channel are listed. Double clicking on any user will display information about them— typically their name and email address. Under the user list are the User buttons. These can be configured to execute any command or ARexx script of your choice. The default settings are for commonly used IRC commands. On the bottom left is a text entry gadget where you enter messages or commands.

A good understanding of common IRC commands is recommended to fully utilize both AmIRC and IRC itself (see Informer Issue 2). Generally, commands are preceded by a "/" followed by the command and then the arguments. For example, to send a private message to someone named "Bill" (which won't be displayed openly on the channel) you would type

"/msg Bill <your-message-here>". For a complete list of IRC commands and their syntax refer to the AmIRC documentation.

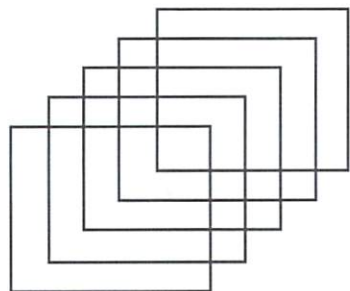
For the experienced or power user almost every facet of AmIRC can be configured. A large range of AmIRC ARexx scripts are available on Aminet (comm/tcp) which enhance its feature set and effectiveness. There are also built in IdentD and high speed DCC drivers (Direct Client Connection), support for Secure Encrypted DCC Chat (SCHAT), built in URL Grabber, internal CTCP flood and, DCC bomb protection and nickname completion AmIRC incorporates.

Support from VaporWare is excellent.



AmIRC 2.0 is simply the best IRC software on any platform, and is yet another example of top quality Amiga shareware.

continued on page 34



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
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Amiga FOREVER v1.1

Not long ago an Amiga emulator was released called the Universal Amiga Emulator, or UAE to its friends. Suddenly, what was widely thought to be impossible became a reality.

Since its initial release, UAE gained in popularity and has been ported to almost all platforms, including the Amiga itself. Having recently purchased a PC, I was both interested and sceptical of UAE. I had observed the heated arguments on Usenet and heard two very different stories. PC users proclaimed it was the next generation Amiga while Amiga users united in their disapproval.

Long-time Amiga developer Cloanto, sensing the opportunity to turn UAE into something beneficial for the Amiga, approached Amiga International and was granted a license to distribute software images of Amiga ROM's from version 1.0 through 3.0 along with the Workbench software. Thus the Amiga Forever CD was created. The CD includes all the above plus an enhanced

version of UAE with Picasso96 RTG drivers, Fellow (another less advanced Amiga emulator), the Amiga Explorer networking software, Personal Paint 7.1, DirDiff, an exclusive interview with Jay Miner, and the Amiga Interactive Guide.

Upon inserting the CD you are greeted with a synthesized voice proclaiming "This is Amiga speaking." You are presented with several boot configurations ranging anywhere from an OS 1.3 system to an OS 3.0 setup with Picasso96 RTG drivers. There are also many options to customize your UAE configuration.

Due to the nature of Amiga disk drives it is impossible to access Amiga floppy disks on a PC. Instead UAE makes use of disk images in ADF (Amiga Disk Format) which is exactly the same as the Amiga FMS (Floppy Masher System) format. An interesting side effect of this is that UAE can have up to 8 Mb of Chip RAM.

Now to performance. On my Pentium-II 233 MHz I found running old games through UAE to be reasonable enough in the speed department. There were some graphical glitches, but on the whole it performed well. I recommend turning on the Paula sound emulation only if you have a very fast machine, otherwise it slows down the emulation considerably.

Running UAE in a base Workbench environment returned very poor results. The emulation of the ECS chipset, while good, is not very fast and this is highlighted when using Workbench. The mouse pointer "drags" and the speeds of GUI (Graphical User Interface) operations are about equal to a base A1200 running in 8 or 16 color hires modes. Using the Picasso96 RTG drivers nets much better results. The burden of emulating the Amiga's ECS chipset is removed as UAE and the emulated Amiga operate like a real Amiga with a very fast graphics card. AHI drivers for UAE are currently in the works which will allow for retargetable audio.

