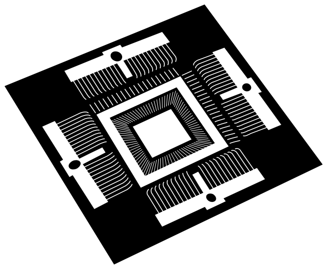
MiamiNUG Newsletter *Volume One Number 2 31 December 1991*



MiamiNUG Newsletter *Volume One Number 2 31 December 1991*

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Happy Anniversary to our one year old MiamiNUG! A trickle of new members has begun, and the upcoming NeXTWorld Expo in San Francisco should also give the platform much more new exposure. Most of our members were hit by the economic crunches of the season and probably only one person from our group will attend the January exposition. In this issue of our newsletter, we feature a couple pieces of thoughtful writing by our MiamiNUG members. We continue to enjoy and luxuriate in the uniqueness and customizability of our platform, and we also continue to experience the "blue meanies" of the relatively archaic UUCP protocol that is often one of the stumbling blocks to making the insanely great machine as interpersonally oriented as we'd like it to be. One of our members, Dr. Thomas Herbert, has an application in to the NSF that proposes using a laboratory of NeXT computers to teach mathematics to biology students. Our corresponding member from New York City, Robb Allan, has moved to Palm Beach during this Christmas 1991 interlude, and we will look forward very much to Robb's outstanding abilities in both clear, incisive writing and clear, incisive hacking. Robb, who co-founded both GUN and the GUN Newsletter, is looking forward to taking over the editorship of this newsletter and being quite active in helping us grope for and achieve some group solutions to UUCP, NeXTMail, and the networks. Bob Prinz, our UNIX-trained Pilot, may be the only one of our members to attend the NeXTWorld Expo in San Francisco.

This issue brings you, courtesy of MiamiNUG members, crystallized and creative thinking on both Developer Camp as a total experience as well as opinions -- desperate and otherwise on one of the most popular and maligned FAXmodems in the NeXT world.

We were pleased at the interested feedback we got from fellow developers and NeXT users on our little discussion of how 60 Hz magnetic fields in excess of 2.5 milliGauss are linked to a heightened incidence of leukemia, brain tumors, and prostate cancer. No one from NeXT Computer, Inc. communicated with any of us about our worries over the fields associated with the Megapixel Display, but we still believe that the length of the coiled cord between the display and the keyboard needs to be at least doubled. Far from wishing to be muckrakers, we will offer some condensed thinking about wellness techniques and their relevance for NeXT- (or any computer) related humans in future issues. One inherent problem occurs because many gifted programmers are so young that radiation-related problems some years down the way are difficult to really prioritize and assess. Look at our attitudes about skin cancers, the ozone layer, and tanning salons.

The January 1992 issue of **LOTUS**: Computing for Managers and Professionals (Volume 8, Number 1, p.84) has an essay article entitled, "A 1992 Computer Wish List," by Steve Stecklow, a national correspondent for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Mr. Stecklow opines in the number two wish on his list: "Monitor manufacturers resolve to tell the truth about radiation emissions. I want to know the possible health risks of ELFs (extremely low frequencies) and VLFs (very low frequencies). Such major manufacturers as NEC Technologies are replacing their old products with new, lower-radiation models. Are they doing this simply to quell customer fears or because they know something we don't know?" Steve was being gentle. We might modify his statement to read, "..or because they know something they don't want to tell us?"

Developer Camp from Here? A Spectacularly Popular Rendition.

From what we heard, the following piece by Craig Mattocks was recently an instant hit throughout NeXT Computer, Inc. Developer Camp often provokes a reaction of "brain crash," or some other less cosmetic variant of information overload. Craig's reticular formation and limbic lobe interacted in a truly creative way with his own cerebral networks.

