Emulation software gives Mac users more choices

computer notes
from the road
by WILMA MELOT

With postal rates for periodicals increasing, many of you are searching for new and improved circulation software.

I'm often asked if there is a way to run circulation software on a Macintosh instead of buying a PC.

Of course, it really depends on what software you decide to use – and how memory intensive it is. If the program costs more than $500, I recommend that you go ahead and purchase a PC.

You can pick up a simple Windows PC for about $500 to $800.

A program such as Parallels, which give Intel-Macs the flexibility of running Windows without rebooting, retails for $79.99, but then you're going to have to buy a copy of Windows XP pro for $299 – if you can still find a copy. And then keep your fingers crossed that your printer still works with this system.

Printer drivers, which translate information from your computer into commands the printer understands, aren't always compatible across platforms.

However, drivers on newer printers seem to work well and I've had good luck setting this type of system up. Parallels is pretty easy to use and seems to work but it's still important to have printer drivers that work in both platforms. But don't forget that anyone running a PC must invest in antivirus protection.

If you don't have a new Intel machine, you're probably wondering if Virtual PC could meet your needs. Once again, my answer is "maybe."

If your Virtual PC runs Windows XP Pro with all the latest updates and if you have a newer printer that has XP drivers, it will probably work. I haven't had much success setting this up but that's because I'm always trying to connect old dot matrix printers without the proper drivers.

Don't forget that you're going to need print drivers for the dot matrix printer (for labels) as well as your laser printer (for reports) and both need newer drivers.

If your plan is to hook a stand-alone PC into your existing Mac network and share the laser printer, make sure your laser has a standing IP address or it's probably not going to work well.

Many newspapers have had to buy a cheap laser printer to connect to the PC just to print out those 22 pages of postal reports. That's because the older laser printer acquired a new IP address each time it was turned on, which meant the PC lost the connection every morning – and there there was no XP driver for the older printer.

Boot Camp 1.4 beta from Apple is the other solution. This software allows you to run Windows on a separate partition of your hard drive and boot the computer in either Mac or Windows mode – but it's one or the other, not both.

Boot Camp will be included with Leopard, the next Mac OSX operating system. Boot Camp lets you install Windows without moving your Mac data, but you're going to have to buy your own copy of Windows. However, Boot Camp will burn a CD with all the drivers you need.

So what's it going to cost to turn your

Now you can turn your Macintosh into a PC with emulating software.

Macintosh into a Windows machine? Let's do some math. The least expensive Mac is the mini, which retails for $599. Now add the price of the Windows operating system (about $300) and you're looking at $900 for a Mac that can turn into a Windows machine. There's also the cost of a monitor but that $600 Dell is looking less attractive all the time.

Although Leopard hasn't been released yet, it should become a reality by the end of this month.

For those of you who are concerned with safety, the stand-alone Windows machine may be the best choice. Just remember it may take some patience to get it into your network and that older printers can be a problem.

If you embrace technology with open arms and want another Mac work station as well as a Windows machine, wait for Leopard and buy a new Apple Intel machine. Don't forget to budget for antivirus software and, again, older printers can still be a problem with this system.

plugged IN

Software updates

Are you a Mac owner? Do you own a copy of Microsoft Office 2004?

If you answered yes to both of those questions, you need to keep up with the program's updates.

To check for updates, launch Word, go to the help menu and then go to "Check for Updates."

If you've been negligent with your updates, you may have to do this several times in a row. Often one update uses another, which means you may have to do this three or four times for it to be complete.

On a Windows machine, let it update the program when it asks but make sure it's Microsoft that's sending the update.

If it's Adobe products you're updating, don't stop the update while it's in progress. This can make your programs not work as well as they should.

The best rule to follow is to quit all programs before you start any updates.

And stay near your computer. You may be asked for information such as a password.

Adobe updates are available under the "Help" menu. Just look for "updates."

Stop cutting and pasting

If your final PDFs are having font issues when they hit the press room, take a careful look at where information from the page came from.

The culprit may be caused by copying items in your e-mail and pasting them directly on your newspaper page. Here's the correct procedure for taking text from e-mail or the Internet:

1. Save the text to your desktop or copy it into a word processor (any processor works – Word, Text Edit, Note Pad, etc.) and save as a plain text file.

2. Change the font to one on your machine and save again.

3. Place the copy in your page layout program.

Check the box in your Indesign import window that says "text import options" (or show filter preferences for PageMaker) to gain even more control over text.

Now when you place a file, quotes will be converted to typographer's quotes. You can even remove extra returns or extra lines between paragraphs.

Using "copy" and "paste" for your text just isn't as good as saving the file and using the place command.

This just might be the solution to those font problems you're having in the pressroom.

Protect your expensive electronic equipment with battery backup units

I know I talk about this a lot but until I convince everyone to buy and use a battery backup, I'm going to keep harping on it.

Once again I am encouraging you to take action and protect your investments with some battery backup units – this means your computers as well as routers, hubs and modems.

I know many of you work on budgets with little cash flow, but think what it will cost if you don't protect your equipment.

APC BE350 Back-ups 350VA for home and office can be purchased for as little as $30.

And if you don't want to drive to a metro area to purchase a battery backup, I have a solution for you.

Your local WalMart carries a brand called CyberPower that retails for $38.

Of course, you can find good battery backups at any computer store.

Now compare that to the cost of a new computer – anywhere from $1,000 up – or maybe just a router going out every few months at a cost of $60 to $80 each time.

Some of these units only have battery backup on one side so make sure to plug your modem and router into that side. And you may need to put a battery in the unit. My advice is to read the directions. It's not always as easy as just plugging it in.

Your hubs and switches also need protection. If you blow a port or two with the next big electrical spike, you're going to start experiencing all kinds of networking problems.

I've been at newspaper offices where all the ports on the backs of the computers were blown and had to be replaced with new cards – at a cost of $400 per card!

That spike came through the network hub.

The newer battery backup units run much faster and seem to be more sensitive to brownouts or spikes.

Take a good, hard look at what your hubs and routers are plugged into and protect them from the outside.

Side Note: If your router loses its connection to the modem and you have to restart, don't hit the reset button on the router.

Pressing the reset button sets the router back to the factory default and you lose all your settings. Unplug the router, modem and hub for a few minutes.

Then replug the modem, wait for all the lights to come on, replug it into the router and hub and see if the Internet comes back. You also may need to restart the computer on older machines.

If that doesn't work, call the Internet provider and make sure it's not a problem on their end.

Don't start changing settings on your computer or the router. They should be correct when you get service back in your building.