“But IT is working fine on my system!”

By Peter Lawrence Alexander / January 27, 2009 / Updated July 27, 2016

When IT is not working on your system. A consideration.

Don’t you just hate it when someone tells you IT is working great on their computer, when IT is not working on yours? I feel your pain. I feel it when I read a developer say to a customer about how great IT worked on their NAMM system (well, duh!). And I’m equally bugged when a fellow user says the same thing, about how great IT is working on their machine.

Then there’s the flip side of the coin which is just a theme and variation of what we’re talking about.

“IT is not working on my system.”

Either way, what’s missing are the system specs of the machine IT *is* working on along with the system specs of the machine IT is *not* working on in order to:

a. troubleshoot the problem
b. avoid the problem with pre-troubleshooting

The things that should ideally be reported (which if you’re on a forum can be added to your signature) are:

- program and version #
- Computer (Mac or PC)
- OS (OS 10.x, XP, XP64, Vista?)

- CPU (8-core, quad-core, other)
- Amount of RAM in system
- power supply (550 watts is preferred)
- Sequencing program and version #
- audio card
- MIDI interface

By tracking down with these points, a pattern will emerge that suggests where the issues are and how they might be resolved.

I did this, and I'll share my results shortly.

The point of problem avoidance is starting with clearly defined specs for the sequencing program to work at the performance level talked about in its advertising. Once that's defined by the sequencing/notation programs, the next quality control step is informing plug-in developers just what those system requirements are, and as the program change, update the virtual instrument developers.

Here are the system requirements for all the major PC programs: Cakewalk Sonar, Cubase, Finale, Nuendo and Sibelius.

Reading the system requirement specs for each company, it's easy to see why there are problems. Once you get past the descriptions for XP and Vista, the remaining system requirements are nebulous. The customer message is, "Baby, we can run on anything."

That's where the problem begins, because these are the same specs given to software instrument developers.

To clarify my point, look below at this picture I shot from the ADK Pro Audio web site. What you see from the picture (and descriptions) are processor choices. There you find words like Quad, Penwyn, Extreme and so on. And that's just Intel-speak. We haven't gotten to AMD yet. Nor the Mac!

All of the sequencing and notation companies know exactly the specs of the systems they're developing on. Bluntly – what are they? What are the specs needed in a system to run the software to do the things the company's advertising says it can do?

How unfair a question is this?

The ADK Pro Audio screen capture I did makes a serious point. There must be around seven different CPUs on the PC to test on, including the new I7 from Intel.

So to ask a sequencing company to report the machines they're developing on is a fair request for everyone. To set customer expectations on performance, it's easy suggest to show test results with the old Sears line: good, better, and best.

The next wave of issues comes from the software instrument developers. Since they don't know the specs of the systems the sequencing companies are testing on, they're testing blind, too.

This puts these developers in the position of having to report the specs for both sequencing programs and systems to work best with their virtual instruments.

Well, I haven't found a virtual instrument developer willing to do that, so I did. And here's what I've discovered.

1. If you're buying a new system, go direct to the 8-core (Mac or PC) and on the PC make sure your motherboard can handle 16GB or better.

2. Do not assume that a "farm" system should run on a lesser CPU or a cheaper system.

This second point is very important because virtual instruments now fall into two categories: resource hungry and resource reasonable.

The Mac Pros solve this problem very easily – right now they only sell 8-cores. This is one reason you're not hearing Mac guys complain too much about resource hungry virtual instruments. But on the PC it's different because you have so many CPU choices. So on the PC, you have to make the choice to buy an 8-core, or trust anecdotal comments.

But on a farm machine, there's a little talked about issue, viz, which virtual mixing board should be used for all these virtual instruments. There's Steinberg V-Stack, Plogue Bidule, and Brainspawn Forte (PC only).

All of these need to be tested, too!

On the Mac, both Logic and Digital Performer are 32-bit application programs and therefore have 2GB RAM limits. The easy way around this, especially with Kontakt, Kontakt players, and the EastWest PLAY libraries is to run a freeware program called Soundflower which enables either company's programs to access more system RAM in standalone mode.

But here's the rub. No company, not even the company making Soundflower, has produced a simple step-by-step tutorial in PDF format demonstrating how to do this for Mac users.

What's odd is that some of these quality issues are so simple to do, and yet so many companies don't want to do them. Is the reason because of the attitudes that tech folks have towards many non-tech folks?

Infoworld did a story about this entitled "I'll Fix Your Computer. But I Don't Have to Be Nice About It". Here's what Anonymous, the story author, wrote:

"Simply put, my IT co-workers had no people skills at all. They would cuss at fellow employees and sometimes call them "stupid" — or worse — to their faces. Whenever employees complained to management about the IT staff, nothing was ever done. Management said the IT staff's skills were too critical to the company, and besides, we only dealt with fellow employees and these actions weren't turning away potential customers."

Does this sound familiar?

An unwritten point in the article is the need to determine in the quality control chain how much the customer should be knowing, or does know, before a company begins training or writing manuals.

That would go a long way for IT to be working great for everyone.

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