Group: comp.sys.next.misc, Item 7614 (Current Item Range #6191 - #7874)
Subject: ND Kamp - A Diary
From: mattocks@rcf.rsmas.miami.edu,

Date: 10 Dec 91 03:36:13 EST

A WEEK AT NEXT DEVELOPER'S KAMP

In Which Pooh Ventures into the 100 Aker Wood
and Dreams of Becoming a Real NeRD
(with apologies to A. A. Milne)

Sunday, December 1

One warm sunshiny morning, Winnie-the-Pooh was preparing to go on an exciting journey indeed.

"Off to the land of visionary righteous hackers!" thought Pooh, as he stashed his pot of most-delicious hunny into his backpack. He had prepared diligently for NeXT Developer’s Kamp, teaching himself C in two-months time and reading every tutorial and NeXT programming book he could get his furry little paws on. Now the big moment had arrived.

"C’mon, you silly bear," urged Christopher Robins, "or you’ll miss your first day of class!" Moments later a scared, Oh-what-am-I-doing-Pooh arrived in Redwood City, a mere stone’s throw (15-20 minutes southeast) from the San Francisco airport.

Pooh jumped into his rental car, sped down the Freeway (US 101-S to San JosÎ), took the Whipple Ave. exit, and pulled into the Howard Johnson’s just before sunset. He dumped his backpack in his room and looked up The Address in the Yellow Pages of the hotel lobby’s telephone book (900 Chesapeake Dr.).

"Hallo!" he called to the desk clerk. "How does a lost bear get to NeXT Computer Headquarters?"

After fidgeting behind the Front Desk, the clerk directed Pooh to return to 101-S, take the Seaport Ave. exit, and "Chesapeake Drive should be one of those new roads on your left. You’re no more than 5 minutes away," he noted.

Well, that seemed real close to Pooh and he needed to stretch his short little bear legs after being wedged into a crowded airplane seat all day long, so he decided to run there instead. Pooh jogged southeast to the end of Veteran’s Blvd., followed the sign left to Seaport Ave., then ran along the railroad tracks, past some AMAZING mountains of salt being pushed skyward by big yellow bulldozers, until he finally reached Chesapeake Dr.

Pooh entered a generic sort of looking research park lined with hardwood trees in the process of losing their leaves. It could have been a Boston suburb but Pooh immediately recognized it as the 100 Aker Wood. He began scanning the company names on the blue metal signs. Finally, there was NeXT Computer, Inc. on the right-hand-side of the road, just another building (#14) in the group of pale blue, two-story office buildings. The double glass doors in the right front corner were locked, it being the late Sunday afternoon following Thanksgiving, but Pooh peered through the glass anyway. On the wall behind the receptionist’s counter hung a backlit NeXT color logo.

"Gnarly sign, Dude!" exclaimed Pooh, practicing his newly acquired Californian dialect.

Indeed, it seemed "chez-cool" to the little bear from the east coast.

The waiting room was pretty spare though, only a black sofa and a couple of black chairs rested on the white pine hardwood floor. A plant or two stood near the door and a large, dramatic poster of a NeXTstation monitor adorned the far wall.

Pooh Bear jogged through the parking lots out front and passed an untagged black Porsche with a red "68000 workstation" bumper sticker.

"Could this be the fabled NeXTmobile?" he wondered aloud, "But isn't it supposed to be a black Miata? Or am I confusing it with Guy Kawasaki's car?" (Pooh had read "Selling the Dream" the night before.)

Around back, Pooh chanced upon a boardwalk and a small marina. The view of the tidy little sailboats huddled together along the edge of the San Francisco Bay was quiet and soothing, not ostentatious at all.

"What a wonderful place to sit and hum a particularly nice hum and dream of creating the ultimate Killer App for the ultimate Killer computer!" thought Pooh.

His initial impression was that NeXT is running a relatively austere operation. This was comforting to Pooh but it was not what he had expected, given the ridicule he had heard over the "net". He circled around the modest building, jogged along the loose white gravel trail and headed back to the motel to study Ann Weitz' "Writing NeXT Programs" book some more. He was a very excited little bear but somewhat afraid that he would be buried by the avalanche of information which he suspected would fall on him the following day. Eeyore had warned him that he would be "blown away" by the intensity and pace of the course but Pooh resolved to grasp hold of the nearest tree branch he could find and hang on for at least one blustery day's worth of lectures.

