

Will artists become computer nerds?

More newspaper artists doing their drawing on PCs

By Mark Fitzgerald

Artists at the *Miami Herald* are each given a drawing table for their cubicles.

But graphic reporter Jeff Glick's table is neatly folded up and stored out of the way. He hasn't used it for three years.

In fact, newspaper artist Glick doesn't even own a set of technical pencils.

Instead, Glick does all his "drawing" on the stark gray Macintosh personal computer atop his desk.

"I think that's where this whole department has gone — to a more computer-based operation where everybody does their art on the Mac. I know that's our goal: To get as many people off the [drawing] board and onto the Mac," he said in a recent interview.

how have artists been changed by their new machines?

In the popular consciousness, after all, artist and machine have always been seen as adversaries.

Would artists then, be like some senior newspaper columnists, who eschew the computer terminal to bang out their work on an old Underwood typewriter?

If anything, the opposite is true, it now appears.

Artists by and large have fallen in love with their computers — some perhaps a little too deeply.

Revenge of the artists?

Providence (R.I.) Journal managing editor/graphics David Gray puts it bluntly: "A lot of artists have turned into computer nerds," he said in a recent interview.

"Yeah, I'm afraid we're becoming the nerds we all dreaded," said How-

of saying, 'Look at what a wonderful piece of art this is,' " said Majeri, current president of the Society of Newspaper Design.

There's a flip side, Majeri said. Editors end up, in effect, making excuses for the machines.

"I find myself accepting, quite frankly, something because I know what boxes [an artist] used for it, where before I would have torn him open for it," Majeri said.

Newspaper graphic artists are painfully aware of the distinction between what a computer can do — and what a newspaper graphic really is.

"Some people take to computers naturally — maybe too naturally — but most of the better artists use [the PC] as a tool," the *Providence Journal's* Gray said.

"A Mac is a technical pen, it's a brush, it's a pencil," Knight-Ridder Graphics Network director George Rorick said in a comment echoed by several other graphics editors.

In fact, the Knight-Ridder Graphics Network, which moves 10 to 15 graphics on an average day, is not at all enamored with a technical look, Rorick adds.

"The bottom line here is, if it looks like a computer graphic, we failed," he said.

Puppy love

While some artists may be too wrapped up in the technical capabilities of their computers, the general feeling still seems to be that newspaper graphics people are just in a stage.

"This is all part of a learning curve, I think," said Richard Curtis, managing editor/graphics and photography for *USA Today*.

"[Some artists] let the computer rule their thinking, but I'm also quickly seeing a swing the other way toward the attitude that it's just a tool," he said.

One reason is that graphics artists are always bumping up against the limitations of their personal computers.

Even now — when graphic packages are becoming increasingly sophisticated — machine-made graphics too often look, well, mechanical.

"The PC certainly has had an impact on the so-called line quality

"[Some artists] let the computer rule their thinking, but I'm also quickly seeing a swing the other way toward the attitude that it's just a tool," he said.

Welcome to the way newspaper art is created in the late 1980s — and likely for decades to come.

For a large and still growing number of newspaper artists, it's hello, Mac — goodbye, Rapidograph pen.

Personal computers — especially Apple's Macintosh models, but also some IBM machines and their compatibles — are the stallions that allow big metros to crank out all those handsome and amazingly timely graphics that New Age editors love and readers have come to expect.

They are the workhorses that triple the productivity of one-person art staffs on the smallest dailies.

Now that PCs have been in the hands of newspaper artists for at least a little while, how are the two affecting each other?

What do newspaper artists like or dislike about the graphics packages out now?

How have machine-made graphics changed our idea of newspaper graphics?

And, perhaps more importantly,

ard Finberg, a pioneer in computerized newspaper graphics who is now assistant managing editor at the *Arizona Republic* in Phoenix.

"We do spend a lot of time and energy discussing this program vs. that program — and forget that the reason for [a graphic] is to get information to the readers," Finberg added.

"The readers don't care if it was created on Illustrator 88 or FreeHand [software packages] — or charcoal or a pen or a No. 2 pencil."

A lot of graphics editors do care — and they're frankly a little embarrassed about it.

Chicago Tribune creative director Tony Majeri, for example, concedes that PCs can cloud his artistic judgment.

