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Edition: Sunday, 01 July, 2001

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## Lyons' Den

## The Webs we Weave: Fallout from the WWDC Rumors

By Daniel J. Lyons

During his Keynote address at the Apple Worldwide Developer's Conference on May 15th, Steve Jobs, iCEO of Apple Computer, did not announce multiprocessor Power Macs, but did announce a delay for the upcoming Aqua-ized Mac OS X (OSX). Originally slated to ship this summer, OSX will now ship in January and a "Public Beta" will be available this summer.

While I have not heard official confirmation of this, I imagine that the public beta will be available from Apple via download or CD-ROM for the price of shipping. I can't imagine paying \$150 for a beta version, but such a thing is not an unknown in this industry. If the public beta is good



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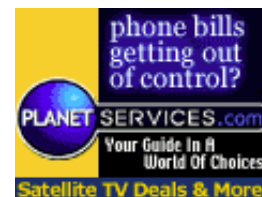
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enough it may be enough to console users until they can get their glossy shrink-wrapped boxes in January. The delay is bittersweet. I'm glad that Apple is trying to build a quality product, but I wish they had been able to stick to their original time line.

The lack of multiprocessor systems does increase the pressure on the AIM alliance to get faster G4 chips out in force before summer. Something needs to bridge the Megahertz gap between the G4 and X86 chips, and it needs to do it now. The G4 line needs a massive speed bump, as soon as possible, to help boost its public image. Doubling speeds would be OK, but to really keep up, a 1GHz+ chip is a necessity. Athlon and Intel will both have at least 1.2GHz chips shipping by then, according to current speculation. Granted these chips may be as rare as Hen's teeth, but rare is better than non-existent.

I suspect that Apple's original timetable called for the announcement of both OSX Beta 1 and the multiprocessor Macs at

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this week's WWDC. Although a multiprocessor Mac was demonstrated at the WWDC, no actual ship date for the beast was announced except the vague comment that they would be out by next year's WWDC. This is a smart move, with no OSX for this year, it doesn't really make sense to officially announce such a machine now, at the earliest we may see multiprocessor Macs announced this summer. But, most likely, they'll be held off until a MacWorld in January.

My previous column spoke about the multiprocessor Macs and counteracting the public image of the MHz gap, [take a look](#) if you missed it.

### Reader Feedback

One thing that my readers don't let be do is get away with incomplete thoughts. Jack Stephens brought up a good point about the pitfalls of Apple promoting multiprocessor systems as GHz systems:

If you start advertising dual and quad Mac's as 1GHz and 2GHz when they are really just 500MHz CPU's what is to

stop PC vendors from doing the same thing. Right now they don't but if they started today how would Apple look with Dell saying their servers are 3 or 4 GHz because they used two or four 700MHz or 800MHz PIII CPU's. I think it would open up Apple to a lot of criticism about ad's if they started this.

This would indeed be an issue, but one that may be avoidable. If OSX can truly saturate four processors and give the user something like 75-80% of a true 2GHz G4 system marketing the multi processor systems as GHz systems will not be all that inaccurate. There would be some industry backlash against Apple, but this is nothing new, they got a lot of flak for the original iMac and the SuperComputer ads as well. The real problem would come from Apple failing to meet their boast of a 2 GHz machine, not simply the boast itself. If a quad processor Mac were to be shipped with OS9, it would not perform anywhere near a 2 GHz machine, only OSX gives it a chance at pulling this off and even that remains to be seen.

Larry Rosenstein wrote in on this very topic:

[cut] Mac OS 9 has support for multiple processors. But applications have to be written specially to take advantage of them by creating additional threads. Also, there are limitations on what these additional threads can do, which makes it awkward to program for MP machines. Only a few apps take advantage of multiple processors on the Mac.

In Mac OS X, any process can be run on any processor. The system itself uses multiple processes, so even without any app changes you would see some improvements on an MP system.

It's not clear how much of a performance improvement you would see on an MP system. Certainly, you will need to be running native Carbon or Cocoa apps to see the most benefit. [cut] But even if you had all native apps, it remains to be seen how much of a benefit extra processors are. A machine with 4 500 MHz CPUs still may not be as fast as a

machine with one 2 GHz CPU.

With all of the work that has gone into multiprocessor support in OSX, I suspect that the performance difference will be quite noticeable. I would hope that 2 500MHz G4 processors would give a GHz Athlon a run for its money. Clearly it would not be as fast as a true GHz G4 system, but it still may outpace the X86 architecture. If they were advertised as GHz systems, you would hope that they would be at least as fast, but until we see some real world tests of these systems and OSX, there's no way for me to be certain.

[Talkback](#)

### ***The Lyons' Den***

*Daniel J. Lyons started with the Mac back in 1989 laying out a High School newspaper on an SE and was immediately hooked.*

*Now, several computers later, he is hoping to share his thoughts and experiences and maybe even a few gripes with anyone who will listen.*

*Daniel has worked in*

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