

The TarMac Vaporware Gazette

The Future of Apple's Macintosh

by Daniel Eran Dilger | appleinsider.com | March 5, 2017

Thinking about the future of Apple's Macintosh becomes more realistic when grounded in facts. It's no accident that several Mac models have not been updated in many months, but it's also true that Apple faces real constraints in dramatically expanding its Mac sales. Here's a look at what's involved, and what's possible for the future of Apple's graphical mouse-based computing platform.

There are two primary factors in the future of the Macintosh: macOS as a software platform, and Mac hardware. Apple has been relentless in updating macOS software. It has issued a dozen major new versions over the past sixteen years, roughly twice as many major new releases as Microsoft's Windows over the same period. Apple's latest macOS 10.12 Sierra release officially supports Mac hardware from 2010.

More troubling to many Mac users--and potential Mac buyers with specialized needs--is that fact that some of Apple's Mac hardware hasn't been updated for years, creating uncertainty about whether Apple still values some of its smaller niche businesses that were once considered strategically important, including pro audio, video, graphics and publishing.

This is particularly the case in the face of the massive adoption of iOS, Apple's Post-PC platform powering iPhone and iPad, which has become the company's primary source of revenue and profits.

Where're the updates to existing Macs?

Consider Apple's current Compare Mac Models page, which lists a dozen Mac products. Seven of those are notebooks, three are iMacs, and two haven't been materially updated in years: Mac mini and Mac Pro.

Last October's Late 2016 MacBook Pro was also considered a delayed refresh; the company's best selling high-end notebooks hadn't been previously updated in more than a year.

However, that model got more than just a new speed bump; it involved an entirely new generation of system architecture from its lighter, thinner case to its Wide Color display to its immersive audio, PCIe SSD storage and Thunderbolt 3 connectivity.

Apple also still sells its previous generation of MacBook Pros to reach a lower entry price. Beyond those Pro notebooks, Apple also sells its Early 2016 MacBook (with Retina Display) and continues to

sell what is effectively the "previous version" of this model: the Early 2015 MacBook Air.

Apple no longer sells anything in the category of the former iBook or plastic MacBooks from a decade ago, nor a large screen 17 inch MacBook Pro. Underneath its lowest priced notebook, the \$999 13 inch MacBook Air, Apple markets iPad Pro and iPad models.

Among its desktop models, Apple sells three main configurations of the Late 2015 iMac, along with the "Late 2014 Mac mini" and the "Late 2013 Mac Pro." The company no longer sells any configuration of Xserve, nor a specialized version of a Mac Pro Server or Mac mini Server.

This raises some obvious questions. Why isn't Apple updating its existing models with greater urgency? Why isn't Apple selling higher-end workstations and servers? And, perhaps, why isn't Apple spreading the Mac brand around on Home Servers, Media TV-puters, carputers, stylus driven 2-in-1 convertible notebooks or desktop studio drawing desks?

The answer to all of these become clearer when you look at the results of companies that are doing the opposite of Apple.

Mac update cycles are not an accident

Why isn't Apple updating its existing models with greater urgency? Consider both of Apple's 2016 updates to its notebook line. Both were complete overhauls of its previous lineup.

PC makers have been working to copy the MacBook Air in tandem with Intel and its Ultrabook program. Rather than just updating the Air with a Retina Display, Apple created a new kind of ultra light machine, and then issued a new, higher performance category sharing some of the same elements for its MacBook Pro. Both updates leveraged design technology developed for (and paid for by) iPads.

The result of these updates was a new surge in Mac sales, stoked by the anticipation and backlog of demand. How would Mac sales have performed if there had been no wait? What if Apple continuously made minor tweaks so that Mac models were always "new"?

Most PC makers have long done this, constantly changing their PC components to offer whatever is newest or cheapest, depending on the price category of a specific model. The result is non-cyclical sales. Another result is clearance models related to continuous inventory purges. This trains buyers to wait for sales, rather than for new releases.

Apple does do some inventory clearances at the release of new Mac models, typically through partners who offload older models for the company at a discount. But these sales are minimal, intentionally limited by the fact that Apple commonly lets existing inventories deplete before launching a new release. This also focuses attention on what's new, rather than on closeouts of old products.

