

# Steve Jobs

## (1955–2011)

The exacting visionary who put the personal into computing.

Apple co-founder Steve Jobs branded the Macintosh as “the computer for the rest of us”. Today, that includes toddlers too young to speak, who use Apple’s iPad without adult help. His uncompromising vision survived rejection, ejection from the company he founded, and a fairy-tale return that transformed Apple into the most valuable company in the world. His passion to make computers beautiful and accessible to everyone reshaped the personal computer industry — and also music, mobile phones, books, magazines and films.

Jobs, who died on 5 October at the age of 56, after a long battle with pancreatic cancer, framed the arc of the personal computer industry. Apple Computer, which he co-founded in 1976 with Steve Wozniak, was one of the first companies to build and sell computers for ordinary people; Apple’s iPhone and iPad arguably mark the transition to the ‘post-PC era’ of portable devices accessing cloud-computing applications.

Jobs was born in San Francisco, California. Adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs, whom he thereafter considered his true parents, he was raised in Cupertino, the heart of what was to become Silicon Valley. His father, a machinist, taught him electronics, and he attended after-school lectures at nearby Hewlett-Packard. Jobs later worked there as a summer employee, and from there lured Steve Wozniak to launch Apple Computer in 1976.

Like Bill Gates, Jobs was a college dropout. He attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon, for a single semester. His formative educational experiences were self-directed: his learning about phone hacking, his participation in the hobbyist Homebrew Computer Club, his travel to India and experiments with LSD. In the early days of a new field, it is often the autodidact and enthusiast who sees with fresh eyes and grasps opportunity.

Jobs had big dreams. In 1983, he invited John Sculley, the president of Pepsi-Cola, to serve as Apple’s chief executive with the challenge, “Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world?”

After he was ousted from Apple in 1985 by Sculley, Jobs founded NeXT (later NeXT Computer), a high-end workstation company, featuring an easy-to-use graphical

programming environment called NeXTSTEP. NeXT might have been a footnote in computer history but for two things: it was on a NeXT Computer that British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web; and it was Apple’s purchase of NeXT in 1996 that brought Jobs back to the company. He served as interim chief executive of Apple from 1997, taking the title in full in 2000, and holding it until he resigned six weeks before his death.

In 1986, Jobs had acquired a computer



graphics company from filmmaker George Lucas, which he renamed Pixar. After struggling for years, it pivoted, and moved into computer-animated films. Pixar became famous in 1995 with *Toy Story*, the first full-length feature film made entirely with computer-generated imagery. Pixar went on to win 26 Academy Awards, 7 Golden Globes and 3 Grammy Awards, while turning animated films into a multibillion-dollar film category. In addition to being the majority owner and chief executive of Pixar, Jobs was credited as a producer on *Toy Story*.

Jobs’s career was marked by a series of milestone products. The Apple II, one of the first mass-produced computers, was released in 1977, four years before the IBM PC. The Macintosh, released in 1984, popularized the mouse-and-window paradigm for computing that had been developed at Xerox Parc. Mac OS X, the revamped Macintosh operating system based on NeXT, was introduced

in 2001, and led the resurgence of Apple. The same year welcomed the iPod — the personal music player that created a legitimate market for digital music and, through iTunes, made Apple the largest music retailer in the world.

The iPhone transformed the mobile-phone category on its release in 2007, and also demonstrated the first practical touch-screen computer interface; the iPad, released just last year, was the first successful mass-market tablet computer, so striking in its impact that it is almost impossible to remember a time before it existed. Each product was revolutionary in its design and had an effect both on the computer industry and on the way media are created and consumed. Jobs’s leadership saw Apple demonstrate an ability to create and reshape industries that brought him comparisons to Thomas Edison.

As a business leader, Jobs was famously demanding. He could be abrasive. At an executive retreat I attended, which was run by a large media company, he complained about the performance of the company’s iPad application, then remarked: “Of course, if your engineers were any good, they’d be working for us.” But his abrasiveness was also his genius. Like Michelangelo, he cut away what was unnecessary in pursuit of an uncompromising vision.

Beauty is not often considered in industry — or in science — and yet it was aesthetics that drove Jobs to demand excellence from his engineers. He knew what he wanted, and he wouldn’t stop until he achieved his vision. He was passionate about creating beautiful products that would delight customers.

Aesthetics was also the key to Jobs’s marketing genius. US art critic Dave Hickey once said that when products become commodities, as personal computers had become, they become “art markets” in which products are sold not on the basis of what they do but what they mean.

It is perhaps for this reason that Jobs was one of the rarest of breeds: a business leader who was loved. After his death, fans left flowers and notes at Apple stores around the world in an orgy of public grief reminiscent of that following the death of John Lennon or Princess Diana. In the words of W. H. Auden, on that day, “he became his admirers”. ■

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