

Learning from Apple Marketing

Learning from the masters of a trade is a good way to improve our own skills. When it comes to brand marketing, we often think of Apple as the best proponent of the art.

But it's also useful to learn about how the masters did it wrong before they learned to do it right. Apple can teach us that just as well as anyone else. If you think Apple got it right from Day One, think again.

The story starts with IBM

The lessons we can learn from Apple's marketing don't start with an Apple computer at all. They start with IBM's PC XT 5150.



You'd be right to wonder why.

- This computer was junk.
- IBM picked a processor they had in stock rather than the best for the job.
- They designed and built it in 12 months with off-the-shelf parts.
- They released it long after the 8-bit micro-computer revolution started.

In short, IBM were miles behind the technological curve.

Apple had hit the market first

The computer 'everyone' wanted was an Apple. Maybe an Apple II. More likely an Apple Mac.



The Mac actually came out before the IBM PC. People find that hard to believe because it looks so much more modern. It was certainly a better computer.

- It used state of the art technology.
- It had a mouse.
- A graphical user interface.
- Sound.
- 3.5" floppy disks holding a whole 720Kb!

Technically, it left the IBM PC in the dust.

Apple marketing shows flair from the early days

As we're going to see, Apple didn't get all their early marketing right. But they certainly started off by showing the bravado and flair for which they became famous.

When IBM launched their PC, this is how Apple responded.



Cheeky.

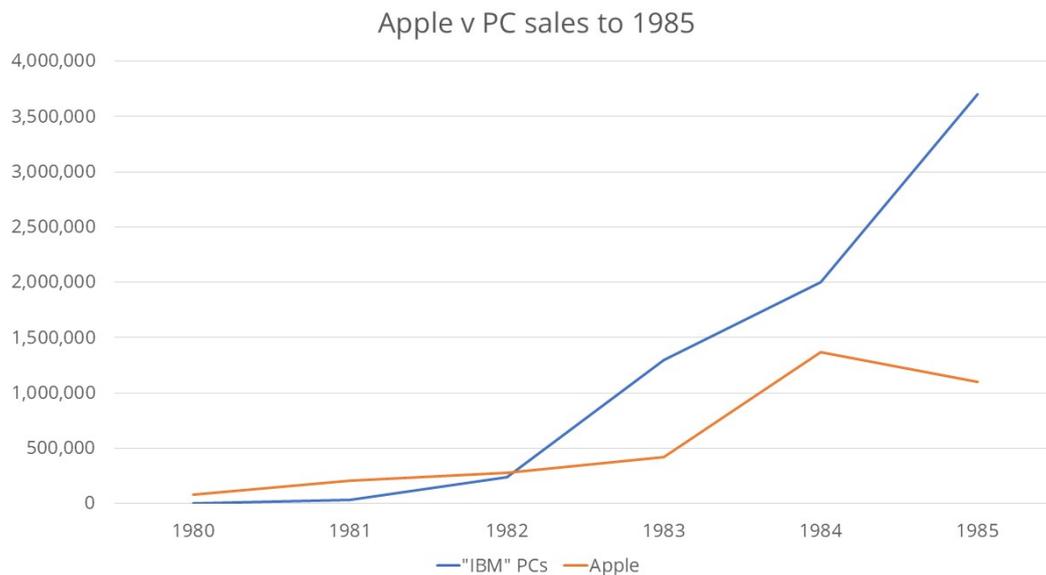
So Apple beat IBM to market.

And Apple had a far better computer to sell.

So how many more Apples were sold compared to IBM PCs?

With Apple's marketing, they must have won the battle..

Despite beating IBM to market and despite having a better computer, Apple sold fewer computers than IBM.



Reliable stats are very hard to come by for the early 80s. The big leap in "IBM" PC sales comes as compatible manufacturers like Compaq jump on the IBM PC band-wagon. But even before their full impact was felt, the Mac was being outsold. And things didn't get better over time. Apple sold fewer Macs in 1985 than 1984 (it was launched in January 1984).

Yes, Apple had supply problems. But they also had unsold computers sitting in warehouses. It was not the resounding sales success we would have expected.

So what went wrong? Why didn't the Apple Mac flatten the IBM PC?

In a word, marketing.

What should we learn from Apple marketing?

So what can we mere mortals conclude from this trip down memory lane?

We all view Apple as the ultimate marketing machine but we forget that for much of the 80s and 90s it was a commercial basket case. After a few years in exile, Steve Jobs returned to a company on the verge of bankruptcy. Despite having a great brand.

In the 80s, Apple marketing grabbed the noisy minority. But the IBM gang got the silent majority. And the money. And most of the world runs on IBM compatibles to this day.

Jobs brought Apple back to life with the iPhone, iPad and latest generation of computers (maybe). It's no coincidence that these were great products. In itself, that's an example of good marketing: get the product right. Marketing isn't all about promotion. If I mention the 4 Ps will I be considered a dinosaur?

And if we're talking about good and bad products, let's look at what IBM did next after the PC. It launched the PS/2. Doh! It was a technical dud and a commercial disaster. Good marketing can't (always) make a bad product successful.



If there's a moral of this story it's to remember that marketing starts way before your adverts, your social media posts and your brochures. It starts before you think about what you can design and build. It starts with understanding who your customers are and what they want to buy.