Having a clear, gapped differentiation between its newest Mac-Book/Pro models and its former, previous generation models still being sold as entry level options also provides for an expanded range of pricing without creating a "tyranny of choice" for buyers faced with a confusing gradient of too many, but only slightly different, options.

This is classic Apple and is also apparent in its iPhone and iPad sales. Rival PC and phone makers don't sell one new phone and last year's model; they commonly sell several families of product groups with overlapping features and prices. This isn't just confusing for consumers but is also far more difficult to manage for the manufacturer and their retailers, who have to account for hundreds of SKUs rather than just a few. Again, the result is more excess inventories, more discounting and harder-to-support products.

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By only updating new models when there's something significant to offer (such as the all new design of last year's Mac notebooks, and the new Touch Bar feature), Apple can sell its new products to a hungry audience that has been waiting to upgrade. And by creating cycles, it can also better manage its inventory levels—still a complex operation, but much simpler than if it had a wider range of offerings updated every quarter.

Extended product cycles create anticipation and then set up buyers to feel comfortable investing in a premium product, knowing that it won't be immediately obsolesced by another new release a few months later. The same trend cycle occurs in the automotive and garment industries. The more premium the product is, the more obvious its marketing cycle.

In addition, significant product cycles also allow Apple to introduce products with major new features—developed at significant expense—and then focus its marketing on selling the result at a premium in a burst of sales that pays for the invested effort. Commodity hardware makers who continuously update their products rarely introduce major jumps in technology because they can't afford to.

In its earnings calls, Apple executives frequently note that new product introductions initially involve higher component costs and therefore lower margins. Over time, component costs can be lowered, resulting in higher profits through the rest of the product cycle. If the cycle is shortened dramatically, the ability to profit from lowering one's own component costs is eliminated.

Essentially, if Apple didn't take time to think big, it couldn't ever afford to think big.

<http://appleinsider.com/articles/17/03/05/editorial-the-future-of-apples-macintosh>



The *TarMac Vaporware Gazette*, named in honor of past president Jerry Rowe, is published monthly. Send kudos, complaints, and article ideas to Cindy Huffman, editor.



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Meetings: 2nd & 3rd Thursday each month except Dec. (first meeting only). 6-8:30 pm. **Help desk** opens at 6. Pops Diner, 1432 Greenbrier Pkwy., Chesapeake 23320

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macmost.com | February 6, 2017

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Best Surge Protectors

By Glenn Fleishman | February 23, 2017 | www.macworld.com

Far better than ordinary power strips, these products will protect your expensive electronics from dangerous power spikes. We'll help you pick the right one for your home or small office.

You only know for sure that you needed a surge protector after your equipment fries. Then it's too late. For a very reasonable amount of money, you could put an almost literal firewall between your expensive (and cheap) electronics and the juice coming in from a wall socket. A surge protector throws itself into the line of fire, sacrificing its components again and again so that your devices stay functional.

These reviews are of surge protectors designed for a home office or cubicle, or a home-entertainment system. Such power mediators have a single function: keeping voltage from exceeding a certain rated level, beyond which equipment can blow a fuse, burn out its power supply, or completely fry its circuitry beyond repair. The surge protector takes a hit instead of your hardware or A/V system, and it could potentially save you hundreds to many thousands of dollars, depending on what you have connected.

You want to make the modest investment in a surge protector for the same reason you want to have a backup of your data: because there's no going back after an adverse event. Getting ahead of a problem that may be unlikely but not improbable saves you from the enormous consequences if it occurs. (You do have multiple backups of your data, right?)

Their top 3 favorites, priced from \$27 to \$36:

- Best all-purpose surge protector: Belkin PivotPlug
- Best at powering-off when it can no longer provide protection: Tripp Lite TLP1208TELTV
- Runner-up surge protector: APC SurgeArrest

For complete review, visit <http://www.macworld.com/article/3172540/home-tech/best-surge-protector.html>

ViewRanger App Helps You Discover and Save Nearby Hiking Trails (and it's free)

by Kristin Wong | lifehacker.com | February 23, 2017

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