

Think Different: The Rejuvenation of Apple's Image

Overview

Apple Computers has been in the market since 1976 and went public in 1980. “By the end of the 1970s, Apple had a staff of computer designers and a production line. The word “Computer” was removed from its name on January 9, 2007, as its traditional focus on personal computers shifted towards consumer electronics.”¹ Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple, disagreed with John Scully, Apple’s CEO, on the design of the products, so Jobs resigned in 1985 after a power struggle.² Even though the sales of Apple were good, the brand structure of Apple as a corporation had changed in its quest to compete with IBM.³ Scully “was ultimately forced out of Apple in 1993 as the company's margins eroded, sales diminished, and stock declined”⁴ reaching as low as \$4.00 per share.

The Return of Steve Jobs and the “Think Different” Public Relations Campaign

After leaving Apple in 1985, Jobs founded NeXT, which technology became the foundation for the Mac Operating System. In 1997 “Jobs stepped in as the interim CEO to begin a critical restructuring of the company's product line. He would eventually become CEO and served in that position until August 2011.”⁵

The “Think Different” PR and marketing campaign to rebuild the Apple brand launched in 1997 and **lasted eleven years** (until 2002). According to an article written by Rob Siltanen, chairman and chief creative officer at Siltanen & Partners, published December 14, 2011 on Forbes Magazine:

“Steve was highly involved with the advertising and every facet of Apple’s business. But he was far from the mastermind behind the renowned launch spot. In fact, he was

blatantly harsh on the commercial that would eventually play a pivotal role in helping Apple achieve one of the greatest corporate turnarounds in business history. “The crazy ones” script I presented to Jobs, as well as the original beginning and ending of the celebrated script, all ultimately stayed in place, even though Jobs initially called the script “shit” (Forbes, 2011).”⁶

Apple sought to position itself among all users who could potentially use their products, and the advertising team of TBWA Chiat/Day thought that because this was the goal of the organization, then the ad should be lined up with creative personalities and people who have made a cultural impact. They associated a dying brand with the originality and the vision of some of the most creative people in the 20th century.⁷ The “Think Different” tag line was an opportunity to include creativity and to respond to IBM’s historic campaign motto “Think” (paraphr.)⁸, infusing the brand with energy and power to re-establish itself in the market. “Think Different” has been **one of the most successful campaigns in business history** and although Steve Jobs hated it, he went along with it. The first TV ad ran on September 28, 1997, and it was followed by the print ads, billboards, and posters.⁹

Key Elements

French psychiatrist Clotaire Rapaille writes that “brands have an unconscious meaning, which mixes a blend of biology, cultural anthropology, psychology, and learning theories to discover the hidden cultural forces that pre-organize the way people behave toward a product, service, or concept (Rapaille, 2006).”¹⁰ More than a PR and marketing campaign, this was a branding campaign. The focus of Apple’s business branding campaign was to position the brand in the feelings of the people to produce an instant association. The **campaign used publicity** by endorsing the people in their ads and this was picked up by the media in articles such as “THE

MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING; Apple Endorses Some Achievers Who "Think Different"
published on August 03, 1998 by the New York Times. ¹¹

Target Prospects

Apple's branding campaign was very visual. The very progressive "television commercial was produced using an Avid 4000 system on a Macintosh working very closely with Jobs via satellite link" ¹² this alone made an association to the near future in the dawning 21st century.

The psychographic of the campaign suggests that Apple wanted to pursue everyone who could use a computer and who aspired to be respected, admired, intelligent, intellectual, artistic, worldly, daring, sophisticated, and above all 'different.' Reaching into the **lifestyles** of anyone reading the magazines where the printed ad ran or viewing the TV show during which their ad would air. Even driving in cities where billboards ads were shown, and ultimately, Apple shipped their poster ads to schools. The campaign tried to **influence anyone** from school children to engineer students, to the woman reading about fashion, to the driver on the highway. The message was an innovative way to use computers for everything, not just to engineer rockets or calculate and study complicated scientific data, but everyone could use one.

The **delivery systems** were very effective; the success of the PR campaign was that they offered the marginalized customers, the creative ones who were not scientists, a choice, and these people flocked to the stores to buy the new Apple computers. Apple position itself well in 1997 and its stock took off just as the Internet technology was getting off the ground and **the Dot.com era** exploded in the in the United States and abroad creating one of the largest economic booms in the history of the country, which **might have had an effect on the outcome of the campaign.**

Annual sales and levels in the stock market are a way to **measure** marketing and PR campaigns. In 1996 and prior to the campaign, Apple reported net sales of \$9.8 million dollars, a decrease of 26% for the year and it dropped to even lower in 1997 including the advertising costs at \$143 million ¹³, with a lower report due to the budget expenditures for the restructuring in 1998. The change started in 1999, when the company returned to profitability and reported a net sales rise to 28% as compared to 25% in 1998. ¹⁴ The 1997 stock price in the NASDAQ was around \$21.81, in 1999, it opened at \$42.13 and by Dec 31, 1999 it was \$100.94. ¹⁵ Today is priced at \$633.68. ¹⁶ **If the campaign were launched today**, it may still have the same impact, since most people are still seeking to differentiate themselves from the crowd and Apple's products are still the most technologically innovative in the market.