As far as raw speed goes, according to both SysInfo and AIBB, UAE has trouble equalling a base A1200 on my PII-233. The "ShowConfig" utility reported the UAE Amiga was equipped with a 68020/68881. Ultimately the speed of UAE will depend on the speed of the PC being used, but overall it is very limiting.

I also found multitasking, something the Amiga excels at, to be troublesome and extremely sluggish under UAE. There were also many other varied but mostly minor problems with the emulation.

The Amiga Explorer networking software which allows you to access a real Amiga's resources on a PC performs quite well. Currently it only supports serial networking, but version 2 will support Ethernet and TCP/IP. The exclusive interview with Jay Miner is nothing special, and the Amiga Interactive Guide while drab, is packed full of information for new users and seasoned Amiga users alike.

Amiga Forever v2.0 update should be available by the time you read this. It will include improved networking support, more extensive documentation, audio tracks of the Jay Miner interview, multiplatform support (currently only DOS and Windows), improved emulation, and a 3D Amiga Boing sticker.

Overall, Amiga Forever works quite well. Cloanto has done a good job at integrating everything and making the task of running UAE much simpler. However, UAE is definitely not a next generation Amiga— it is barely a complete current generation Amiga. I cannot recommend UAE as a substitute to an Amiga— especially for serious work— but for an Amiga owner with a PC, it will compliment their current Amiga well. Combine that with the networking software and the included copy of Personal Paint 7.1, and Amiga Forever represents a good deal. Unfortunately, since UAE requires a software image of the Amiga Kickstart ROM, which is illegal to own unless you own the ROM itself, it seems to have caused the copying of Amiga OS software in addition to the pirating of older games. This is an unfortunate side effect.

Amiga Forever v1.1 can be purchased from most Amiga retailers for about US \$30. Version 2.0 should sell for about US \$60. Upgrades will be available from Software Hut (www.softhut.com). You can contact Cloanto at www.cloanto.com

Due to the nature of the product I see fit to give it two ratings, one for the emulation and an overall rating.

Rating: Emulation C+
Overall B+



By Paul Morabito

AmIRC con't from page 30

There is a standardized method of reporting bugs and an AmIRC mailing list. AmIRC is fully functional shareware, but limited to only thirty minutes of operation. Registration costs between US \$25 and US \$30 depending on the way you wish to receive your keyfile. There are numerous registration sites around the world and on-line registering through First Virtual. Visit www.vapor.com for full registration listings.

The only shortcoming I could find was that while AmIRC could connect to multiple channels it could not connect to multiple channels on multiple servers. That said, in AmIRC VaporWare has made an amazingly powerful program and, combined with the AREXX interface, it is not only the best IRC client on the Amiga but on any platform. Because of this, AmIRC deserves the highest rating of A+.

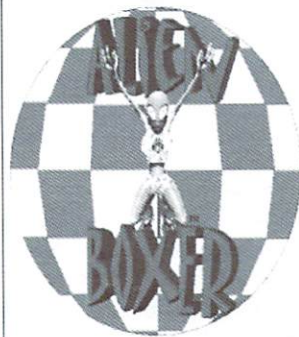
Rating: A+

By Paul Morabito





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Siamese System Version 2.5

The idea behind the Siamese System is to transparently integrate a PC with an Amiga, and in doing so, give the Amiga access to some of the cool things modern day PCs can do (that the Amiga WOULD do if it weren't for horrific mismanagement). For example, modern, cheap, "multimedia" (sic) PCs have many features found only in highly expanded big box Amiga's (if at all), such as 24bit high resolution graphics cards (often with 3d acceleration), software/hardware mpeg players, 16bit sound playback and recording, and of course "Industry Standard" software. So why not take advantage of the PC? So what does it do? The most obvious thing it does is allow you to use one keyboard, one mouse, and one monitor, to control both computers (you choose whether you want to use the Amiga or PC mouse/keyboard, or you can continue to use both if you want). You flick between computers as easily as flicking between Amiga screens, using a hotkey "left-amiga-c", or "f12" on the PC's keyboard. An Amiga depth gadget also appears on your Windows StartBar Tray, pressing that goes to the Amiga, and you can also use the included Amiga96 StartBar program to put a button on your WorkBench to flick back to the PC.