"We'll see tomorrow," yawned Pooh, "but now I need a little smakerel of hunny before I turn in for the night."
they waited patiently together outside of NeXT Headquarters. They noticed that NeXT employees had to insert a black magnetic card into a slot on the column outside the glass doors before they could enter the building.

"Hmm, there must big pots of super-delicious hunny inside," mused Pooh.

Suddenly, a hearty, dark-haired woman strode up the walkway.

"That's Bambi - NeXT's Den Mother!" shrieked the classmate. She cheerfully greeted the two lost students, then directed them across the street and around back (710 Chesapeake) to the classroom.

And, WOW, what a classroom it was!!! Eight laboratory workbench tables were arranged with four "rows" per side of the room, angled so that, when Pooh walked down the central aisle, it was like walking upward through the middle of a big "V". Four monochrome NeXT cubes sat atop each table while four Cube servers plus the instructor's machine were set up at the front of the room, for a total of 36 NeXT's networked together via Ethernet. Four NeXT laser printers were thrown in for good measure. A GE projector flashed the teacher's Megapixel display onto the movie screen at the front of the classroom so that students could follow/replicate every mouse movement the instructor made. Four-by-four foot posters of the front and back of the Cube adorned the white walls. Pooh was getting radically stoked.

"Do I smell a honeysuckle bush?", wondered the hungry bear, who had rushed out of his HoJo's hotel room without a morsel of food.

Much to their delight, the budding NeXT developers-in-training were provided with an elegant, catered breakfast spread in the back of the room each day.

"Muffins, pecan danish, bagels with cream cheese, yogurt, juices of all kinds, coffee, OJ,... what's a confused bear to do?" pondered Pooh.

Lunch was served up in the classroom next door each noon and an afternoon cookie/brownie break was provided to keep the hackers' blood sugar levels high. A few NeXT elves would stop by to chat with the students during these breaks.

"Nice touch, NeXT!" thought Pooh, who really enjoyed talking with the wee NeXTfolk.

At these lunches he learned, among other things, that Apple Computer software engineers often clandestinely attended NeXT Developer Kamp masquerading as employees of the phony "Palo Alto Shipping Company".

POUNCE . . . "Hi, I'm Tigger!" shouted our instructor (actually Ms. Susan Rayl). "Tee-Eye-Double-G-RRR." And she broke into a song:

"The wonderful thing about Tiggers, is Tiggers are wonderful things.
Their tops are made out of rubber, their bottoms are made out of springs.
They're bouncy, trouncy, wouncy, they're really fun, fun, fun.
But the most WONDERFUL thing about Tiggers, is I'M the only one!"

"Tiggers can be extremely Bouncy at times," recalled Pooh.

Tigger served as the Kamp's shepherd through the perils and (mostly) glories of NeXTstep programming for the week. She told the students to grab their badges, sign in, and logon to any machine they wished. A thick spiral notebook entitled "Software Development Course Materials" and a NeXT tote bag, replete with a NeXT t-shirt, decals and pencils, awaited each student at his/her desk. Pooh noticed that both the name on his badge and his login name had been misspelled. ("Duh . . . whatsa Pooh?") Tigger and Roo (actually teaching assistant and networking ace Gray Lee who kept the Cubes hummin') noticed the discrepancy vis-a-vis the sign-in sheet and - viola! - suddenly a new badge appeared automagically on Pooh Bear's keyboard. His user account was also instantly corrected. (Being a shy, humble bear, he had said absolutely nothing to the instructors about these problems.)

Tigger, who has been teaching NeXT Developer Kamps all over the world (Redwood City, Pittsburgh, New York, Paris, Tokyo, even someplace in Indiana!) for the last 2 years, gave us a brief synopsis of her background: EE degree at Stanford, studied artificial intelligence at Carnegie-Mellon, worked with OSF/Motif at IBM, loves graphical user interface design/creation/development.

"We are in enthusiastic, capable hands," thought Pooh.

Then each student stood up in-turn and introduced themselves.

