

Liz Hayes,
news editor



SPECIAL TOPICS

Mac or not to Mac?

A new campus organization extols the benefits of Macintosh computers

by Liz Hayes
news editor

Macintosh computer users at Behrend often feel singled out due to their preference of Macs over PCs. A small but determined group of people is introducing a new organization to remedy the loneliness of being a Mac user in a PC world.

The Behrend Macintosh Users Committee will act as an advocacy and interest group for those interested in or in need of help with Macintoshes, according to member Dr. Robert Speel, associate professor of political science. The group, which formed in the last few weeks, already includes at least 10 faculty and staff from the schools of Science and Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as several students, Speel said.

"We want to make the campus aware that there are people here who use Macs," Speel said. Several committee members have implied the campus is generally hostile to Mac users.

Speel and Dr. John Gamble, professor of political science, said faculty in the School of H&SS were recently informed the school would not purchase any more new Macs for faculty only PCs. Any faculty wishing to continue to use Macs will now have to buy the computers themselves.

Speel said the Gateways being purchased for H&SS faculty cost hundreds of dollars more than iMacs, his computer of choice. His computer is only two years old, so he isn't due for a new computer for several years. But he's not sure what he will do when that time comes around.

"I have the choice of a new PC, on which I won't be able to use my old files or academic work, or of using my own money for a new office computer."

Dr. Mary Chisholm, associate professor of chemistry, said she became a Mac user because the research software she needs is written for Macs only.

"I was warned I was 'on my own' when it came to needing help, but Macs are so much more reliable than PCs that I almost never need serious technical help."

The Computer Center stopped having Macs in the main lab several years ago. Chisholm said it wasn't cost-efficient for the center to look after two systems. Doug Butterworth, a student consultant at the Computer Center who is equally conversant in Macs and PCs, said part of the problem is "that many PC users aren't very open-minded when it comes to their computer. It seems like many 'hate' Macs only because everyone else does, and even don't have a good reason why. ... Also, part of the problem is students who use Macs have not made their voices heard."

Gamble said he used a Macintosh political science program for his classes several years ago and students had problems working with the Computer Center. "I got dozens of reports from students that the Computer Center did not like Macs and did not want students using them. Then Mr. [Ronald] Hoffman [manager of network and information systems], a fellow who makes no secret of his disdain for Macs, announced that there was less and less demand for Macs so the Computer

Center would close its Mac lab." Gamble added. "It looks to me like Mr. Hoffman created the lack of demand."

Gamble would like to see Behrend become more Mac-friendly, as is University Park. He thinks administration is underestimating the Mac usage on campus. "We need to be very careful when stating how much Mac use there is here." He

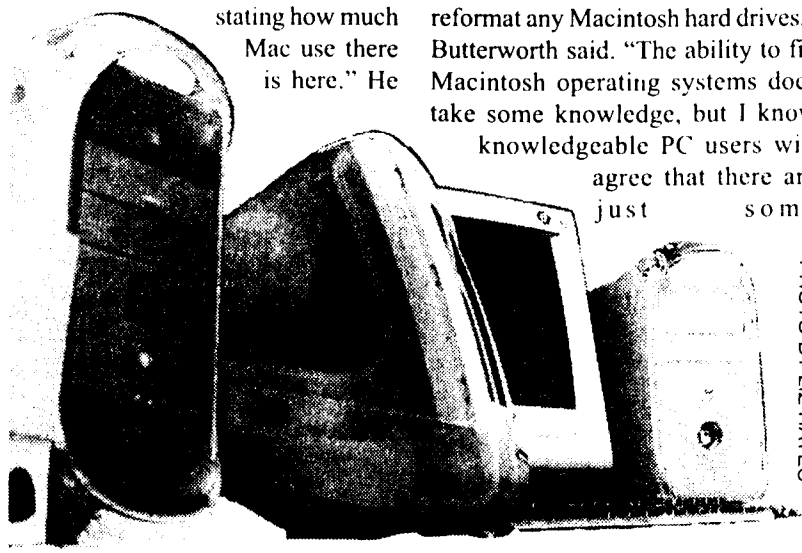


PHOTO BY LIZ HAYES

The Beacon, like many publishing and media outlets, uses Macs exclusively. G4s and iMacs are the main components of the Beacon's network.

added, "I would like to see an objective assessment of whether Macs really cost more" and whether they really are less convenient.

Speel and other members have pointed out there are several advantages to using Macs over PCs. For one, Macs are immune to most viruses that afflict PCs. "One out of every 100 viruses are created for Macs," said Butterworth. Speel added that when viruses were running rampant through the School of H&SS, he didn't get any on his iMac.

However, one reason Macs get fewer viruses is because few are created to strike at Macs. Butterworth said. Since PCs are the computer used by the majority, those creating viruses are going to design them to afflict the most commonly used computer.

