

Corporate Visions of Personal Computing Space:
A Program of Videos on Computing Futures

Hawai'i Library Association 2006, Waikiki

Eric Flower, Librarian
flower@hawaii.edu
University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu

In July of 2001, I published an article¹ that began by noting that we were moving away from personal computers, operating systems, and applications that mainly generated printed pages while heading toward a future filled with the tools needed to create a ubiquitous, secure, high-bandwidth, Net-centric, media-rich environment. When this environment became widely available, we'd see real-time, high-definition video creation, manipulation, and presentation; natural speech recognition; and idiomatic language translation on the desktop. The article concluded with a prediction that combinations of high-speed, multibillion transistor processors eventually would become the heart of artificial agents and machines that think.

The most common reader response to this vision, and there were plenty, was, "If you're right, what will this look like?" For once the answer was easy. First, I suggested, take a look at three forward looking corporate videos that have become the star charts of computing space—Apple's *Knowledge Navigator* (1987), Microsoft's *Information At Your Fingertips: 2005* (1994), and Sun Microsystems's *Starfire: A Vision of Future Computing* (1995). All had the same purpose, to show what personal computing space might look like in the future—the year 2004 for Sun, 2005 for Microsoft, and 2011 for Apple. And second, follow the development of office environment design experiments like the IBM/Steelcase collaboration called *BlueSpace*.

These visions and development plans support remarkably similar goals along distinctly different lines of development. One model creates fixed location personalized immersive workspaces, while the other builds ever more powerful mobile devices linked to no particular location. In both, operating systems and applications are virtually invisible, or at least unobtrusive. You have no sense of how they work, but it's obvious that they are powerful and Net-centric. It's hard to see where the hardware ends and the software begins. Interfaces are natural. Many devices are invisible or embedded. Networks and network services are ubiquitous, secure, fast, reliable, wired and wireless. Access to huge amounts of data, deep information databases, and networked hardware resources is seamless. Privacy is protected. Software is graphical, data-centric, and voice or touch activated. Everything is personalized. Collaboration is effortless and distance is no barrier. Point-to-point and multi-point videoconferencing as well as streaming video work so well, they are taken for granted.

Let's look at some of these videos now and see how close to our reality those corporate visions are.

¹ "Personal Computing Space: Specifications Subject to Change," *Computers in Libraries* (July/August 2001) 21 No.7:8+.