"Yow! I am surrounded by bright, experienced programmers who inhale C code and speak in postscript," gasped a daunted, Oh-I'm-not-in-Pooh-Corners-anymore-Pooh.

"Snort, 10 50 moveto, pop pop, fillrect, stroke," said his classmates.

.Tigger warned the Kampers that this would be the main "grunt" day - the students would need to listen to some lengthy lectures to acquire a foundation in the basics of programming on the NeXT computer. Yet she made every lesson entertaining (she's absolutely tireless) and she patiently answered even the dumbest of questions (many offered by Pooh himself). She moused along with the students through the Workspace Manager's rudimentary functionality, she presented an overview of what the NeXTstep classes, objects and the AppKit are, then she fired up Interface Builder and whipped up a simple interface (consisting of a working window, menu, and icons) in about two (count 'em) two minutes!

The class covered the essentials of creating and using objects, message syntax, inheritance, . . . then the students played with a project which, it seemed to Pooh, would end up being an aquarium screen-saver for the NeXT - happy/sad "fishie" and "jellie" objects swam through an abstract ocean class. Tigger encouraged all aspiring NeRD's to "steal" code from the numerous examples which come installed on every NeXT computer. The also students learned how to look up class/object syntax in Digital Librarian and copy/paste it into their source to avoid coding mistakes.

"I am, like, one totally exhausted Bear!" thought Pooh at the end of the day, his Valley Girl lingo cresting. But he vowed to read ahead through the notebook that night so that he would be better prepared for the next day's lectures and exercises.

To be continued . . .

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 |      |
 |      |   "Did you ever wake up to find,
 | (o)(o)      a day that broke up your mind?
 C      _)   Destroyed the notion of circular time...
  | ,___|      It's just that evil life that's got you in its sway."
  |   /                                  - MJ, Rolling Stones
 /____\
Don't have a cow, man!
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Books, Black Boxes, Virtual Realities, and Vapor.

Neuron's FAX96+ and associated bundled software hogs the spotlight this issue because of the particular intensity with which both fans and opponents express themselves. Who can forget or not notice the full-page inside-back-cover ads taken out by Neuron, Inc. in the last two issues of <u>NeXTWorld</u> ? Touted as "the one-step connection between your NeXT and the world," the Neuron FAX96+ modem has generated varying amounts of frustration, rage, and admiration in our NeXT community over the past few months. Even with an academic or Developer discount, the device still costs a bit more than $1000, and the main thrust of numerous complaints wafting through my Internet node suggest that a device costing $1000 *should* work, but there have been quite serious problems with both hardware and software. Early critics acclaimed the modem as a good piece of equipment but rejected the software as too buggy. Later critics applauded software improvements that followed the NeXT user interface guidelines more closely than Communicae, for example, but then noted that the hardware was too frequently stodgy and unreliable in its role as a FAX device. A $1000 piece of hardware coupled with a $10-15,000.00 computer ended up being a lame imitation of an ordinary $300 FAX machine. Some of the same critics blamed System 2.0 and said that NeXT Computer, Inc. had not really fully implemented both sending and receiving FAX transmissions, but that the 2.1 update really fixed all the "broken" parts. The same critics later admitted that possibly the problems would be fixed in System 3.0. Neuron's package is described in a slick ad as "Our hardware/software combination provides fully integrated Group III fax send and receive and high speed V.32bis data communications up to 38,400 bps."

Members of our MiamiNUG are very ambivalent about the Neuron device and the software that comes bundled with it. Of our members who actually own the Neuron FAX96+, only 33% are really sufficiently satisfied with Neuron's package to offer no specific complains. Another 33% of our members owning the Neuron package are truly ambivalent and have coexisting love-hate feelings about the package and the company. As you would guess, the remaining one-third of those owning the Neuron package are quite negative and feel ripped off and have found the company unresponsive. Stan Wohl's comments which follow have been very carefully compiled and represent a "worst possible case" of sorts that is unfortunately true. We hope that this opinion is definitely in the minority but we are afraid that Stan's opinions are probably found all too frequently. Neuron's hardware functions anything but seamlessly, and too many users have been reporting that the Neuron FAXmodem will send but will not receive FAX transmissions.