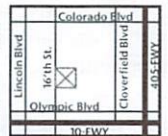


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Uropa2: The Ulterior Colony

Uropa2: The Ulterior Colony from Austex Software is a new CD-ROM only game distributed by Vulcan Software Limited. Uropa2 combines a unique Sci-fi action adventure with an equally unique shoot-em-up section. The game comes with a well-done 3D intro that explains the entire story line.

The game is large and there is tons to learn; everything from key functions to battle strategies. I was pleased to learn that Uropa2 multitasks and allows you to access its AmigaGuide documentation without having to quit, which I did several times during play. Hitting the help key brings up some useful information, but it just isn't as complete as the AmigaGuide.

In the first section of the game you are a hovering droid searching rooms for useful objects, accessing computer terminals for information, and battling enemy droids in a labyrinth-like underground base. You can control the floating droid by using the joystick or cursor keys, both of which I found equally annoying. I would have much preferred the point and click interface of other such games. In the other sections you must transport to the surface where you pilot a hovercraft and battle the enemy. You must recharge your shields when they get low, collect replenishment objects, and return to the base station before running out of fuel. I found hovering around the moon's surface blowing up bad guys considerably more fun than fumbling around inside the base.

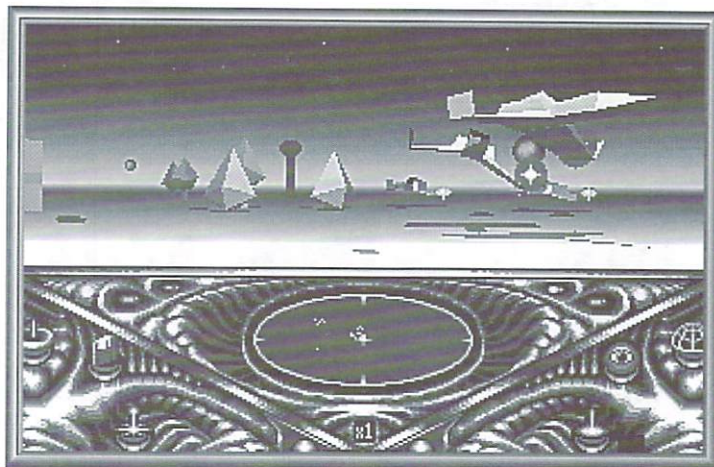
The music and sound effects in the game are only average, but they made excellent use of digitized speech in both

sections. I especially enjoyed the enemy taunts during hovercraft battles on the moon's surface. One very interesting feature of this game is the Hoverwar option which allows 2 players to connect their Amigas via the serial port and battle it

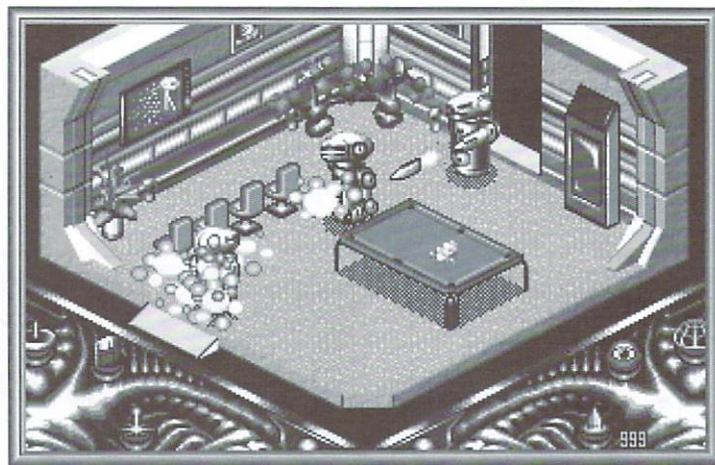
available, but it seems they had to keep the palette limited for it to be compatible with all Amigas. The manual calls the adventure section graphics 3D Isometric, I call them 2D graphics from an overhead and angled viewpoint. It also says the hovercraft section of the game was 3D Vector light-sourced, but it just looks polygonal to me.

