



For Your Knowledge

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APPLE TAKES MICROSOFT'S POSITION IN TECHNOLOGY

The New York Times and Wall Street announced Apple, Inc. as the worlds most valuable technology company beating out Microsoft. According to Wall Street, Apple is now worth \$222.12 billion dollars and Microsoft at \$219.18 billion. Whether you are a Microsoft fan or an Apple fan or you really don't care, you have to admit that this is a moment in time. To me the great story is not that one side is winning over the other, but a story about a company (Apple) that fell by the wayside a decade ago and found itself on the verge of going out of business. Yet, Apple climbed back to a victory, which I don't think any of us would have dreamed we would see in this lifetime... and they did it in one of our worst economies.

I'm a technology fanatic. I am fanatical about how technology leverages business. Love him or hate him, in my eyes, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, is the man. It's not my "fanboyism" regarding what he has done for Apple, but rather what he has done as a human being. Its about what Steve has done for for all of us. Steve Jobs should be remembered as one of the greatest business minds of all time. Let's take a quick sneak peek back through time (the quick version). Steve founded Apple in 1976. Apple then fired him because he didn't get along. In the ten years that Steve was not part of Apple, he founded Pixar Animation Studios, another very successful business. During his Pixar years, Apple crumbled. Apple begged Steve to come back and save the company. He immediately dropped what he was doing with Pixar to save his first born, Apple. A decade after his return he took a company from nothing and made it the biggest technology firm in the world, as Wall Street points out. Each CEO usually has one lifetime to do this, in my eyes, Steve Jobs contributed more to business in his one lifetime than several successful people couldn't do in two lifetimes.

I have learned a few things over the years watching the Apple business model. The most important: user experience does matter. This is something that I think get's lost in the technology world. Sometimes software developers bully end users into an experience that's not enjoyable, but yet the end user has learned to comply, simply because the end result outweighs the pain. Steve Jobs, on the other hand, has never taken no for an answer. I remember reading a story about how Steve Jobs told his engineers that he wanted the entire computer in the monitor, hence the iMac. Remember the first iMac?- it was a clear see-through aqua-blue monitor with the entire computer inside it? That was Steve Jobs' first attempt at re-birthing his company. His engineers would try and bully him into the fact that putting a computer in a monitor was impossible. He didn't take "no" for an answer. He drove the engineers from their confront zone into a realm of innovation. From that point forward Apple started consolidating devices, peripherals and even the end-user experience. Look at the iPhone and iPad, and you see the consolidation of phones, computers, music servers, cameras, and video cameras. Remember the day when you carried a pager, a phone and a PDA? Apple and Steve Jobs truly were on the cusp of consolidating the confusion of technology. In the end, I believe that Apple understood what the consumer wanted... their lives



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simplified into one device with simple interfaces, that got the job done. No annoying and overwhelming configurations. No fears that you had to install security applications to protect your device. Just a simple consolidated tool that did what you asked it to, when you asked it to do it. Oh, and it looked sexy as hell too.

For me, as a technology person, this has been a lesson in the making. Never forget your end-user and their needs. Too many techies build amazing technologies that are useless to an end-user, or too cumbersome to use due to a lack of good functional design. Roughly 7-10 years ago, managers and decision makers were not quite sure if the user interface on a piece of technology was as important as how the technology worked. Today, with Steve Jobs, his Pixar animation background, and his bubbly animated interfaces that seem so friendly to use, you have to wonder that maybe, just maybe good interface design and good branding, blended with really good technology, could be the key differentiator in separating one piece of technology over the other.

What does all this mean to you and your business or the business that you work for? When implementing technology remember to build in a discovery phase (we call those Gear Sessions). A good Gear Session will allow you to step back prior to building out your technology and discover good usability, problems with past attempts and the opportunity to enhance your technology, benefiting your end-user. Build a good road map. Spend more time on the interface and design; think about how it flows and how it will effect the end-user. We are constantly taking feedback from our customers and end-users to enhance our technology to be as user friendly as possible. Sometimes it hurts, I mean hurts really bad to reflow a piece of technology to make it better for the end-user, but in my experience this has always paid off for the next customer that walks through the door. It also gives your business a competitive advantage. Maybe the next time your potential customer compares your product to other competitors, they won't be comparing Apples to Apples.

-Dan Carbone, CTO Idea Engine, Inc.



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