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Remembering Steve Jobs

The Apple Generation Loses Its Visionary

By *Marc Pitzke* in New York

Apple visionary Steve Jobs has died at the age of 56 after a long battle against cancer. He was one of the great inventors of his time and an inspiration to an entire generation.

Right up until his death, Steve Jobs' health was the subject of rumors and speculation. Observers suggested that Jobs could have made a surprise appearance at Tuesday's presentation at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, California. Instead, his successor, Tim Cook, took the stage alone to introduce the iPhone 4S. Insiders suspected that it was not a good sign.

Around 24 hours later, Steve Jobs, the legendary Apple co-founder and IT pioneer, died from cancer at the age of 56. On the Apple website, the usual colorful links to the company's products immediately disappeared, replaced by a black-and-white portrait of Jobs in better times and the simple message: "Steve Jobs, 1955-2011."

"Apple has lost a visionary and creative genius," the company said in a statement confirming Jobs' death. "Those of us who have been fortunate enough to know and work with Steve have lost a dear friend and an inspiring mentor." The statement included an e-mail address where fans could share their "thoughts, memories and condolences": rememberingsteve@apple.com.

The brief but unusual statement says it all. Apple is more than just a company -- it's a whole way of life. And Steve Jobs was more than just a corporate leader. He was an inventor, a visionary and the inspiration for an entire generation.

A Modern Thomas Edison

Jobs was always one step ahead: from the first Macintosh via the iTunes revolution and the Pixar animated movies to the iPod, iPhone and iPad. His ideas, his designs and his style were hotly debated and quickly copied. Countless millions bought the products, even if they had not previously realized that they needed them.

It's no wonder that, with the growing hype, the question arose of how long Apple and Jobs could continue to come up with new inventions. People also asked how closely Apple's future was tied to the future of Steve Jobs. When on Tuesday the company -- without Jobs -- unveiled not an iPhone 5 but a new version of the iPhone 4, the blogs grumbled loudly.

"The world is immeasurably better because of Steve," Apple said in the early hours of Thursday. It's a statement that contains a certain amount of PR hype, but also a lot of truth. "Thanks for showing that what you build can change the world," Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said in tribute.

Jobs has been dubbed a modern Thomas Edison. Indeed, the Apple visionary had a lot in common with the inventor of the gramophone, the movie camera and the light bulb. Jobs' products also became part of daily life, to the extent that it became unthinkable that they had not existed earlier.

Jobs was the "most innovative" entrepreneur of our time, said Andy Serwer, editor of *Forbes* magazine, in remarks to CNN. He was also one of the most combative: Serwer was not the only person who found himself being personally bawled out by Jobs when he didn't like an article.

'Do You Want to Come with Me and Change the World?'

Unlike Edison, however, Jobs had to struggle against failure for a long time. He grew up in Silicon Valley, where his mother had put him up for adoption, and worked after school at Hewlett-Packard. He dropped out of college, earned money by collecting deposit bottles, ate for free at a Hare Krishna temple and worked for the video game maker Atari.

Together with his friend Steve Wozniak, he worked on a new computer, even selling his VW bus to cover the costs. The first prototype was built in Jobs' garage. That was also where Apple was founded in 1976.

Jobs always thought on a grand -- perhaps even grandiose -- scale. In 1983, he lured John Sculley away from Pepsi-Cola to become CEO of Apple, saying: "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?"

A year later, Apple introduced the Macintosh computer with a bombastic presentation, which anticipated the later blockbuster events for other Apple products. The company transmitted a \$1.5 million TV ad during the Super Bowl final in January 1984, which made advertising history with its allusions to George Orwell's "1984."

But the first Mac was expensive, bulky and a slow-seller. Apple's sales plummeted, and the company had to fire workers. Even then, Jobs was already notorious for his difficult personality. He was seen as bossy, moody and erratic. He eventually fell out with Sculley and the Apple board, which fired him in 1985 after an internal power struggle.

Jobs would put a positive spin on his dismissal. "The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything," he later said.

Always Something New

He founded Pixar, the sensationally successful animation studio, as well as the somewhat obscure company NeXT, whose software is the foundation of Apple's Mac OS X operating system today. In 1997, Jobs returned to his old home when Apple bought NeXT and its software.

Apple's renaissance began. The iMac, iBook, Power Mac -- Jobs launched one hit after another. In May 2001, the first Apple Store opened, and the brand became a global consumer cult. In the autumn of that year, the iPod, followed shortly by the iTunes system, shocked and revolutionized the established music industry. Buying and listening to music would never be the same again.

Every time Apple's ideas were threatening to look old, Jobs came up with something new. When the iPod started to seem boring, the iPhone was released. That was followed by the iPad. As he revealed recently, US President Barack Obama was one of the first people to be given an iPad by Jobs, long before the official launch. The irony is that, during the debt crisis, Apple was richer than the US government.

Jobs presented all these products in person in his standard uniform of jeans, black turtleneck and sneakers and with his familiar mix of arrogance and self-deprecating humor. His disciples would storm the now more than 350 Apple stores worldwide to be the first to get their hands on the new product. Some of them had even camped out on the street for days to be first in line. On Wednesday night and in the early hours of Thursday, these stores became shrines, besieged once again, this time in mourning.

'No One Wants to Die'

Jobs was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in mid-2004. He initially reported that he was suffering from a rare, "curable" variety of cancer. "I had the surgery and I'm fine now," he said in June 2005 in a speech to Stanford University students.

But his appearances became less frequent, and Jobs seemed more and more like a ghost of his former self. In September 2008, he played down speculation about his health by quoting Mark Twain:

"The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." He disappeared from public life and underwent a liver transplant. He appeared again at a few events, such as the iPad 2 launch in March. In August, he eventually stepped down as Apple CEO with a heavy heart.

Jobs died surrounded by his family. But his real family was Apple. "No words can adequately express our sadness at Steve's death," his successor, Tim Cook, wrote in an e-mail to Apple employees. Even Barack Obama said he was "saddened" by the news. "Steve was among the greatest of American innovators," the president said in a statement on Wednesday evening, US time. "Brave enough to think differently, bold enough to believe he could change the world, and talented enough to do it."

"No one wants to die," Jobs said in his 2005 speech at Stanford. "Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share."

Then he added, without drama: "And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new."

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