Uropa2 isn't exactly absorbing. In the beginning it requires quite a lot of problem solving and is a bit hard to learn, but if you like a good challenge, you'll probably like it. I really love that it doesn't require booting in PAL display mode—it is the first game I've received recently that didn't. It's obvious that Austex Software spent much time on this title and I commend them for their hard work, but from a time-limited gamer's point of view, I can only give it a C rating. It just never really got me going.

The specifications claim that Uropa2 requires a hard drive and a 4x CD-ROM drive, although I found the game ran fine with a 2x CD-ROM. It will run without hard drive installation, but you will not be able to save the game. Uropa2 will work on any Amiga with a hard drive, 2 Mb memory (1Mb Chip & 1Mb Any), and a 4x CD-ROM drive. Uropa2 was tested on an A1200 060/50 MHz, 3.0 OS, 18 Mb RAM. It's available from most retailers for about US \$38.



Fly about the surface battling bad guys – or serial-link two Amigas and battle a friend!



Down below you explore a maze-like base and toast enemy droids. Don't forget to search rooms for booty and info too.

of. I was unfortunately unable to test this feature, but it sounds like fun.

Although skillfully done, the in-game graphics seem like nothing much more than shades of blues and grays. The specs say that Uropa2 uses the AGA chipset if

Rating: C

By Jeremy Campbell



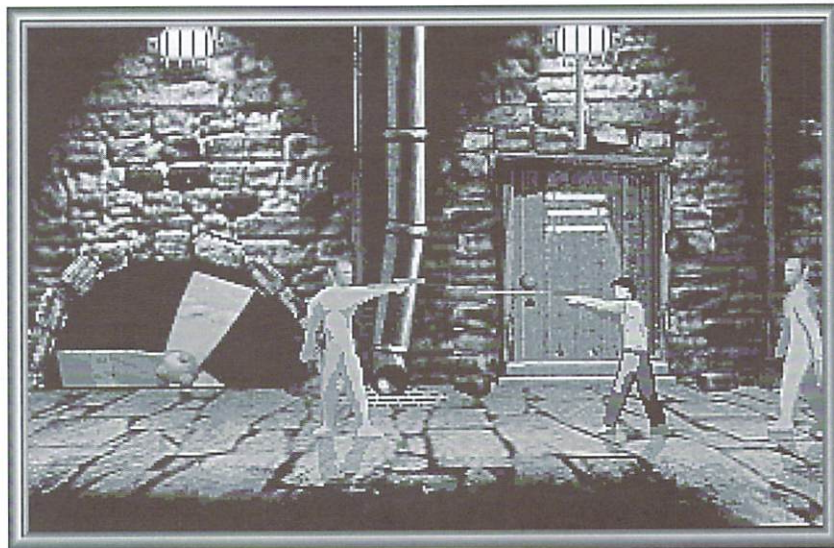
OnEscapee

OnEscapee is a CD-ROM only game from Invictus Team and Sadness Software. If you've ever played Out Of This World (dubbed Another World in Europe) or Flashback, then you have a good idea what to expect from OnEscapee. Its gameplay is best described as a combination of platformer and action/adventure with close-up movie style sequences throughout. It's very unique.

In OnEscapee you've been abducted by Aliens and forcibly taken to their planet, kicking and screaming the whole way. Luckily your noncompliance pays off and causes them to crash land. You've survived and now it's your job to stay alive and find out if you're the only human Escapee on this strange Alien world. You've got your work cut out for you. Let me tell you, I haven't got much sleep because this game really pulled me in. Once you get used to the way the game works it's extremely difficult to stop playing.

The beginning credits include a highly entertaining introduction with smooth animations, great sound effects, and a catchy soundtrack. The in-game hand drawn graphics are gorgeous and include many animations, some of which are rendered. One 3D animation of a spider coming at you literally made me jump back from the screen! And Invictus Team didn't forget audio either. Throughout the game are realistic sound effects and mood setting music that changes at sufficient intervals. This adds immensely to the games overall flavor.