"I think [PCs] have, as a whole, taken away the judgment I used to make of the aesthetic qualities of a graphic as good art work," he said.

"Instead, I look at the technical accomplishment. I say, 'Hey, look at the work this guy does on a PC. Look what this guy does on a Mac.' Instead

and artistic integrity of graphics," Chicago Tribune's Majeri said.

"I think the Macintosh has been both a boon and a bane for information graphics," said the Arizona Republic's Finberg.

The boon, he said, is the machine's convenience, ability to make accurate repeats of drawings, and to change a graphic on the fly.

"The bane has been that the quality of typography and the quality of illustration has suffered," Finberg said.

Because the Mac is so useful in so many ways, Finberg added, it is harder to insist on quality.

In PC graphics, line quality was the first limitation to frustrate newspaper artists. In the hands of a graphic artist, a technical pen easily makes the needed subtle changes in line thickness that the earliest PC graphics packages simply couldn't handle.

"In a lot of respects, [PC graphics] have made the art cruder than it should be," Providence Journal's Gray said.

That one-dimensional mechanical look — which almost all newspaper artists interviewed referred to as "chunky" — was a real problem at first.

"On the MacDraw [from Claris] a one-point rule was the finest line you could put down," recalled Marian Wachter, art director of the *Seattle Times*.

"But when that line was actually printed out, it was thicker, and when you drew a diagonal, it got even thicker," she said. "It just was not as refined a line as you would get on a, well, a double-O Rapidograph."

However, artists now say that the line problem is more or less solved. Much more subtle lines can be drawn with such software packages as Adobe's Illustrator 88, Cricket Software's Cricket Draw 1.1, Aldus' FreeHand or MacDraw II, the upgraded version from Claris.

Not their type

The biggest problem now is getting the type right in graphics, artists say.

Most programs still have problems manipulating type at anything much more complicated than a right angle.

PC graphics packages also have generally inadequate libraries of type fonts, sometimes forcing newspapers to run graphics that clash with their own type style.

"It's called information graphics — and you have to have words in it, and those words have to adapt to the style of the newspaper. If they don't, they look bad," Knight-Ridder Graphics Network head Rorick said.

As more of the limitations of PC

graphics have been overcome, graphics editors themselves become increasingly optimistic about the potential.

"I think we're just in a very temporary stage now where computer graphics don't look quite as refined as the hand-drawn graphics," Seattle Times art director Marian Wachter said.

went through the deadlines of its various editions.

"We were able to send [graphics reporter] Chip Taylor up there with a Mac, and he would chart roughly where the barge was shifting," Wachter said.

He sent that information by telephone modem to artist James McFarlane in the Times newsroom, who

"Before the advent of these machines, it would take four to five hours to do one chart — and any kind of revision was certain death," Society of Newspaper Design executive director Ray Chattman said.

"Now, it may take two or three hours — but revisions are almost instantaneous."

Charting a barge

Wachter has seen good reason to be optimistic. The Seattle Times — with its pressing evening publishing cycle deadlines — is a good place to see the potential of computer graphics.

Recently, for instance, a barge foundered in the Puget Sound about 70 miles away from Seattle. The barge shifted this way and that as the paper

created the final graphic.

Because personal computers allow artists to drop and add graphic elements quickly, the paper was able to produce graphics following the shifting barge throughout tight afternoon deadlines.

At the Times "about 95% of our graphics are machine-produced," Wachter said. The paper uses Mac-

(Continued on page 42pc)

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Graphics software

Newspapers find plusses and minuses, but are the vendors paying attention?

By Mark Fitzgerald

Talk with most newspaper artists for five minutes, and they'll tell you how great a graphics software package is.

Talk with them for 10 minutes, and they'll tell you how poor it is.

Newspaper graphics editors and artists often come down firmly on both sides of the question when they are asked if they love or hate their personal computer software.

One reason is that the more graphics packages improve, the more their limitations show through.

"I'm not sure there is a perfect program out there. I don't know if there ever will be a perfect graphics program," said Howard Finberg, assistant managing editor at the *Arizona Republic* in Phoenix.

That might sound like a cliché, but in the realm of computers, it really isn't.

very good job with type. The font libraries are limited, and type can't be manipulated very easily, they say.

