

2011 obituary: Steve Jobs, Apple co-founder and Silicon Valley pioneer, dies at 56

By Bruce Newman
bnewman@mercurynews.com
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[Steve Jobs](#), who sparked a revolution in the technology industry and then presided over it as Silicon Valley's radiant Sun King, died Wednesday. The incandescent center of a tech universe around which all the other planets revolved, Jobs had a genius for stylish design and a boyish sense of what was "cool." He was 56 when he died, ahead of his time to the very end.

According to a spokesman for [Apple \(AAPL\)](#) -- the company Jobs co-founded when he was just 21, and turned into one of the world's great industrial design houses and foremost technology companies -- he suffered from a recurrence of the pancreatic cancer for which he had undergone surgery in 2004. Jobs had taken his third leave of absence from the company in January of this year, and made the final capitulation to his failing health on Aug. 24, when he resigned as Apple's CEO. After 35 years as the soul of Silicon Valley's new machine, that may have been a fate worse than death.

Surrounded by his wife and children, Jobs died only a few miles from the family garage in Los Altos where he and fellow college dropout Steve Wozniak assembled the first Apple computer in 1976. Jobs transformed the computer from an intimidating piece of business machinery -- its blinking lights often caged behind a glass wall--to a device people considered "personal," and then indispensable.

"Apple wasn't so much a corporation as a happening, like Woodstock," said Regis McKenna, who did Apple's early marketing campaigns, and accompanied Jobs when he bought his first suit at Wilkes Bashford. What made Apple's iToys objects of desire was Jobs' ability to make them personal.

"The first Apple computers were called hobby computers, then went from 'hobby' to 'home,' which gave it a little more personality," McKenna recalled. "And it was Steve who finally said, 'Let's come down to a name that allows us to identify this as one person, one computer.' That's where the term 'personal computer' came from."

Jobs was the undisputed "i" behind the iMac, the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad, and there was very little about his personality that was lower-case. According to Fortune magazine he was considered "one of Silicon Valley's leading egomaniacs," but Jobs also cultivated a loyal coterie of ergonomaniacs -- ergonomic designers who created the sleek stable of iHits -- whose devotion to him was the centrifugal force holding Apple together. Shares of the company's stock plunged 22 points after Jobs announced his final medical leave on Jan. 17.

"A hundred years from now, when people talk about Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, Gates is going to be remembered for his philanthropy, not technology," said tech forecaster Paul Saffo, "the same way people remember Andrew Carnegie for the money he gave to education, not the fortune he made in steel. But what they're going to say about Steve Jobs is that he led a revolution."

It was a war waged on three fronts -- computers, music and movies -- and with each successive Apple triumph, Jobs altered the landscape of popular culture. With its user-friendly interface and anthropomorphic mouse, the Macintosh forever changed the relationship between humans and computers. After acquiring Pixar Animation Studios in 1986, Jobs became the most successful movie mogul of the past half-century, turning out 11 monster hits in succession. The 2001 smash "Monsters, Inc." could just as easily have been the name of the company.

Liberated music

But it was with the iPod -- originally released just six weeks after the cataclysmic events of Sept. 11, 2001 -- that Jobs engineered another tectonic shift in the digital world. The transistor radio had untethered music from the home, and Sony's Walkman had made recorded music portable. With one of the world's premier consumer electronics businesses, and a music label of its own, Sony was poised to dominate digital distribution for decades.

But it didn't happen. Jobs took a digital compression format that had been around for a decade, synced it to Apple's new digital download service, iTunes, and with the iPod changed a system for delivering music to consumers that had been in place since Edison invented the phonograph.

It was Jobs' genius for simplicity that led to a pricing standard of 99 cents per song that remained unchanged for eight years, despite initial resistance from the music studios. And it was his irresistibility as a pitchman that brought the record labels so completely into line that iTunes now is the dominant player in the digital music business.

A man of sometimes confounding contradictions, Jobs once traveled to India and shaved his head seeking spiritual enlightenment. But he also brought a fierce urgency to his business dealings, often screaming at subordinates and belittling foes. Feared and revered, Jobs commanded the respect of his competitors, loyalty from the engineers he goaded relentlessly, and loathing from many others.

"It's not easy to like Steve close up -- he does not suffer fools gladly," said Bob Metcalfe, founder of the networking giant 3Com and an old friend of Jobs. "But I like him very much. His energy, and standards, and powers of persuasion are amazing. He is the epitome of a change agent."

Rock star CEO

Whether by accident or design, Jobs created such an intense aura of mystery about what he was on to -- and up to -- that he developed a cult of personality, sometimes called "Macolytes." His appearances at the annual MacWorld Expo were often an occasion for the rollout of some new product that Jobs -- with a rock star's sense of theatricality -- had managed, until that very moment, to keep top secret. To his loyal fans, it seemed to matter little that Apple's new device inevitably cost far more than its competitors'.

