At this point, the market is confused, vendors are paranoid, and users are understandably afraid to buy too early as a result. At times, spectacular products are introduced, but others are terribly matched to customer requirements.

The market needs to define and establish itself. At that point, domination of the industry by giant companies is likely to occur. The market, however, will separate into distinct niches, and smaller companies will need to pick a market niche and serve it well to survive.

I feel that only companies with adequate support and established distribution channels will endure. Even so, the workstation market will continue to be confusing and fraught with competition because of too many vendors and products. At the moment, ready-made, easy-to-use software is the key to this market.

Finally, communication software is a definite requirement for these workstations because they need to connect to mainframes, local nets, and long distance. Also, graphics capabilities are good benchmarks to help differentiate products from each other.

This exciting, volatile market will ultimately stabilize. Meanwhile, it will continue to deliver office, business, and engineering automation. In short, it's the next logical step in the evolution of computing.

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Marleen R. Martin is marketing programs manager for Sun Microsystems, Inc., and has been active in the computer industry for over 15 years in both software design and the marketing of complex hardware and software products. She has been involved in several high-technology start-up companies including Gnostic Concepts, the Unix/usr/group, 3Com Corporation, and Sun Microsystems, and she has consulted for numerous other companies in product design requirements and marketing strategies.

Educated in business and computer science at the University of California at Berkeley, Martin has been active in the IEEE, the Society of Women Engineers, and the Usenix and /usr/group associations. She has won local awards for Women of Outstanding Achievement from Santa Clara County for contributions in high technology.

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