Mediator - part 1: first impressions

Benedykt Dziubałtowski

(c) Polski Portal Amigowy (www.ppa.pl)

I have had enough of AGA. I could not take this anymore. The whole joy of fancying with Amiga is being stolen by the chip that can display 64 colors in Multiscan mode not to mention doubtful speed. Well, it seemed I needed to look around for some hardware which would help my Amiga to spread its wings. My choice was Mediator from Elbox Computer. "Why Mediator?", you may ask. Many reasons. First and probably the most important - availability. On Polish market you may find plenty of it - both new and second-hand. Second - the price. Frankly speaking, this piece of hardware is not cheap, but acceptable for the Amiga market. Third - service support which is available by e-mail and by phone and, what is particulary important for me, in Polish language. I cannot afford much so I decided to buy second-hand. I bought Mediator from one of the shops that sell second-hand hardware. A few days later I received a package which contents was about to solve all my problems mentioned at the beginning.

The package itself was very nicely wrapped. Inside there was a CD, manual, sleeve and, of course, Mediator. So it has started. At first, I took a glance at the board itself. It contains 4 PCI slots, 8 MACH chips and 1 oscillator. The whole thing measures about one third of Zorro slots. Its design is pretty neat and thoughtful. Looking at it I concluded that there is nothing that could be broken or damaged.

The second glance was at the manual. I noticed a yellow stain. I am not going to complain on the shop but such a thing made me thinking: would any other shop selling stuff for PC let it to happen? On the other hand it does not depreciate the value of the Mediator and it has no influence on its usage. What is more, it is not disadvantage because in case of buying new Mediator such a thing would have never happened. Nevertheless, the most important were things described inside the manual. There is almost a complete, concise, illustrated with photos step-by-step guide how to assemble Mediator in Amiga. According to these guidelines, my computer was soon enriched with S3 Virge graphics card, SB128 sound card and PCI Realtek network card. Pretty soon I could boot my Amiga and install included software. After that I rebooted the system and... where are new graphic modes? A bit confused I talked with some people but still I could not solve this problem. I e-mailed to Elbox and received suitable and helpful reply. Below you'll find a solution to the problem. You need to know that these things are not described in the manual and you need to be aware of them when assembling the board. after assembling the Mediator and booting the computer, go into "Boot menu". In the "Expansion" tab you should see at least 3 devices: extension board and two other entries dedicated to Mediator. If you see less than three, it means that your computer has a problem with Mediator detection. "pciinfo" tool performs check of PCI bus and shows information about plugged in cards. Important thing is that you need to boot the whole system first - "pciinfo" will not work without "setpatch" command initialized in the first place! to install Mediator software you need to have the latest version of INSTALLER tool. In my case installation of one of the AmigaOS 3.9 Boing Bags was needed. The manual does not mention it and an install script does not verify it. when configuring Mediator, users of S3 Virge graphics card need to enter amount of memory available on the card. The easiest way is to look into the specs of the card but if you don't have it, take a look at the card. Amount of memory can be recognised by number of RAM chips on the card. If there are 4 of them, then S3 Virge has 2 MB of memory and if 8 then 4 MB of memory. RAM chips are unique and you cannot make mistake not recognising them. I advise not to experiment with giving higher numbers then suggested. users of Apollo cards should remove jumper labeled CONFIG (if there is such jumper). Otherwise, RAM memory assembled onto the card will not be detected by Amiga. The manual mentions it, but for many people it is a common mistake.

Mediator supports rather few groups of hardware. Among them you may find expansions that are more than enough for your Amiga and for sure will meet your expectations. What can be plugged into PCI slots of Mediator and you can be certain that it works? graphics cards: Voodoo Banshee, Voodoo3, Voodoo 4, Voodoo 5, S3 Virge (practically all models) and some models of ATI Radeon (more below). On the Elbox Computer website there are drivers written by Nicolaus Mezentcev that work with some other graphics cards of S3 company. What is important, Warp3D works only with Voodoo 3, 4 and 5. Full list of all supported graphics cards is available here, network cards based on Realtek chipset (both 10 Mbps and Fast Ethernet 100 Mbps), tv cards: there is a huge selection here. More than 100 models are supported. Personally I use FlyVideo 98 card, Spider USB card (quite expensive - new one costs something about 200

Mediator - part 1: first impressions

Benedykt Dziubałtowski

PLN). Also you need to buy USB stack (only demo version is included with Spider USB card), sound cards: Sound Blaster 128 and Terratec 512i Digital are supported.

If it comes to graphics cards similar to S3 Virge, I strongly recommend DX version. It is the fastest available. Its advantages are low price and the luxury of work in resolution of 800x600 in 16-bits. Of course S3 Virge can do more than this but the performance plummets.

It is necessary to mention about Radeon 9200 graphics card which are also supported by Mediator. First of all, Mediator SX or TX is required. It is due to ATX power supply. 3D support for Radeon is only available for AmigaOS 4.0 - AmigaOS 3.x can only support 2D mode. The older models of Mediator can work with Radeon cards but a suitable adapter is needed. In case you want to squeeze everything into the tower case, it is advised to use Radeon 9200 low-profile.

Mediator is equipped in AT or ATX power supply (the latter only in SX and TX models). Thanks to this, you do not have to worry about the power supply in your Amiga anymore. It is also useful when you want to replace your Amiga desktop case with tower case. There is no need to buy a specially designed power supply adapter which, all in all, does not solve any problems. Still, it supplies the power in a classic way so even when we have really powerful PSU, we are not going to get rid of the issues.

I strongly recommend to register Mediator in Elbox Computer. You will receive access to the latest version of drivers and free of charge technical support. The whole process of registration comes to sending an e-mail with suitable data. Everything is described in the manual.

That is all if it comes to the first impressions. In the next part I will focus on graphics card plugged into Mediator and problems you might encounter.

Translated by Sebastian Rosa.