And while his personal fortune -- often the measure of success among the tech elite -- was dwarfed by peers such as [Larry Ellison of Oracle \(ORCL\)](#) and Bill Gates of Microsoft, Jobs' matchless record of innovation over three decades made him the coolest computer nerd in the valley.

"He reinvented the paradigm of what computing is three times with the Apple II, the Macintosh and the iPhone," said Mike Daisey, who built a theatrical performance, titled "The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs," around a life notable for its highs and lows. "And to be clear, the rest of the tech industry reinvented the paradigm zero times."

Jobs insisted the products Apple brought to market not merely be great, they must be "insanely great." It was his focus on design that allowed Apple to maintain a hold on the imagination of the public that often was disproportionate to the company's market share.

Apple's product lines were a projection of his sense of style, transforming the boring, putty-colored boxes of computers sold by competitors like Dell and IBM into a compote of fruit and berry-flavored iMacs. Yet Jobs himself rarely deviated from a single, Mao-like uniform of blue jeans, black mock turtleneck and sneakers, turning that into a kind of meta-fashion statement: Think different. Dress the same.

His first brush with pancreatic cancer did nothing to slow Jobs down during the final years of his life. If anything, he seemed more driven than ever. Speaking to the Stanford graduating class of 2005, a year after surgery to treat his illness, Jobs said, "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

I Ching to iMac

In a curious way, Jobs started his own life by living someone else's. He was given up for adoption by his biological parents -- Joanne Schieble and Abdulfattah Jandali, a Syrian-born graduate student -- shortly after his birth in San Francisco. His parents eventually married and had a daughter, but it was not until Jobs and his long-lost biological sister were both grown that he discovered she was the best-selling novelist, Mona Simpson.

Even growing up in the profoundly non-conformist '60s, Steven Paul Jobs always seemed different than his peers. His adoptive parents -- Paul and Clara Jobs, a machinist and an accountant in middle-class Mountain View -- took every utterance of their restless son seriously. When Steve declared he wasn't learning anything at his junior high school, and told them he refused to return the following year, the family abruptly moved to Los Altos so he could attend Homestead High.

It was there that he telephoned William Hewlett, president of the electronics manufacturing giant [Hewlett-Packard \(HPQ\)](#), and asked him to donate parts for one of Steve's engineering projects at school. Hewlett was so impressed that he offered the teenager a summer job.

If Jobs already had a sense of his own manifest destiny, he didn't reveal it. After a single semester at Reed College in Portland, he dropped out of school, then spent the following year learning the I Ching -- a Chinese system of symbols used to find order in chance events -- while dropping acid and dropping in on Reed's philosophy classes.

He took a job with the computer game maker Atari in 1974, but stuck around just long enough to save money for a pilgrimage to India. After tramping around in traditional Indian garb and a backpack -- his shaved head and spectacles giving him a vaguely Gandhi-like appearance -- Jobs returned to the Bay Area, spiritually uplifted and flat broke.

He stumbled upon Wozniak in 1975, presiding over a geekfest called the Homebrew Computer Club in Palo Alto, and convinced the brilliant Woz to start a company with him. Woz would remain the man behind the curtain, while Jobs provided Apple's razzle-dazzle, welcoming the attention.

"Every time I designed something great...he would say, 'Let's sell it,'" Wozniak recalled once at an [Intel \(INTC\)](#) conference. "It was always his idea to sell it."

Boom and bust

Jobs decided to name the startup Apple, after the Beatles' record company. From the outset, he made no secret of his appetite, conspicuously taking a bite out of the Apple logo. He and Wozniak trumped Microsoft's early operating system by adding a mouse and a pioneering graphical user interface that allowed users to stop typing commands in bewildering DOS code. It took Microsoft until 1985 to counter with its clunkier Windows operating system.

But in one of his rare miscalculations, Jobs refused to license Apple's interface to other computer makers, and it quickly became a Microsoft world. As a business, Apple computers were a boom and bust operation. The sophistication -- even artistry -- of the engineering created a fanatical following for the company's products, but the Apple faithful remained a small, if vocal, minority.

Jobs needed a businessman who could turn his ideas into gold, and found him in Pepsi CEO John Sculley. When Sculley wavered, Jobs reeled him in with his most famous seduction line: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water to children," he asked Sculley, "or do you want a chance to change the world?"

But it was Sculley who rocked Jobs' world, outmaneuvering him in Apple's boardroom, and forcing him out of the company in 1985. "What can I say?" Jobs admitted later. "I hired the wrong guy. He destroyed everything I spent 10 years working for. Starting with me."

With the fortune he made on the sale of his Apple stock, Jobs immediately started another computer company. But NeXT -- which started as a manufacturer of overpriced workstations, and ended as a designer of overpriced operating systems -- represented for Jobs a decade of wandering through the wilderness.

