



OPINION

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ROMAN LOYOLA / **Let the Games Begin**



The Olympic torch passed by the *MacUser* offices a few days ago. The event brought the excitement and glory of what started in Greece long ago with the immortal words, "Let the games begin."

At Apple, there's a new attitude brewing. After more than a decade of denying that the Mac is a great computer for games and trying to convince everyone that the Mac is a business computer, a graphics computer, a multimedia computer, an education computer -- everything but a game computer -- Apple has changed its mind. Suddenly, from the streets of Cupertino, we hear that Olympic cry. *Let the games begin!*

Apple wants more games to be created for the Mac, and it's going all out to promote and attract game developers. Its first step was to create a staff (where before there existed only one solitary games evangelist) devoted to the development of game software. The next step was to establish "Game Kitchens" -- hands-on sessions in which Apple meets with game developers and educates them on the intricacies of the Mac OS and Mac hardware.

Now comes Apple's biggest step yet -- the release of [Game Sprockets](#), a software-development kit that will help developers create Mac games more easily than before. Finally, game developers, who've complained that the Mac OS is too complicated to deal with, are now getting a helping hand.

Developers may be the only people who care about Game Sprockets, but each component of Game Sprockets will affect every aspect of what users care about: game quality. The DrawSprocket will facilitate the creation of better-looking graphics. The SoundSprocket will allow for 3-D-sound processing, so game sounds will give an impression of space and location during play. The SpeechSprocket will allow for speech recognition, so you'll be able to let out a James T. Kirkian "Fire!" while hunting down a Romulan. The NetSprocket will make it easier to create network games and promote more mayhem after quitting time. The InputSprocket will give vendors better tools for creating joysticks and other input devices for flight simulators. The QuickDraw 3D RAVE Sprocket will help developers create fast 3-D software so that we can experience true 3-D worlds without waiting for a painfully slow redraw.

Although cynics might say that the only reason Apple created Game Sprockets was in response to Microsoft's Windows 95 Game Software Developers Kit, the more pressing reason is cold, hard cash. According to numbers released by Apple at the Computer Game Developer's Conference last April, more than 60 percent of the people who bought any type of computer for the home said that entertainment is a top priority when making a buying decision. Fifty percent of the Macs sold in 1995 were to home users. In the last six months, sales of game software have increased by 60 percent. The Mac-game market *alone* brought

in \$100 million dollars during that time.

There's Gold in Them Thar Hills.

There's obviously room in the Mac-game market for titles other than just Marathon, Myst, and X-Wing. And Apple has made some good progress in helping game developers with its staff, seminars, and software. But if Apple really wants to take this market seriously, its game plan needs to address issues of concern to many game developers.

First, Apple needs to provide consistent software support for game developers, most of whom develop primarily for the PC and are used to creating games for DOS. Game Kitchens and Game Sprockets are a good start, but more needs to be done. Apple's work with Bungie Software and Reality Bytes has been fruitful -- those companies have created excellent Mac games.

Second, Apple and [Bandai](#) need to decide what Pippin is and isn't and get the word out. Is it a game machine or an Internet browser? Is it both? If Pippin can establish an identity and any type of installed base, then game developers may opt to create games for Pippin. That's good news, because Pippin-based games will also run on Macs. If game developers decide they want to write software for Pippin, they'll also be entering the Mac-games market.

(With any luck, the Pippin picture will become clearer when Bandai and Apple officially announce their Pippin marketing strategy at the [Electronic Entertainment Expo](#) in Los Angeles, later this month.)

Third, Apple needs to educate game publishers. Game developers new to the Mac market don't know how to promote and distribute Mac software, nor do they know how to communicate to Mac users. Apple needs to teach them how. Apple should also address worries about the lack of shelf space for Mac products in software stores and show publishers how to overcome this problem.

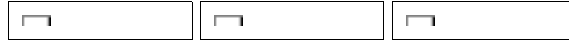
Finally, it's not enough for Apple to simply initiate game-developer relations. The company needs to see its current relationships through and work hard to create new ones. Many developers have made attempts at creating games for the Mac, only to find a less-than-lukewarm response from Apple. And since most game developers have limited resources to begin with, some simply abandon Mac development and distribution instead of struggling with it. The best friend a vendor can have in the Mac market is Apple.

There's no reason why Apple shouldn't put out its best effort when it comes to games. Games are the perfect way to show off the Mac's overall power. Just look at Bungie's Marathon 2: It's the best first-person shoot-'em-up game available on *any* platform. It's better than Dark Forces, Doom, and Descent, and it shows off the Mac's playability and how the machine handles quality graphics and sound. Games such as Marathon and Myst have succeeded by establishing themselves on the Mac first, and with over 20 million Macs out there, there's clearly a market. Vendors such as LucasArts are responding to the demand by releasing more Mac games and by cutting down the release time between the PC and Mac versions of games.

Sure, if Apple can succeed in promoting game development for the Mac, some companies are going to make tons of money tapping a fertile new gaming market.

But the biggest winners of all will be Mac users, the ones who've known for a long time

that the Mac -- with its graphics and sound capabilities, processor power, and easy-to-use interface -- is a great game machine. For too long now, these folks have strolled down the aisles of their local software retailer, envious of all the games available for DOS and Windows. If Apple maintains its program, there will be excitement and glory for Mac users -- more games to choose from, and well-designed games that are fun to play. And if the hottest computer games around run on Macs, that gives the Mac OS one more edge over Windows 95 in the battle for the home-computer market.



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