"You're not able to do things in terms of 'kerning' type that you can do by hand," *Miami Herald* graphics reporter Jeff Glick said. Kerning refers to changing the space between letters.

In the face of those complaints, vendors are promising much and delivering little, some say.

"The programmers say, 'Hey, that's no problem' — but they don't do it," Rorick said.

Recently, he said, the beta site copies of MacDraw II, Claris' second-generation of the popular MacDraw program, showed real improvement in typography.

"But the released version is restricted where type is concerned, again," Rorick said.

When graphics software packages for personal computers first came

Republic's Finberg said.

In the development of editorial front-ends, for example, individual newspapers would pick a technology and it was up to the wire services to adapt to it, Finberg noted.

"But with [graphics], it was: If you want this service, you've got to have a Macintosh [and compatible software]. The choice of software is really being dictated out of the top," he said.

Consider the survey of Society of Newspaper Design members taken at its convention last fall. Apple's Macintosh was the PC used by 86.7% while IBM was used by just 9.2%.

Graphics from Knight-Ridder's network, for example, work with three of the most popular software packages for Macintosh: MacDraw, Adobe's Illustrator and FreeHand from Aldus.

In their search for a perfect program, most newspapers say they have introduced a mix of these packages into their art departments.

MacDraw, for example, is a basic program favored by many papers for its speed and simplicity.

"Its big advantage is its repeatability [of images], its accuracy. You can alter on deadline," said David Gray, managing editor/graphics for the *Providence (R.I.) Journal*.

However, the MacDraw "still doesn't draw very well."

MacDraw II is viewed by many artists as a big step up.

"The line weight is much finer," said Marian Wachter, art director of the *Seattle Times*.

Still, like MacDraw, MacDraw II is also favored for locator maps, bar graphs and graphics in which a fine line is not terribly important.

Both are likely to remain art department workhorses because they read the graphics sent by Knight-Ridder and the Associated Press.

"MacDraw II could end up being the industry standard since AP is going to it," said Richard Curtis, managing editor/graphics and photography for *USA Today*.

Many artists like the Adobe released Illustrator and the new Illustrator 88 for finer drawing.

"The smoothness of line has improved immensely," *Miami Her-*
(Continued on page 43pc)

"I'm not sure there is a perfect program out there. I don't know if there ever will be a perfect graphics program," said Howard Finberg, assistant managing editor at the Arizona Republic in Phoenix.

After all, the computer industry has spawned packages for business spread sheets, word processing, database management, training and games that are essentially perfect for their intended uses.

But even after two generations, graphics software, it seems, comes only ever more tantalizingly close to that level when it is used for newspapers.

Why? Some suspect a big reason could be that even now — when literally hundreds of papers big and small use personal computers to churn out their graphics — the newspaper market doesn't get the respect it deserves from software manufacturers.

Vendors listen to the newspaper industry, complains George Rorick, director of the Knight-Ridder Graphics Network, but they don't necessarily follow through.

For example, newspaper graphics people have complained for some time that graphics packages don't do a

out, newspapers were not the primary target market, he says.

"Apple told us right off that at first the newspaper industry was not their big concern," he said.

MacDraw, Claris' first version of Macintosh graphics software for publishing, "originally was designed to do something else" besides newspaper, Rorick said.

"We started [the graphics service] in spite of the limitations" of software, he added.

At the time, newspapers were beginning to clamor for computer graphics. They eagerly snapped up services from Knight-Ridder or the AP Access.

In signing on for these kinds of services, newspapers also signed on for the same software limitations.

"This revolution in newsrooms in terms of using computer graphics is very interesting because it did not come from the bottom up — it came from the top down," Arizona

Buying

(Continued from page 7pc)

Co. systems operator who developed the TECS/2, came to Chicago to work on those needs.

At the same time, Pulitzer executives traveled to Jacksonville and to the 25,000-circulation *Antelope Valley Press* in Palmdale, Calif., to see the system in operation. In addition to being a smaller publisher like Pulitzer Community Newspaper properties, the Palmdale paper also had widely separated branch offices.

Conceptually, too, the Pulitzer task force found itself more and more attracted to the TECS/2 system.