He didn't make the journey alone, marrying Laurene Powell in a Zen Buddhist ceremony in 1991. The couple had three children -- Eve, Erin and Reed -- and Jobs had a fourth child from a previous relationship with Chris-Ann Brennan. Lisa Brennan-Jobs, now 33, was born around the same time as Apple's third-generation computer, which was marketed as the Lisa.

By 1995, NeXT still had not acquired the type of industry buzz that Jobs was accustomed to creating. The workstations had a sheen of technological sophistication, but were so expensive to produce that few companies could afford to buy them.

Apple, meanwhile, was faring even worse. Its share of the personal computer market had dwindled so alarmingly that the company was even considering a switch to Microsoft's Windows NT operating system. Inside Apple, that was viewed as such a full blown retreat that when NeXT's operating system was offered as an alternative to Apple CEO Gilbert Amelio, he grabbed it. Apple paid \$429 million for NeXT, but taking Jobs back as an advisor turned out to be far costlier to Amelio than the price tag.

No retreat

Jobs derided the CEO behind his back as a "bozo," helping to set the stage for Amelio's ouster a few months later. Insisting he had nothing to do with Amelio's firing, even as he was installed as the company's "interim" CEO, Jobs hand-picked a board of directors loyal to him, then set about returning Apple to profitability.

Apple was still teetering on the brink of extinction in 1997, with just a tiny fraction of the PC business, when Michael Dell, Jobs' PC doppelganger at Dell Computers, sneered that if he ran Apple he would "shut it down and give the money back to the shareholders."

Never one to back away from a fight, or to forget a slight, on the day that his company's market capitalization surpassed Dell's in January of 2006, Jobs sent a congratulatory memo to Apple employees -- though by that time, nine years later, he may have been the only one still keeping score. "It turned out that Michael Dell wasn't perfect at predicting the future," Jobs gloated. "Based on today's stock market close, Apple is worth more than Dell."

Jobs' resurrection at Apple remains one of the most dramatic turnarounds in the annals of American business. Until his rebound was cut short by cancer, it stood as a near-perfect rejoinder to the F. Scott Fitzgerald aphorism, "There are no second acts in American lives." As a young man, Jobs merely helped lead the world into the computer age. In the final years of his life, he turned Apple into a kind of beloved nation-state: a company whose reputation for innovation gives it a reach far exceeding any worth calculable on a balance sheet.

"Steve Jobs has a way of making people believe," 3Com's Metcalfe told the Mercury News in 1997. "It's called the reality distortion field. Whenever you get near him, no matter how mean he might be, there's this field that distorts reality. You are made to feel that if you disagree, you are a jerk."

Pixar powerhouse

The iPhone was an example of the kind of upside down world Jobs could create with his distortion field. Long lines formed outside Apple stores before the first iPhones went on sale in 2007, and the device received endless -- mostly rhapsodic -- coverage in the press. Yet even after the fourth-generation iPhone was released in 2010, Apple's share of the U.S. cell phone business stood at 22 percent, behind Android and RIM's BlackBerry.

Even Apple stores, which were originally created to provide showplaces for the company's product line, turned into tech temples, and became so popular they generated the most profit per square foot of any retail outlet in the country.

Though computers remain Apple's most profitable product line, Jobs sought to lead the company away from what had become, increasingly, a commodity business. He made the transition from computer niche player to consumer electronics giant official in 2007, dropping the word "Computer" from what is now simply Apple, Inc.

For a decade, Jobs was the only CEO of two major American corporations, running Apple (as the iPods got smaller and smaller), and Pixar (as the box office hits got bigger and bigger). With comparatively little fanfare, Jobs annexed this second fiefdom when "Star Wars" filmmaker George Lucas decided to cast off his digital animation division. Jobs scooped it up cheap in 1986, and within two years, Pixar had won its first Oscar for the animated short film "Tin Toy," director John Lasseter's five-minute forerunner to "Toy Story."

"Toy Story," the first fully computer-animated feature, followed in 1995, and it marked the beginning of a box office run so successful that Jobs was able to sell the company to Disney in 2006 for \$7.4 billion in stock. That transaction made him the largest single shareholder in the world's dominant media conglomerate.

At his death, Steve Jobs sat at the summit of an information and entertainment empire, through which he controlled a large part of the culture's digital means of production -- and with the iPhone and iPad, its reproduction. He tamed Leopard; befriended Mickey Mouse; kept music and movies, and even Pluto, all spinning in their separate orbits, so they intersected, but rarely collided.

Jobs did all that through the force of his personality, which was sometimes maddeningly abrasive, and the perfection of his vision, which often seemed limitless. But now, suddenly, the bright star at the center of Silicon Valley's universe has gone out.

Contact Bruce Newman at 408-920-5004.

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