When problems do arise with Macintoshes, they are usually easier to fix than PCs. "I have never had to reformat any Macintosh hard drives," Butterworth said. "The ability to fix Macintosh operating systems does take some knowledge, but I know knowledgeable PC users will agree that there are just some

PC issues that sometimes can't be fixed... and they will need to reformat their hard drive in order to correct the problem."

Dr. Ronald Leavers, assistant professor of chemistry, agrees that working with Macs is easier. He explained he acquired a Mac and a PC at the same time. "The second week I had a PC, a program uninstaller refused to work, so I had to uninstall the program manually. ... On a Mac I could have uninstalled it very easily in minutes. ... It took me most of a

Saturday to do this." Mac users also insist Macs are generally easier to use than PCs. "For most actions, they require fewer keystrokes," Leavers said. Chisholm also listed user-friendliness as a major advantage: "Ease of use, ease to set up, run and add things on. You can get up to speed on most new software and hardware very quickly."

There are some disadvantages to using Macs. Obviously, there is less technical support available on campus for those who do use Macs. Leavers said he has had to learn to fix his own Macs. "I learn to do it myself by reading books and the many Mac-related Web sites such as www.macfixit.com, www.xrbuyyourmac.com, and I subscribe to 'MacWorld' and 'MacAddict'. This is somewhat more time-consuming, but I have learned a lot about computers by doing it myself."

Also, some software and hardware is harder to come by, especially in Erie. "There isn't quite as much software for Macintosh, but there is software. Most can be found from online computer stores," Butterworth said. "Local computer stores like Staples, the closest Macintosh reseller, has some Macintosh software, but still not that much. One's best bet is to look online."

Some Macintosh hardware also costs more than similar PC hardware. However, Butterworth said one of the advantages of having the same producer of the operating system produce the hardware is "guaranteed compatibility and quality."

Buying computers online vs. from Penn State

by Karen Niemla
staff writer

When looking for a new personal computer, it might be beneficial to consider buying online to avoid pushy salespeople and confusing packages, such as \$400 off... if you sign up for a year of Internet service that costs about \$400. An extra plus to shopping online is college students have the opportunity to get some good deals.

Penn State's Microcomputer Order Center can get reduced systems through a number of companies including Dell, Apple, IBM and others. But how can one know if these prices are honestly better than those found when purchasing as a regular customer online? One can compare MOC and regular Websites to each other and sort it out. Here are the more popular brands for home users: Dell, Apple, Gateway, and Compaq.

Dell is a computer company that sells PCs online and by phone only, and is considered by many to be the very best at it. When shopping with the MOC, though, you are not looking at Dell's regular Website but instead their special "Premier Dell" Website for people buying while associated with an organization of some kind.

The desktops and notebooks available are limited because when an organization works with PremierDell.com, that organization decides what the Website will offer. One of Dell's greatest features is the ability to customize new systems. This is allowed at the Premier Website, but it is, like everything else, limited. You may only want to pay for one year of technical support, but there is only an option for three. After configuring a Dimension 4300 system that costs \$1,384, the same system at the regular Dell Website was selling for about \$950 after mail-in rebates even with the three years of support.

The deals are even greater at Dell's

Outlet store, also online, which sells like-new wares at low prices. Dell also has promotions, like free printers or shipping, that can't be redeemed through Premier. Overall, Penn State's Dell site is wanting. Also, it's confusing: a login name and password are required. The site is slow, and not pleasing to the eyes, unlike Dell4me.com, a preferred Dell site.

Apple sells online and also through dealers such as Circuit City and at Apple Stores in malls, mostly in large cities, that look like GAP boutiques with stylish computers instead of stylish clothes (and no wonder: the Apple and GAP CEOs are on each others boards of directors).

Apple's Penn State sales, though Apple is unfortunately shunned by most "blue bloods," is quite good, and this can be explained by Apple Computer's need to maintain the education-related sales which are crucial to the company's survival. Apple also needs to sell to those they aim for: young, intelligent people, thus making college students their good pals.

The pages are much more aesthetically pleasing, easier to navigate, and offer all products. It is, for the most part, exactly like the regular Apple Store page; so much so that when you have both windows open and switch from one to the other, the only change you see is a Penn State graphic, and when you're looking at prices, they go down, even their new iPod music. If you want to buy an Apple, feel free to see MOC and save money.

Gateway is a popular brand and sells online at its cow-spotted farm-style stores. Both the Website you reach through the MOC and the Gateway.com site are equally disorganized, the customization pages cluttered with options for scanners, digital cameras, and software packages. If anyone wanted to buy any of those things, it would probably be easier to shop for them. But that is the reason for the many options:

Gateway is aiming for those who do not know what they want or need.