Although OnEscapee has many similarities to the aforementioned games, the programmers added new dimensions and twists. Out of this World and Flashback were essentially played as a standard platformer with most tasks being performed by horizontal left and right movements. OnEscapee however often requires you to turn into the screen to access terminals or away from the screen to solve touchpad puzzles, open doors, be transported, or advance to the next level. Another big improvement is the ability to save your position at any time. No codes to write down or levels that must be played over and over. Tip: save your position often because at any moment you may fall into a pit and die or be eaten by an odd animal hanging upside down from the ceiling, etc.



This game gives you everything: gorgeous hand-drawn graphics, excellent sound effects, action, atmosphere, puzzles, predicaments, and . . . good tips and help! Be prepared to burn the midnight oil playing this one!

OnEscapee makes you use your brain besides requiring good hand/eye coordination. There are some highly challenging touchpad puzzles and you are repeatedly thrust into dead ends. Figuring your way out of these predicaments often takes some serious thought and memorization. I found the need to sometimes take a break from playing so I could logically think about my situation and come back the next day to try again. You must examine each screen closely or you'll miss seeing something like a corridor, clue, key, access panel, etc. For instance, in one part of the game there's a dead body caught in a spiders web: look closely and you'll see a weapon in his hand. Now how do you extract that weapon without being killed by the spider? See what I mean, and that's one of the easy ones. But don't let that scare you. It kept me coming back, was lots of fun, and after solving each puzzle, I had a great feeling of accomplishment. It has a considerably high difficulty level, but luckily it comes with good hints and tips in both HTML and ASCII formats.

Controlling your character is done almost entirely with the joystick. The game also supports the keyboard or CD32 joystick. You can also select from many different screen modes, but sticking with the defaults keeps everything full size. It supports graphics cards, and with a patch available on the Sadness website, the game can be played on non-AGA machines too.

OnEscapee required no installation whatsoever; it ran fully and flawlessly from the CD-ROM drive. However, OnEscapee did lock up on me twice during my many hours

of play. You must also be careful when selecting "load" or "save" a game. If by accident you select save game when you meant to load it you will lose that save and crash the machine. This should definitely be remedied in an upgrade.

Overall I'm extremely impressed with this title and give it an A-, and minus only because of it's few minor bugs. It's definitely worth the price of admission.

Visit www.sadness.demon.co.uk to get a downloadable demo, FAQ sheet, screenshots, comments, and other interesting information about OnEscapee. It retails for US \$39.95 and requires a 68020, AGA or GFX Card, 4 Mb RAM (at least 1 Mb Chip), 2x CD-ROM, Hard Drive (for saved games), and OS 3.0. It was tested on an A1200 / 060, 18 Mb RAM, and 2x CD-ROM. Email: Sadness Software at: rich@sadness.demon.co.uk

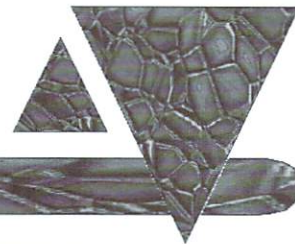
Rating: A

By Jeremy Campbell



Make sure your multiple floppy drives are buffered properly for optimal performance. Find the line "C:AddBuffers >NIL: DF0: 15" in your S:startup-sequence and duplicate it for each floppy drive (DF1, DF2, etc.). If you have a faster (68030+) processor and plenty of RAM, you'll get a slight speed increase by increasing the size of buffers to 35, 50 or more.

Eye on Graphics



By Aaron Ruscetta

Aaron is the owner of Image Architects, a company that provides production & consulting services with Amiga graphics, animation, programming and multimedia. Aaron also teaches computer art and graphics as an adjunct professor at the Atlanta College of Art. Your input will directly effect the topics covered in this column, so email Aaron with your thoughts at aaron@noel.pd.org, or directly from our website at www.amigainformer.com.

I want to start off this second 'Aye' On Graphics column by saying thanks to everyone who shared their ideas and information in response to the first column. It's been a big help in our endeavors to inform here!

Most of the email I received so far has topic suggestions or questions related to Amiga's hardware for both native display modes and after market extensions. While this makes the choice of topic here obvious, the variety of the questions, depth of the subjects, and space limitations make focusing on isolated questions impractical.

