

Jobs Well Done

By Douglas I. Sheer

With the recent passing of Steve Jobs, co-founder and CEO of Apple, it may be time to reflect on the company's impact on the professional market. Much has been said in the wake of Mr. Job's passing, about his legacy and the role the company has played in the consumer market, but little said about its role in our industry. As someone who has done business with them over twenty years and known some of the key Apple players, I am pausing to reflect on that question.

Beyond Apple's mesmerizing hold on the consumer electronics market, in iPhones, iPads and iPods particularly, its impact in our space has been in two ways, proliferating the Macintosh computer and its success with the Final Cut Pro editing system. Apple discovered that it is the software (as Gillette discovered with its disposable razor blades) that can drive demand for the hardware. Polaroid played the game the same way.

After a long period where Apple stood mainly on the sidelines of computing and at the fringes of our market, they achieved a larger share in media applications – the media and entertainment market – than they ever could targeting general office automation as did Microsoft and the major hardware brands, such as Dell, H-P, Compaq, IBM and so on. It was through targeting the music industry, then photography and design and eventually video that Apple was able to carve a much wider niche and build enthusiasm for their hardware and with the introduction of the G-system models (in 1999) substantially juiced up interest in the Macintosh and launched Final Cut Pro. The meteoric rise of Final Cut is history, with Apple claiming sales in excess of 2 million copies. While we see that number, if true, as spilling beyond the core of pro video, it's an impressive achievement, nonetheless. I am intimate with this phase as I was tapped to write, for *Videography* magazine in '99, my longest article ever, 5,400 words, called "The Mac is Back." And, my business plan writing for Jean-Louie Gasse, ex-president of the Apple Technology Division and his former Mac engineering team, helped launch their BE, Inc. John Sculley, former Apple President & CEO (during Jobs absence) was the venture capitalist on that launch.

So what is Apple's forte and Jobs genius? It has mainly been packaging, perfecting and marketing. Despite his stewardship of so many innovative products, Jobs could be better compared to P. T. Barnum than Thomas Edison. Barnum was the penultimate marketer of the 19th Century, who promoted the circus and other state-of-that-century entertainments on a massive scale. What Jobs advocated and Apple personified, was perfection of consumer devices in the greatest possible functionality and design, even if they weren't necessarily the first to introduce them. And, Apple did so while charging premium prices, a further challenge.

In the professional markets, such as audio, photo, pro video and broadcasting, Apple grew to tire of them somewhat after selling the maximum number of Macs it could in them, and pulled out of virtually all professional shows and publications, leaving the selling to app and peripherals makers. Consumer was just too profitable to waste too many resources on professionals any more.

So, where will Apple head in the post-Jobs era? They will probably see more and more consumer marketing victories. And, with much of their manufacturing being done in South China, this should continue to assure them of amazing profits as well.

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