Neuron, Inc Fax/96+ Problems

by Stan Wohl, 822 NW 9th Avenue, Dania, Florida 33004
(305) 920-0312

I have been trying to get this company to respond to product problems for almost four months now, with absolutely no satisfactory responses or assistance.

Prior to this last go-around, I had the following problems that were never resolved with the original software:

- Incoming Fax from manual-fax originators can not be received. Apparently, it doesn't "see" the senders' fax/carrier soon enough to recognize the caller as a fax sender and hangs up on those senders that have these manual fax systems. One of my largest clients has this type of fax, and I have been unable to receive their transmissions.

- My primary datacomm connections are made with two BBS's, Compuserve and Bix. For Compuserve, all communications are garbled, from first response from the gateway after connection, all the way through the final connection to the CIS host. That is, the connection is made, but all text received from both the gateway and the host (CIS) is unreadable garbage. The host "sees" my data, but Synapse doesn't "see" his data. With Bix, the problem is garbled data through the gateway, but readable data after passing through the gateway and actually connecting with Bix.

- No changes in scripting, parity/byte settings, or manual dialing procedures has any effect on the garbled data problem. However, using Communique to get to either of these BBS's works correctly.

Since receiving the new ROMs and 1.50 software:

- I replaced all the chips correctly, installed the new Neuron Software, removed and re-installed the fax/modem through PrintManager, powered off, and then rebooted the system.

- A bug in Neuron Monitor continuously loops to the /tmp/console.log the two lines "*got host with name localhost*" and "*add host localhost*" as long as the console is open. No real problem if you power up/down daily, which will clear the log file. However, since the system stays up 24hrs a day, the log file eventually reaches a significant size.

- In Synapse, with the new release and new ROMS, when dialing a script, the dialed number answers and puts the carrier up, but Synapse doesn't see it, nor does the modem CD light come on. Synapse eventually "aborts the script", at which time, the CD light ***does*** come on the modem. *Connection HangUp* has to be done twice to get the modem to actually go OffHook.
- When attempting to dial and connect directly from the Synapse window, without using a script, but by using "AT" commands, again the dialed number answers and puts the carrier up, but the modem does not go to CD. Eventually, the modem returns "CED", and stays OnHook until you escape and hangup.

- I have tried using my old Communique Software and have experienced the same problems as with manual dialing through "AT" commands.

I tried various combinations of software and ROMS, with no success and I am back to using the original ROMS and original software, with the same limitations and problems that prompted my initial dissatisfaction with the product.

Repeated telephone calls and fax'd messages have never elicited any response from Neuron other than delaying tactics and stonewalling techniques. After having made more than a dozen calls attempting to reach a solution, I am no further along in resolving the problems than I was the day I received the product.

Questions such as "do you know what the problem is", or "when do you think you will have an answer", or "what is the status of my request", or "do you intend to do anything about this", all get the same response: "I don't know". When I asked to speak to a supervisor, I was told, incredibly, that I could not, and when I asked for the name of the head of the company, I was told they would not give me that information, either. How's that for "customer service" and "product support"?

Neuron has never suggested any settings, or attempted in any way to assist me in the debugging of what is truly their problem and product weakness. Trying to deal with them has been monumentally frustrating. You never get any response other than "someone will get back to you". So far, no one has ever "gotten back to me".

It is possible that I have overlooked some combination of settings that will work, or it might be that the new ROMS are bad, or that the new software is bad. But, I have a business to run, and the product is supposed to be a tool, not a toy to be played with constantly to see if a way can be found to make it work properly.

It’s easy to translate their response, or rather their lack of response. If what they are really saying is "we don’t care, and we’re not going to do anything about your problem", then they should be honest enough to just tell that to their customers, instead of constantly putting us off and wasting our time while we try to resolve it.

If they recognize that they do have a problem, and a responsibility to all their customers, than they should be forthright enough in their dealings with us to admit that fact and then try to keep us informed of their progress in solving it.