Therefore, I've decided to spend a few issues covering Amiga graphics hardware from the ground up. There are numerous details involved with understanding the various display systems, and my hope is that sharing the parts and concepts that I understand in an organized fashion will answer most of the questions that come up for our readers.

The vast plethora of Amiga display modes and hardware tools can be shuffled into five basic categories: Native, Enhanced Native, Encrypted Native, Frame Buffers and Retargetable Display Adapters. This list also outlines the evolution of the display hardware, so I'll start everything off with the Amiga's original, Native display system.

There are two display topics that were born with the original Amiga architecture and they remain uniquely Amiga to this day: Video Compatibility and Flicker. Unfortunately, the good one is inex-

tricably linked to the notorious second. It's useful to explore these topics and consider the concepts and mechanisms that are involved with any overview of electronic imaging, including the mechanics of your own vision.

As you are reading this, your retina and optic nerves are flashing images to your gray matter around 57 to 63 times every second; that is your optic Frame Rate. If the fluorescent light you are reading under is going on and off at a rate substantially less than your optic frame rate, then many of the images getting to your brain will be dark—you'll sense this as "flicker" and know it's time to change the bulb.

Any AC powered light you see is flickering to some extent, just not slow enough for you to sense. Your flicker sense can also depend on the ratio of On to Off or the magnitude of the change in brightness (contrast).

Like your internal optic system, imaging displays for computers, televisions and the like must also employ a frame rate. In addition, most electronic displays involve a second timing element, the Scan Rate. This is the frequency at which the lines that make up each frame are scanned onto the screen. Using NTSC (the US television standard) for an example, each frame is made up of 525 lines and a new frame is scanned to the screen 30 times each second. Doing the math, the Scan Rate for NTSC is $(30 \times 525 =) 15,750$ or 15.75 khz.

For Amiga, the 15.75 khz number becomes very relevant as it was designed from the ground up to be 100% NTSC compatible. All the original Native display modes and many of the Amiga's system clocks are built around this 15.75 khz frequency. It is also the source of the Amiga's more visible display flicker, but we'll flash back to that in a moment.

Somewhat by chance, the 15 khz range of the clocking base also allows for Amiga compatibility with European television standard, PAL. The PAL system employs a slower frame rate of 25 frames per second, being based on their 50 hz AC power. Each frame, however, contains more lines; 100 more to be precise, so $25 \times 625 = 15,625$ or 15.63 khz. The two scan rates are close enough that the Amiga's designers could make this machine software switchable between PAL & NTSC display modes (though fully compatible system operation requires a different clock crystal on the motherboard).

One last element in covering scan & frame rates is the use of Interlaced and non-interlaced display types. The terms quite simply refer to the method & order in which the Scan lines are drawn on the screen for each frame. Most non-Amiga computer display modes are non-interlaced; they draw each frame's scan lines in order, one after the other, from top to bottom. Both the PAL and NTSC television standards (and therefore, Amigas) employ interlaced scanning, where all the odd numbered scan lines of a frame are drawn first, then all the even numbered lines are drawn in between (interlaced with) the odd lines. So every video 'frame' you see is woven together from two halves, called Fields.

The reason for interlace displays is simple as well. TV systems (and therefore, Amigas) were designed to display Motion graphics and the technique of interlacing produces a smoother illusion of motion for the viewer. Our 30 frames per second become 60 fields per second, doubling the rate at which motion can be recorded & displayed.

While interlace is closely related to the flicker issue, it is not the cause of the problem. Your sense of that flicker is a



function of the difference between your "60 frame per second" optic system compared to the strobe rate, on-to-off ratio, and contrast level of the light source.

NTSC video is only 30 frames per second. That is, the electron beam of the CRT screen you watch is scanned at 15.75 khz to make phosphor dots radiate light, hitting any given point every 30th of a second. At a rate of only half of your optic rate, you should sense a lot of flickering. But a half dozen other aspects like phosphor afterglow, on-to-off ratio, color range, dithering, encoding artifacts, and analog signals, all play a role in reducing the contrast between lines and thus reducing the flicker.