TECS/2 is an unusual PC-based system in a couple of ways.

First, there are no file servers at all.

"All the horsepower is there in the hands of the operator," Jackson said. "Each PC has the memory that mainframes used to have."

The PCs are linked by common LANs — Pulitzer will use Ethernet — and the failure of one terminal does not affect any other.

Too, each PC in the Morris system can do all the functions — editorial, classified, word processing or whatever.

"That allows you to be marginal, quite frankly, in the number of terminals you purchase," Jackson said. "You don't have to be so redundant on backup, because if you need more editorial terminals because of a disaster, let's say, all you have to do is flip a switch on the classified terminal and you have all the functions of a newsroom terminal."

"Every editorial terminal can do

classified and every classified terminal can do editorial."

Like any other PC-based system, TECS/2 also permitted extremely easy expansion, Jackson noted.

"You don't have to go running all over the country for backup. The fact of the matter is, if you need a new piece of hardware, you just go down to Computerland," he said.

Installation of the TECS/2 has already begun in the Lerner properties. So far the Pulitzer group has sent its executives for training and laid cable for the Ethernet.

Staff training will begin in September. The entire system will be installed and up and running in October.

"That's one of the advantage of a PC system," Jackson said, "you get up faster."

Apple

(Continued from page 9pc)

ment Corp. earlier announced a joint undertaking to integrate systems and networks.

Apple has also joined Vienna, Va.-based Quantum Computer Services Inc. in development of AppleLink —

Personal Edition on-line communication and information service for Apple Computer owners.

Apple Community, one of the service's two sections, includes various forums; demonstration software, product information and third-party company technical support; public domain software and shareware; Apple information and connection to Customer Relations; access to Apple technical and product databases, software reviews, educational software, and Apple Programmers and Developers Assn. listings; various courses and an events calendar for the section.

The General Services section includes 15-minute-delay AMEX, NYSE and OTC stock quotes, market summary and debate board; international news and weather; and special-interest connections, amusements, travel services and educational and reference areas.

Both sections have electronic mail. Work off-line function allows users to save on-line charges. *AppleLink Update* monthly magazine accompanies the service.

Surges

(Continued from page 13pc)

tem.

"We haven't put in any surge protectors because we just haven't seen the need," technical coordinator Hall said. "The power supplies in the IBM PCs will protect them."

The *Daily News* of Los Angeles — which finds itself in small earthquakes all the time and experienced a major earthquake last October — protects its PCs with devices to protect against surges and electronic "spikes."

One of the more interesting outage protection devices was not developed with newspapers in mind.

Universal Vector Corp.'s Unisaver is a hardware device that places a PC in "hibernation" whenever there is a power outage. When power comes back on, Unisaver automatically restores the system without a need to re-boot.

Unisaver is a combination plug-in PC card and control unit that attaches to the top of a PC.

When a power outage occurs, the device switches to battery power. If it determines that the power is going to

go out for more than two seconds, a message on the screen alerts the user.

"It has 20 minutes of battery-powered environment," Fred Culpepper, director of national accounts, said. "You put it in 'hibernate' and your job is frozen at that point . . . Then it can come back on demand or unattended."

The device can save one megabyte of non-volatile RAM and keep it intact for up to a week without power, Culpepper said.

"We didn't have any special marketing for newspapers," he said in a telephone interview, but maybe we should."

Software

(Continued from page 12pc)

ald's Jeff Glick said.

"We're basically considering shifting almost all our information graphics over to Illustrator 88, which sort of goes beyond the MacDraw traditional standard," the Arizona Republic's Finberg said.

While the paper has been experimenting with a copy of FreeHand as well, Finberg said, "The artists feel for the most versatility that Illustrator 88 is the way it wants to go. It's very easy to change type [in the graphic]."

One drawback to its widespread adoption is cost, according to USA Today's Curtis.

"It's so expensive that it's kind of prohibitive for many of our [Gannett]

papers," he said.

FreeHand from Aldus is viewed by some artists as a kind of middle road between the MacDraw and Illustrator generations. It has the simplicity of the MacDraw but greater line control.

Copies of Cricket Software's Cricket Draw 1.1 also are turning up increasingly in art departments. Here too, the perceived benefit is a greater fine art-style control.