A supplementary opinion by another of our members is that there have been occasions when technical staff (including the President of the company !) have made themselves available for short periods of time. The patterns of Neuron’s responsiveness and frequent lack of it may indicate incredible, rapid growth of the company and their totally-sold-out production line, but apologists for the company are definitely in the minority in southeastern Florida. A "no-refunds, no-communication" policy from Neuron conveys the old IBM middle-finger attitude that is not typical of many NeXT-related companies nowadays in the era of interpersonal computing. A middle finger attitude cuts off communication, even if the hardware product is potentially superior to other available products. No matter what the excuse, a middle finger attitude only generates similar attitudes and a general lack of empowerment in others.

Marble’s Teleconnect, advertised for months as bundled with the Neuron FAX96+, only appeared very recently, at about the time that the "new" ROMs were being mailed out to help correct problems with the hardware’s "seamless" integration of FAX and modem functions. There have also been frequent difficulties with applying Marble’s well-designed but complex software. The communication problems with Neuron have even been noted by personnel from Marble Associates, Inc., as the following portion of a network communication indicates.

"I’m Marble’s Vice President for our Software Products Division. I don’t have net news access at the moment, but several postings have been forwarded to me from the net concerning problems with Marble Teleconnect or with technical support for Teleconnect.

I’d like to address those problems, but first let me cut to the chase. I am responsible for all of Marble’s product-related activities. If you have any problem, whatsoever, with any product or with Marble technical support, please call, email, or fax me directly.

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Unfortunately, I cannot answer each technical support call myself, but if you are unsatisfied with the support you have been getting from our technical support staff, tell that to the person who answers the phone and ask for me directly. I will do my best to help you. If I am not available and your need is urgent, please explain that to the person who answers the telephone, and he or she will find someone who can help you as soon as possible.

Teleconnect is an extremely complex product that (we think) adds a lot of capabilities to a NeXT computer. However, to make full use of those capabilities, a user must understand considerably more about the networking aspects of a the Unix and Internet environment than is normally required by NeXT applications. We have tried to make things as simple as possible through Teleconfigure and Telemonitor, and we have packed the manual full of information about TCP/IP, Unix networking, the NeXT anomalies, modem configuration, and internet routing in general.
These are not simple subjects, and our manual is not a simple document.

Clearly, there are things that we could have done better. We would very much like to improve Teleconnect and solve these problems, so let us know what they are. Constructive suggestions and bug reports are always welcome.

Now for the issues that have come to my attention:

1. Problems with Neuron modems:

Neuron requested, and received, a special version of Teleconnect that will only work with its modem. Neuron felt that it would be inappropriate for people to use Neuron versions of Teleconnect with other modems.

Neuron is responsible for providing technical support for Teleconnect when purchased with a Neuron modem. Whenever Neuron cannot help someone, the Neuron staff are supposed to call us. We have not received one phone call from Neuron technical support. If you purchased a Neuron modem and have been unable to obtain adequate technical support from Neuron, call us directly and tell us about it. Neuron received an excellent price on Teleconnect based on the fact that it would provide its own customers with technical support; however, we do not want ANY Teleconnect customers to experience insurmountable problems, so you should call us directly if you are not satisfied with Neuron.

Neuron has apparently shipped old, beta versions of the software to some customers. Neuron assures me that this is inadvertent. If your software says "beta" on it anywhere, please contact Neuron for a replacement. The telephone number is 609-243-7538."

To add a positive note to the last part of this discussion, it is fair to say that Neuron also has an 800 number [1-800-727-7538], and some very bright and pleasant people manning the telephones, even if messages may not be answered regularly. Frequently, when you call the company, it is possible to hear the company's FAX96+'s sending their whistles and static patterns in the background. Neuron's FAX number is (609) 542-8495, and their FAX machines **do** receive FAX transmissions.

Next meeting of the MiamiNUG will be at 3:00 pm on Friday, January 31,1992. Write email to the editors or call us at either 854-8954 or 596-7480 for more information.