Native Amiga output, being video compatible, has identical scan & frame rates, but it lacks some of those flicker reducing factors. Most significant is that the native mode color ranges are more limited, so the contrast between scan lines is often greater. Also, the signal is direct RGB; there are no encoding artifacts helping to reduce the line contrast. The result is that any brighter, single pixel lines of interlaced screen modes will flicker quite noticeably.

Placing a second bright line immediately adjacent to the first will eliminate the flicker because your eye will receive something bright in that area almost every optic frame instead of getting an alternating light & dark area. This "line doubling" is also why Amiga's non-lace screen modes don't flicker, but have only half of the vertical resolution of their interlaced counterparts. You can also think of non-lace modes as using half as many lines per frame, where $15,750/212.5=60$ frames per second, so no flicker.

These points of video compatibility, scan rates & frame rates appear often with Amiga related display hardware. They are important to understand and should give everyone a platform for understanding some broader and more complex elements.

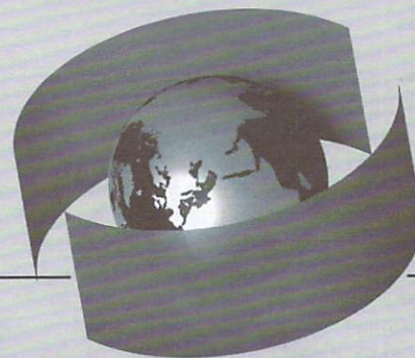
As always, your comments and responses are welcome. For those of you using retargetable graphics adapters, I'm especially interested in gathering opinions regarding your display board and software. Sort of an informal survey so I can pass the results on here.

Now pass me another cold one and say "Aye"!



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Ask Dr. Amiga



By Oleg Moskalensky

Question: I want to install the Music Quest MQX-32m MIDI interface in my A2000 but am not sure that the PC slots in the A2000 will work. The MQX-32m MIDI interface is native to the PC world. Does the A2000 support ISA cards out of the box?

Answer: The PC slots in the A2000 are designed to work only if you have a Bridgeboard installed and running PC emulation. Then you can run PC software and use the slots. Otherwise you won't be able to utilize them. There is a board called the Golden Gate-II that I believe plugs into the A2000 and allows the use of many native PC cards, but I do not have contact information for the company that makes it. You may call one of the advertisers in The Informer and ask about this card. In the mean time, just get any Amiga MIDI interface and use it. They work great for me!

Question: I need an adapter for a PC 9-pin serial port trackball to connect it to the Amiga mouse port. I can construct the adapter if I had the pin diagrams but don't know where to get them. Any clues?

Answer: You might find what you need at National Amiga's Technical Info section where they have many files of pin-out diagrams and other schematics. Go to the National Amiga website at www.nationalamiga.com and follow the links to the Tech Info section.

Question: I work on a television show where I use an Amiga, but everyone else works on PC's. The PC's are networked to a digital framestore. If I get an Ethernet card for the Amiga will I be able to be included in the network chain and save images onto the digital framestore?

Oleg Moskalensky has been in the computing business for the past 17 years, working on a variety of hardware and software, including design, development & implementation of just about any business computing task imaginable. If you have an Amiga related question you would like to ask the Dr., point your browser to The Informer's homepage at www.amigainformer.com or send email to: pcs@accessone.com. You can also visit Oleg's webpage at: www.accessone.com/~olegm.

Answer: You can certainly get onto the Ethernet network, that's not a problem (see Informer issues 10-12 for networking articles). Where you'll have difficulty is when you try to talk to their disks. I don't know how your framestore works, but most likely you'd need a special driver to use it. If they had a computer on the network where all the images were simply stored using a regular FTP approach you'd have no problems storing files there and retrieving them.

Question: We have an Amiga 4000 Video Toaster that will not boot. After removing and replacing all boards, it booted several times but failed to boot a couple of days later. Is there anything I can do to fix the seating of the boards or do I need to get them replaced or repaired?