Gateway computers are for those who want to use computers but do not know a lot about them or have the time to work on them. The selection is similar to that offered at the regular site except the computers are given slightly different model names. The prices do seem to be better through Penn State than alone with two similar systems differing by about \$500, but as with Dell, there are promotions that apply only regular to buyers that may or may not outweigh the savings. One should compare two systems directly to be sure which site to use when buying from Gateway.

Compaq's site seemed to be selling highly inferior desktops at high prices and without the option to customize. The Deskpro series computers are not nearly as good as the Presario 5000s available from Compaq for far less money, while the Evo and iPaq models are more fairly priced. The prices, though, are not as good as they are at Compaq.com, and once again Compaq has the special offers that aren't available through the MOC (this week, Compaq offers free shipping).

There is a listing for handheld PCs, but curiously, the link brings the message "No Families Found." Compaq computers are said by some to be made with low-quality motherboards, but this should not be a problem for people who won't be installing new hardware, anyway.

In general, it seems the Microcomputer Order Center offers less than it seems, but every individual's computing needs are different. It's best to check and compare the prices of all computers before making a decision. However, don't dwell too long, for when a company has a special offer, it might only last for a week or two before being replaced by a new one. Obviously this is done to pressure buyers, but don't let it; remember what is important to you, and look for those features.

Has your computer been vaccinated?

by Jarred Heigel
staff writer

What could be more devastating to any college student than a computer virus? Computers are so important in the lives of today's college students: They are used for writing papers, doing research, completing engineering homework, and even keeping in touch with friends from home via e-mail and AOL Instant Messenger. If a student's computer were to become infected with a virus, he or she would become virtually helpless.

Thankfully, computer viruses are programs, just like anything else on a computer, and because they are programs, they can be prevented from completely ruining the machine. In order to know how to protect computers from viruses, it is important to know where they come from.

Since computer viruses are programs, they must install themselves or be installed onto a computer. This means that if nothing is ever installed from floppy disks, CDs, or the Internet, there is no chance of the computer getting a virus. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to go without ever installing new hardware or programs, or from connecting to the Internet.

It is important to be careful when using disks and the Internet. The most useful weapon in fighting computer viruses is virus detection and removal software. This software can scan any folder in a computer for viruses, scan incoming information off the Internet for viruses, and even fix some infected files.

Some of the more common antivirus programs are Norton Antivirus, McAfee, AVP, F-prot, and Thunderbyte. These programs will update themselves over the Internet so they will be able to guard against

the most recent viruses out there. Many programs are relatively inexpensive. Norton Antivirus costs about \$25. It is a good idea to have more than one of these programs installed and running in a computer because it is possible for one program to miss a virus, but another might detect the virus and fix the corrupted file.

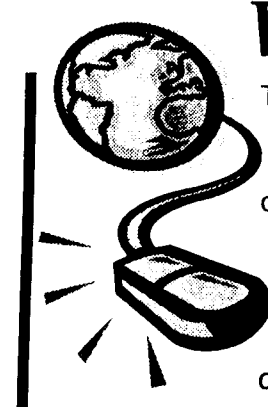
Here are some viruses to watch out for:

---W32/Nimda@NM There is a high risk of receiving this virus if running Windows9x through ME. This virus' main goal is to spread over the Internet and computer networks, infecting as many computers as possible, and at the same congesting the network so it is practically unusable. Some of the ways this virus can infect your computer are through mass e-mail and network share propagation.

---W32/Magistr.b@MM This virus uses a more complex encryption technique that enables it to terminate the ZoneAlarm firewall user interface process if it is running, delete all .NTZ files, and retrieve e-mail addresses from the Eudora mailbox to send itself to those addresses.

---W32/Sircam@MM This mass-mailing virus sends itself to all users found in the Windows Address Book and in temporary Internet cached files.

---W32/Vote.b@MM This is another e-mail virus, but it takes advantage of the recent war efforts. An e-mail containing this virus would be a forward titled "This War Must Be Done!" The body of the e-mail then goes on to read, "Hi We Must Fight, We Must ReMemBer Our Victims! No Peace Before KILLing TeRRoRists!" The e-mail then contains an anti-terrorism attachment that actually has a derogatory comment about America, then it downloads itself onto the computer.



Website insight

The Beacon's editors came up with some of their favorite sites to browse — from the fun to the helpful to the downright odd, here's where they've been surf'ing. Got a fave site of your own? Send an e-mail to behrcol5@aol.com, including your full name, the site's URL, and a few sentences on why it's worth checking out.

Ben's pick:

www.drudgereport.com

—"the guy who broke the Monica Lewinsky scandal! ...Drudge provides the week's controversial and interesting stories ...also has links to most news sources."

Paige's pick:

www.Launch.com

—"has streaming music videos, but must have PC with high bandwidth"

Jeanine's pick:

www.victoriassecret.com

—"provides a way better selection than the stores ...have occasional deals you won't find in the stores ...guys like the site for obvious reasons..."