Specific Tactics

The alignment of the campaign with people who have changed the world was one of the best tactics. For the print advertisements Apple skipped the trade and regular computer magazines and bought space in fashion and mainstream magazines. If they were going to get people to think differently about computers they needed a totally different approach to the potential buyers. The idea was that all buyers should be included, not just the engineering or scientific few, and their consideration translated into sales. These new customers made the "Mac" (not the PC) the computer that became the integral part of their everyday lives. The idea that IBM had dominated the market in hardware and software for several decades, and its motto, "Think," was ingrained in the World's psyche was added to "Different," immediately putting them into their own distinctive niche.

The TV ad was **produced** with black and white film featuring famous rebels, misfits, inventive, and creative people, and at the end, a child, who has a more powerful imagination?

The print and billboard ads were black and white photography, which can evoke mystery, the romance of by-gone era, certain social class, and timelessness, which the common and ordinary color photography of today cannot. In addition, the Apple logo in the 1990s was in multicolor stripes and it popped when over-imposed on the black and white backgrounds. Again, **the message** that “you” can think it differently permeates through the ads. **The other tactic** was that the marketing team designing the ads decided not to show any of Apple’s products, leading the viewer to relate with mythical person embodied in Earhart, Callas, Gandhi, Lennon, Dylan, Branson, Einstein, Buzz Aldrich, King, or Henson as the people’s hero of the day. That was powerful psychology. The ad contained the emotions of a culture that had reached its intellectual peak in the 20th century represented by its iconic figures never to be forgotten or ignored because they changed the world in which they lived, and they became the cultural declaration of Apple Corporation.

Events That Took Place around the Campaign

In 1997 Apple needed cash flow badly in order to rebuild its image, so it signed a partnership with established software giant, Microsoft, who was investing \$150 million in Apple to release the Microsoft Office for Macintosh software.¹⁷ Steve Jobs went on to a series of public appearances to promote Apple and its new partnership with Microsoft, which was announced at the 1997 Macworld Expo. “Microsoft chairman Bill Gates appeared at the expo on-screen, further explaining Microsoft’s plans for the software they were developing for the Mac, and stating that he was very excited to be helping Apple return to success.”¹⁸ Oddly enough it was not an Apple, but **a Microsoft product that was promoted** at the start of the campaign.

Behind the scenes, the partnership with Microsoft was another ace in the hand because at the time, Bill Gates and Microsoft were on top of the world and the company was seen as the next pioneer taking humanity into the industries of the 21st century.

Stakeholders Affected by the Campaign

For Apple, the primary stakeholders affected by the campaign were the board of directors, the CEO, the CCO (Chief Creative Officer), and investors, their input was crucial for the success of the campaign. The secondary stakeholders were ad agencies, marketing staff, suppliers, stock holders, and the employees of Apple. These last ones would feel the impact of the campaign if it did not work as intended.

Research before the Campaign was Launched

No data was found to this regard; however, one could speculate and say that their marketing research found out that people who were the primary buyers of computers were associated with the field of science and engineering. With the Internet setting the world on fire, there were a world of people being ignored by companies that had the corner of the market, such as IBM and even Microsoft. **The advent of the Internet changed the landscape for companies**, but specifically organizations like Apple, because now they could include just about everyone that could type two words in a keyboard.

Personal Opinion

The marketing and advertising side of the campaign was brilliantly produced. Upon watching it, a family member who is a musician, ran to buy a Mac even though these were the most expensive computers in the market in the late 1990s. People want to think of themselves as innovators and movers and shakers, and this can be seen today with social media. Facebook,

Twitter, the public participation in everything from radio programs to TV shows has opened a new door and a new territory for the imagination to wander and say, I am thinking different (ly), so I change the world also, let me get an Apple product.

Why Did I Choose this Particular Campaign?

I chose this campaign because it represents a wonderful rebirth for a company that kicked out Steve Jobs, the only creative mind in its executive rank and following this act, it withered as a result of stodgy and old thinking, and lack of innovation. The new executives wanted to create a new clone of IBM. In some part of the message I take that “old thinking” is fine when you have done something to change for the better and your world along with it. This is something that should be taken as an example and added to the collective imagination. Apple’s rebirth also represents our own rebirth as people who can make it and can participate in the world freely, because we are all part of the world, not just the few in the elite. It gives hope and because of that it is beautiful.

Although today the attention span of people is a very short and by today’s standards the campaign ran a long time, one could say that it is timeless. If I were to change this campaign, I would add people in the current generation that have thought different and therefore they are changing the world, because the world has not stopped and the heroes of tomorrow are born in the imagination of today.



Click this link to view Apple's PR/marketing campaign "The Crazy Ones:"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rwsuXHA7RA>

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