

The Eternal Learning Curve

By Claude Ducloux, HILL, DUCLOUX, CARNES & DE LA GARZA

If one more person tells me how “intuitive” it is to learn how to use a Mac computer, I will garrote them with their earbuds cord. At what point does this madness end? Eve had an Apple, too, and look where that got us.

Remember the good ol’ days when the biggest technical challenge we faced was hooking up the stereo, so it could play “Inna Gadda Davida” loud enough to make dogs reach for aspirin? Heck, now just turning on the TV requires programming two different remotes and at least one round of yelling at the Chinese. And don’t even try to tell me DVDs are an improvement over videotapes.

The most advanced machine in a 1978 law office was some version an IBM Selectric. Then, suddenly, someone invented the idea of “processing” words, and typing pools became “word processing departments.” Employees who mastered this new technology were treated with the reverence of astronauts, and such reverence was well-earned and jealously protected. We all assumed, in our blissful arrogance, that we would never need to learn this particular alchemy of document production. Then word processing became only a subset of computer applications, and we were all dragged into uncomfortable levels of training, which included learning to boot, prompt, and open, all the while risking dreaded “error messages,” which was the computer equivalent of “you’re screwed; start over.” I expressed my early frustration with being forced to use a computer as an inextricable part of law practice in this space (“In-

tro to Computers for the Pitifully Intimidated,” *Austin Lawyer*, April 1994).

First, we had to learn a complex series of hieroglyphics to access documents on our computers called “DOS” commands. You had to remember the precise sequence of characters and backslashes to access files. Yes, it usually led to tears. New words were thrown around like “megabyte” and “RAM,” and the big computer companies fought for system superiority, dividing us like lemmings into “PC” people or “Mac” aficionados. Clearly, by the early 1990s, the PC crowd developed more comprehensive software, and with the advent of “Windows,” which allowed us to point and click on our digital treasure, the overwhelming number of users were in the PC fold.

But the Mac crowd was fiercely loyal, and you’d find that little smug enclave of Mac users in every firm, continuing to insist, like the early “survivalists,” that the end is coming for PCs. Sure enough, as the Mac technology advanced, more and more of our younger folks began buying these Macs, my kids included.

Okay, so I was a bit impressed with how compact and light these little notebook computers were, having lugged a much larger and heavier PC notebook all over the world. But I really didn’t want to learn a new operating system. “But, Dad, it’s so easy,” they’d insist. Right. I seem to recall Tom Kite telling me how easy it is to play golf. Liars. But, like the curious cat, I wore a disguise and went down to the Apple store in

the mall, intrigued by the thought of carrying a lighter, easier to use computer on my travels.

There is an atmosphere of fun which permeates the whole store. It’s like they’re on happy drugs. Technically savvy kids with droopy pants and piercings can’t help but impress you with their enthusiasm, punched up with the over-use of the word “absolutely” (currently the leader in American adverbs I never want to hear again). They all have names like “Ving” and “Marsden” which is distracting at best, and further dissuades any notion that you are of the same species.

But there is the aura of techno-heroin which infuses their excitement into you, and before I knew it, I had purchased both a MacBook AND an iPod. (I think I bought the iPod just to watch Ving use the hand-held card scanner again). Needless to say, I was like a Hawaiian tourist who is totally stoked about buying his custom-made flowery shirt while on Kauai, but arrives home and asked himself, “What the heck was I thinking?” Similarly, when I got home, my Mac-crack wore off, my enthusiasm waned, and I didn’t even dare take the stuff out of the box for a month. I knew I’d need a new burst of energy to face the consequences of this purchase. I thought about calling up one of my kids to show me, but, having personally trained them in inter-familial mockery, I knew that I couldn’t learn anything while withstanding their withering sarcasm (“Dad, do

you need me to come and cut up your meat into little pieces for you, too?” Grrr ...).

I started making new household chores to interrupt my inevitable interaction with the MacBook. I started fantasizing about hiring a “Mac Genius” to come over to help, but knew I’d be too distracted by their tattoos. Finally, one Wednesday evening, all my other chores were done: the cat bathed and the roof shingles freshly waxed; I knew it was time. We were about to take a long trip, and I wanted to have enough familiarity to write a diary and send and receive emails.

So, I cleared the kitchen table and plugged the computer in, looking in the box for a floppy disk to insert. Well, what do you know? It really wasn’t as bad as I thought. As I filled in the information during the “Welcome” process, I became much more comfortable with Little Mac. The icons bounced around, little rainbows swirled, and I kept looking for ways to do stuff, like adjust page size, and use tools which had become second nature on a PC. Many of those tasks still remain a total mystery.

All in all, however, I found my Mac friendly and fun. Naturally, there were a few little mistakes I made in the registration process. Somehow, I bought three cows in Dusseldorf and accidentally joined the Taliban on Facebook. But I’m still learning. And I’ve named the cows Ving, Marsden, and Austin.

Keep the Faith. - AI

