

Switching to a Mac From a PC

by Mark Clement

Like most small-business people, I've used personal computers (PCs) to manage my business. My wife, who runs the office, has also used PCs. Plus, I use a laptop at design meetings — I love hearing customers say “wow” when I open a crisp photo. Some deck builders zap out plans using design software. Those graphical presentations are impressive on a fast machine; however, running CAD software and programs like Acrobat and Contribute and manipulating large photo and video files were causing our PCs to run slowly or even crash.

Recently, I got the “blue screen of death” — my wife and I have a history of chewing up a PC every 18 months — so I had to invest in a new computer. I'd been hearing the “get a Mac” mantra from designer friends for years — touting a Mac's reliability and its ability to run design and graphics programs. So, I bought a Mac.

It turns out my designer friends were right. The Mac's software processing outclasses that of any PC I've ever had, in power and speed. It's smaller. The monitor is better — I can even work outdoors in indirect sunlight. It runs cool. You can hang a door from the screen hinge. It slides into its bag easily. The power supply alone is a beautiful thing — it connects to the machine by a rare-earth magnet, decreasing friction on a wear-part, and has flip-out hooks that act as a cord wrap (I wish my Shop Vac had those). The plug prongs fold away. It boots up in about 1 minute, whereas

my PC — which, to be fair, is older — takes closer to 5 minutes.

And because Apple has its roots in education, the guts of this machine are impact-resistant (kids drop things), according to Apple. The hard disc automatically shuts off when the machine senses impact — which minimizes the chances of damage to

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this essential component — nice for a lives-in-the-truck machine.

Macs tend to cost more than PCs, however, and they require Mac-specific software — which costs extra and might not work the same way as PC programs, notably Microsoft Office. The price for Apple laptops has dropped, but they're still not cheap. My MacBook, with a rugged, single-piece aluminum body, cost \$1,200 (the white polycarbonate body with the same guts costs \$999).

The Learning Curve

Mac aficionados will tell you that Macs are “more intuitive” or “easier to use.” Ignore them. All they're saying is that they know how to use their Mac better than they know how to use a PC.

I had to partly relearn the process of using a computer. Typing words is the same, but keystrokes for working

in documents (page down, highlighting, bold) are slightly different. If you decide a Mac — and the process required to migrate your life from PC to Mac — is for you, I would not recommend going it alone. Apple stores have classes — free. It's smart to take one. The key is to find a class that focuses on running the software tools you need for your business.

You can't buy a Mac at very many places. You can get one online, which I didn't because I needed human support. You can also buy one at an Apple retail outlet, like the Apple Store where I bought my wife's Mac, and at Best Buy, where I bought mine. I got more knowledgeable support at the Apple Store than at Best Buy, but getting someone's attention wasn't easy.

Even my “you can pry my Mac from my cold, dead hands” designer buddy runs MS Word and Office. He concedes you can't communicate with the rest of the world without them. But they don't work exactly the same on the Mac operating system, called Mac OS X. (A PC's operating system is called Windows.) When I asked at my local Apple Store about a class for Microsoft Office — and I thought this was enormously telling about Apple culture — the salesman told me, “We'd never support that.” (I got that attitude from the store manager on down.)

For \$250, Best Buy migrated the data from my PC to my new Mac. For my wife's Mac, I bought Apple's 1-to-1 service at the Apple Store for about

\$150. Included was data migration to the Mac and one-to-one face time with an Apple “genius.” (The “genius” I spoke with didn’t know anything about Word for Mac, so I question the nomenclature.)

There were a few other additional costs. I owned two printers: The Mac didn’t work with either one, even after several hours spent downloading drivers from the Internet, so now I own three printers, with a fourth en route. The Mac can’t sense my Microsoft-based back-up hard drive,

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so I need to buy a new one. The Mac version is called Time Machine and is made by the same company that makes my PC-based back-up drive: Western Digital.

The bottom line is that the \$1,200 machine I bought ended up costing about \$2,000. I measure that partly in hardware I didn’t know I needed (indeed, Best Buy assured me up and down that I didn’t need any) and partly in the time I spent making the transition from my PC.

I’ve been using my Mac for about three months as I write this, and despite mountains of complaints, I’m in. I’m sold. The machine is irrefutably a Ferrari in computer clothing — as fast and reliable as I’d been led to expect. ♦

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