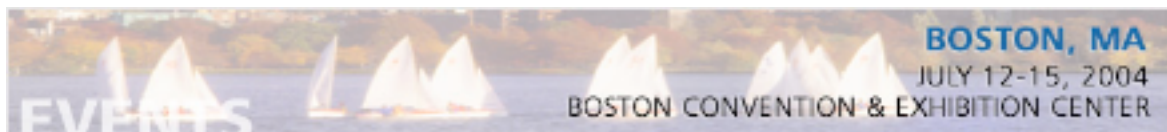**Real People Reviews** by Daniel M. East

OPINION: Boston or Bust -- The pros and cons of Macworld Expo Summer 2004

In the last two weeks, the single most question i am asked is what my thoughts are about attending the upcoming Macworld Expo to be held in Boston this July and the conspicuous absence of all things Apple. Since I wear many "hats," and therefore have several perspectives on this subject, i'd like to share some of what I believe to be the pros and cons of attending 2004's version of Summer Macworld.

I'd like to start off on the "good foot," as it were, since there seems to be a lot of pessimism out there right now. Macworld Expos are not just about seeing new products (although that is a lot of fun). For user groups, consultants, developers and educators, it can be about community networking and planning your next six months of presentations, trainings and lesson plans. It can be about connecting with vendors, friends and colleagues or, and admittedly in a lesser amount, just collecting that latest piece of promotional merchandise (a.k.a. "swag"). As someone who truly benefitted from my time at Macworld CreativePro in 2003, I can tell you that a smaller conference offers some real opportunities if you are willing to pursue them. If you are one of those frustrated attendees who just can't wait in line for the coolest standing room only demos, a smaller conference provides an opportunity to really talk with a vendor and work on establishing relationships. You can fully see and experience a training session or make contacts at some of the many parties held in the evenings (and getting invites can be substantially easier as well).

On the down side, IDG has only (as of this writing) confirmed forty-two vendors with absolutely no Apple corporate presence whatsoever. That includes eMagic, Apple Consultants Network and the usual formidable Apple booth space. Given the fact that IDG had projected 100 vendors in their statements from August of 2003, we are now only about a month away with a mere 40% of that goal. I spoke with an IDG representative (who wished to remain anonymous) who indicated that the organizers had pre-show ticket numbers still below 15 thousand -- a far cry from the last Macworld Expo in New York City which had well over 35 thousand attendees. Of those numbers, what percentage was actually paid for and how many were complimentary "exhibit only" passes? They wouldn't specify; however, a bigger item of note is the absence of other major vendors beyond Apple. There is no Adobe (who is holding their own mini-expo nearby at the same time), no Alsoft, no eZedia, no Canon, Nikon nor Epson. In fact, there seems to be no real "anchor" vendor in the bunch as the primary draw. My contact at IDG indicated that they were hoping (now confirmed) Quark as a "major" vendor, but the image problems they

have combined with a rapidly declining number of new users hardly qualifies Quark as a draw at this stage.

Now, having said all of that, let's look at some of the people, companies and organizations who will be there: The new, and clearly improved, SpyMac Network; Xerox, ProSoft, Primera, O'Reilly, PeachPit Press, LinoType, Belkin, DriveSavers and our friends at MacDirectory will all have a place at the show. There will, in fact, be an Apple User Groups booth and User Group University along with the User Group Lounge featuring some of the hottest speakers, trainers and presentations for user group members. A variety of pavilions with everything from digital media to tech support and the new "Dream Studio" area will feature music systems and demonstrations for all levels of end users.

Look for sessions by some favorite "usual suspects," like Chris Breen, David Pogue, Andy Inhatko, Adam Engst, Jason Snell, Andy Hertzfeld and others. The conference sessions will include a major presence in topics ranging from FileMaker Pro to a huge range of digital multimedia and music offerings along with uber-geek techie stuff like UNIX, Open Directory and system configuration sessions. For those who are into graphics and design, but just couldn't make it to the successful MacDesign conference last week, there is a huge range of sessions for every brand, make and model of design tool and technique you can imagine. The fun stuff won't be lacking either as the Users sessions will have lots of GarageBand information and a wide range of iLife information to make your life more fun to record and display for friends, family and business.

One new addition that IDG is touting is the "Geeks and Gadgets" area complete with presentations of the latest and greatest toys and tricks for your Mac. The real question becomes, "is all of this enough to get people to Boston?" Well, in my opinion, I can only say "maybe."

From a vendor's perspective, the show floor may not be the opportunity that might be more fully realized in San Francisco or New York; however, it is a different opportunity if they capitalize on the many diehard Mac enthusiasts who will attend any Mac-friendly event. I believe that more excitement will be generated after the upcoming Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) and some of the expected new product announcements there (especially OS X v. 10.4 a.k.a. "Tiger"). Boston is a city with a lot to offer, but is there a chance of recapturing that old magic from Boston Macworld Expos of years ago? I highly doubt it, and believe that this is another real stumbling block for this July's offerings from IDG.

As a consultant, I am still undecided since I want to see the latest and greatest products, systems and services as well as network with my colleagues, friends and vendors so that I can continue to be as effective as possible for my clients. From my user group view, I think that Boston may be an incredible opportunity to really shake hands with a lot of the people and things in the Mac-community that MUGs really need. Starting from UGU to the show floor and the opportunities to "press the flesh" with vendors, I believe that Boston could be a great chance to showcase some of the truly wonderful group leaders who may now find themselves with a larger membership and more limited resources as Apple's growing product popularity (iPod, e.g.) continues to bring more attention to their organizations for those who want more information, training and assistance.

Will this be a Bay-area Macworld Expo? No way. Will this be a huge opportunity to get up close and personal? You betcha. Will it be successful? That remains to be seen, but I hope that you can make your decision to attend with more details and perspective. Visit www.macworldexpo.com, talk with your user group members, visit the Mac news sites and let's continue to support the events and conferences that support all of us and our own needs as Apple/Mac users.

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