Answer: Before sending to the repairs shop, try these suggestions. Remove all your boards. Next, making sure you're WELL grounded, press firmly but carefully on all the chips on the motherboard to make sure they're well seated. Use a small vacuum cleaner to vacuum the motherboard and the cards. Alternatively, you can buy a can of forced air and use it to blow off all the dust. Now take a regular pencil eraser and using small brush strokes and not too much force, go over the entire length of the metal connector tongues of your plug-in cards. Don't do this over your computer! Blow all of the eraser shavings off the cards when done. Plug the boards back in, making sure they seated snugly (a little extra force here is good, as long as it's within reason). You want to make sure the connectors go all the way in.

If this operation doesn't solve your problem, I'd say it's time to get it fixed by a pro. For replacement parts, motherboards, etc. you can contact Paxtron (www.paxtron.com). They deal in hardware issues and are the official Amiga repair center.

Question: There are several programs on Aminet written in PAL format. When I run one of these programs, the bottom section of the display is cut off even though the pointer can obviously access this area. I've tried everything to fix this to no effect. What can I do?

Answer: Here's what you need to do:
1) Boot your Amiga while holding down both mouse buttons. You will get a special boot screen.
2) From that screen select "Display Options" and click on PAL.
3) Try your software - it's possible that it'll already be just fine. If not, change the display mode in Prefs to PAL.
I think these few steps should fix most PAL display problems.

Question: I purchased a 4 Gb SCSI-2 Hard Drive. If I buy a SCSI-2 controller, will it replace my original SCSI controller, or will it work in addition to it? Is my 4 Gb drive going to be able to be formatted with HDToolbox?

Answer: You can have and use more than one SCSI controller. Which controller drives a given device is determined by which `scsi.device` driver is used. For instance, any device controlled by an Octagon controller card is driven by the `OctagonSCSI.device` driver. If a device is connected to a Squirrel SCSI interface, it is controlled by the `SquirrelSCSI.device` driver. You'll certainly be able to use HDToolbox but you'll need to partition your drive into multiple (most likely 1 Gb) partitions, and you will need to make sure the proper `SCSI.device` driver for the device is selected within HDToolbox. You could also get a SCSI 2-to-SCSI adapter and use your old SCSI controller, but then you'll be missing out on the much improved speed and functionality of SCSI 2.



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What Is Convergence?

One of the catch phrases hovering around the Amiga these days is "Convergence" technology. The purpose of this technology is to combine the ease of use of a television with the power of a computer. For example, picture in your mind a line with a TV at one end and a computer at the other. As you travel from the TV towards the PC, you add things like "picture-in-picture," "digital high definition," and built in cable tuning. As you travel from the PC to the TV you remove a little bit of the RAM, cost, and ease of use. Somewhere between the two end points you "Converge" at a product much like the CDTV or Destination. But the mere use of a TV by a PC does not make a convergence product.

The Amiga is well suited for convergence use. The very thing that allows an Amiga the ability to control audio levels on external genlocks gives it the ability to both send and receive these digital signals along with regular video feeds. Most PC implementations still have difficulty handling their PC and TV functions at the same time, but the Amiga excels at this. Remember, Jeff Schindler was responsible for the development of Gateway's convergence product the Destination PC/TV. The Amiga might be the key needed to open the real world of convergence products.

St. Louis continued from page 5

called "just a start" is slated for the third quarter of this year. It is being written out of house, under contract. It will feature full internet solutions, an enhanced interface, and more support for industry standards. Schindler asked Amiga developers to tell Amiga Inc. what they're doing through user groups and the ICOA, so these efforts can be supported in the operating system. He also promised better documentation for developers, to a smattering of applause and cheers.

All in all, this was a marvelous Amiga show to be a part of. We could have hoped for more details and concrete reassurances from Amiga Inc., especially with regard to future products, but I'm not sure how realistic that wish was. The good news is Amiga Inc. stated outright they have a plan for the future. The mood of the show attendees seemed to approve of AI's approach and signaled confidence, and most people had a lot of fun. If you weren't there, you missed a splendid time.





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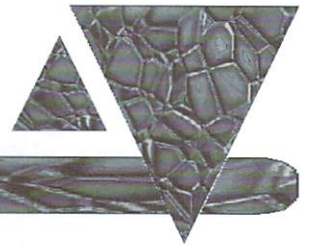
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X & Y Flip	Object Change

Volume Three FX Descriptions

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