

Thoughts on Steve Jobs

Even though AmiTech got its start as an Amiga-only user group, I feel I would be delinquent if I didn't mention the passing of Apple co-founder and general tech guru Steve Jobs. Certainly the mainstream press couldn't shut up about him for at least two full days after his death, which is more coverage than the average celebrity death usually scores. Like many tech-company heads, Jobs was a controversial figure, to the point where some out there may think his cancer was somehow deserved. In addition to founding Apple with Steve Wozniak, he was a driving force behind the original Macintosh computer in 1984 until being edged out in 1985 after butting heads too many times with the CEO he helped bring in. Perhaps it was for the best, as it gave him the opportunity to try other things, and dust off his chops as a venture capitalist.

Perhaps the most successful of his bankrolled projects was the Pixar animation studio. It took several years to become a profitable concern, but is now a pioneering force in the animation industry with an impressive track record of successful films, as well as Jobs' "in" with global media bigwig Disney. Perhaps not as successful but still influential was the "NeXT" computer company, and its (then) B&W 68040 UNIX/BSD system with GUI, which became the conceptual seed for the Mac OSX operating system series upon Jobs' return to Apple. It would seem Apple's (and Jobs') greatest successes were after his dismissal and subsequent return, ushering in the era the "i-stuff," from the iMac to the iPod and iTunes to the iPhone and iPad, along with the

transition of Apple from underdog computer company to dominating tech device and media distributor. It's hard to say exactly how much of all that was directly attributable to Mr. Jobs, but given his famous penchant for control, perfectionism, and micro-management, probably more than you might expect. Along with greater success and market influence comes greater scrutiny, and Apple (and Jobs) are spoken of in the same strong-arming evil monolithic monopoly terms formerly reserved for Bill Gates and Microsoft.

The news of Steve Jobs' passing has predictably brought out the best and the worst in the online communities, respectively deifying or decrying everything about the deceased. Personally, I think a lot of the media coverage and online praise have overlaid the man's genius and his role in history a bit much. Then again, for every Apple "cultist" overselling the importance of Jobs and the Apple philosophies, there seem to be at least as many downplaying to an insane degree. If you go to the right place, all you need is to show a photo with a person or a desk with an Apple-logged product on it to bring people out of the woodwork who are more than happy to tell you how every last thing Apple makes is inferior in features or price-to-performance ratios (or just "everything") to the competing products, and how Steve Jobs has never actually done, created, or accomplished anything, ever. I take the more moderate view in the fight, knowing that both sides are prone to hyperbole. I can understand the "cult" mentality, as well as the feeling of being the smartest computer user in the room full of idiots — I've been an Amiga user, after all. I've had the pleasure of using Mac products at various points in the line's life, but never fell into the Apple cult, partially because of my

Amiga preferences, and partly from Apple's increased leaning toward their hand-held devices.

Even though I don't consider myself even mildly an Apple fanboy, I respect the contributions Steve Jobs made to the industry, and feel they were far greater than average. Jobs was one of the first true champions for the "common man" in the computer and tech gadget industries, pushing for product that didn't require a doctorate in engineering to use, or a doctorate-level salary to pay for. He was the type to ask "Can Grandma figure out how to use that?" and more frequently than others get a "yes" in reply. Sometimes the philosophy went a little far, and end users became restricted by the concept of ease-of-use rather than aided, but the spirit was still admirable. As Windows/Linux users, or the anti-Apple biased in general will gladly tell you, Apple products are not usually the most powerful, or lowest priced, or most easily modified or expanded (especially if you're a techie type who likes to build your own systems), but they frequently represent a good balance between power, quality, and to a lesser extent price, tightly integrated into a stylish package which often becomes a design influence on its competitors, or even unrelated products, like toasters or lamps. While the tech and products came from Apple engineers and other sources, Steve was the perfectionist control-freak steering force behind it for a long time, and he seemed to have a pretty rare gift for understanding what the public wanted well enough to provide it, or just convince them they wanted what Apple was selling. He was frequently (and famously) a douche to a lot of employees and other people, though that seems to be a common trait for a lot of smart

people with extremely strong convictions.

If you have some time to waste, I recommend visiting the website Folklore.org. It is a large collection of anecdotes about and from Apple computer employees, focusing primarily on the development of the original Macintosh computer in the early 'eighties. Not surprisingly, Steve Jobs features heavily in a lot of these stories, and it's an entertaining bit of history and insight, likely to confirm what you already thought about the man as well as surprise you occasionally. He will be missed. While I hardly agreed with everything he said or did, I feel the loss of his creativity and drive diminishes the industry, at least a bit if not a whole lot.

Sorry to turn the newsletter into the Steve Jobs memorial show this time around. It's largely out of my system now, so next month I'll concentrate on other things. For example a new 3.0 MorphOS is supposed to come out around the end of the year. I hear it will run on even more models of Apple Mac.

...by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech Gazette, October 2011

Robo-Calling on Cellphones?

Federal lawmakers are considering a bill that would allow companies to make robo-calls to people's cell phones, sparking debate over mobile devices and business concerns.

The House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on Communications and Technology held a hearing Friday to discuss the Mobile Information Call Act of 2011 bill sponsored by Rep. Lee Terry (R., Neb.) that would ease restrictions on telemarketing calls to mobile phones.

Terry said his bill is a badly-needed update to the 1991 Telephone Consumer Protection Act, or TCPA, which prohibits automated dialing and prerecorded voice message calls to mobile phones.

The bill provides for consumers to opt-in to receive messages, which Terry says could help companies notify consumers about flight delays, product recalls, or credit card alerts. Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.) said he also welcomes the changes.

"Today, many American households have given up the landline and rely exclusively on wireless service. Back then, wireless customers paid higher per-minute rates to receive calls; now, most consumers have buckets of minutes so that receiving an additional call costs them nothing," Walden said. "Given these changes to the market, now seems like a good time to revisit some of the rules the TCPA put in place."

Both legislators said the measure won't unleash telemarketers on unsuspecting wireless consumers, but Rep. Anna Eschoo (D., Calif.) isn't so sure. The subcommittee's ranking member is concerned people may opt-in to receiving robo-calls and unknowingly open themselves up to unwanted calls. Eschoo doesn't support the bill in its

current state and said, at the very least, the "prior express consent" portion of the bill must be more clearly defined.

"In fact, my constituents have spoken very clearly — they don't like this bill," she said. "I've heard from many, many constituents, and they don't like it. They've written to me since this legislation was introduced; nearly every letter was in opposition."

Eschoo's comments echo those expressed in Wisconsin's statehouse earlier this year when senator Van Wanggaard drafted a bill that would ban unwanted text messaging much like the state's no-call list does for phone calls.

In explaining the idea, Wanggaard notes many cellular customers have to pay for all incoming text messages, a complaint resembling a similar argument used to create the statewide no-call list. The senator says adding a provision to cover texts would bring the law into the 21st century.

In both instances, the proposals seek to update legislation created before the proliferation of mobile devices, and there is little debate laws need to be updated. But the way in which such laws should be changed, either to allow or prohibit greater accessibility to mobile phones, will likely continue.

...by Margaret Rock
Nov 07, 2011
<http://www.mobiledia.com/news/115501.html>

December Calendar

December 5 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 PM — Main Grand Prairie Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

December 5 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

December 26 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

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<http://www.amigamccc.org>