

COLUMNS

## Why almost everything that Apple's PR machine does turns to gold

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By [Vanessa Horwell](#)

I started writing this article the morning after the media vultures started picking over Steve Jobs' resignation carcass. Why add more fuel to the Apple fire, I thought.

It has been "Apple this" and "Apple that" for longer than I care to remember. So I put down my notes.

Now, more than five weeks later, the world has not ended with Steve Jobs no longer at Apple's helm. Its shares have not plummeted. The iPhone 5 will likely dominate 2011 holiday sales. And, in the process, Apple became the most valuable company on the stock market.

Life continues, and so I write.

Give an apple to the teacher, as the cliché goes, and you stand a better chance of getting in their good books.

But in a very real sense, for the better part of its existence, Apple has been the company that has given us the apple and kept the public relations spinmeisters and media industry singing the company's praises right down to its very core.

So how has Apple kept us plugged in?

Consider this: Twenty-five years ago tech was geek. Majorly geek.

Tech was for nerds who were shunned by the masses. They were the ones who rode bikes or skateboards when we bought our first shiny BMW. They discovered iPods while we were still oohing at clunky MP3 players. We got hammered at parties while they wrote code wired on Mountain Dew.

Who's laughing now?

They are, all the way to their tech-stock engorged portfolios. Today, tech is trs, trs chic, and much of that chic transformation goes to Apple.

It is not every day that a balding, lanky, somewhat geeky man can command the stage, holding a twinkling device that promises the universe but is only a phone/music player/tablet attain rock star status.

Yet, Steve Jobs and Apple have done just that, launching hit, after hit. As Kool and The Gang sang back in the '80s, "He's got the Midas Touch."

In the PR trade, it is usually us who are the ones drawing the lines and making the rules or we like to think so anyway.

In the case of Apple, however, we have been entranced or is it enchanted? right along with consumers. I cannot imagine doing our work without an iSomething to hand and it is hard to imagine a world without Apple.

The Apple R&D folks create what often kicks off long and gushing reviews of the company's line of firsts, but it is the marketing department which really goes to town on the behind-the-scenes work even though it goes out of its way to appear not to.

Not all about what's under the tech hood

While we sell our well-honed communications skills skills that are supposed to help our clients develop strategies that communicate their messages with pinpoint accuracy Apple's PR strategy has been the opposite. Obfuscate, block, and say nothing.

Mix that in with lots of hype, cult-like adoration and oodles of staging, and you have the only brand that is globally tolerated for its "magic of misdirection." Any other brand would be excommunicated from the journalism world, but not Apple.

Take the iPhone 5 prototype "accident" from a few weeks ago. Left at a bar, the only prototype available. Just like that. A similar watering hole mishap occurred last year with the iPhone 4.

Although Apple says nothing, the publicity rumor mill speeds away at over four megabits a second. Did Apple deliberately lose a new phone to generate buzz? Was it to lap Android in a sort of subtle way, "We've done it again, you suckers?"

Even if the iPhone 5's loss was a five-alarm fire of genuine concern does not much matter. Nineteenth-century showman P.T. Barnum is often credited with the expression, "There's no such thing as bad publicity."

Mr. Jobs and Apple have polished that phrase to an all new sheen.

Apple, truly, has broken all conventions when it comes to media and PR strategy, from allegedly misleading the press Electronic Games, 2007; the delayed Korea launch to letting its fanatics have a free-for-all without saying much to deflate some, at times, far-fetched theories.

As someone with a vested professional interest in damage control, I have to admit that Apple is a PR treat to devour.

Instead of taming the media beast with a crisis strategy or even strategically controlled messaging, it has let the media beast feed on itself by strategically saying nothing at all.

Think about for that a couple of minutes.

For all the talk of CEOs and corporate communications teams stepping up and commenting the second a negative tweet or blog post appears, Apple has done the opposite. Its lack of response when it comes to conjecture only makes any actual responses all the more poignant.

Company that talks little but says much

Since Apple is regularly seen as observers in the melee, when it does speak, we listen.

Notable instances include the company's denial of tracking iPhone and iPad users which we know is a lie; we are tracked and yet we still do not much care or when Steve Jobs' illness was finally clarified (way more serious than we thought).

Both instances could have been far more damaging for any other brand.

But Apple's product launch rumors and news kept us magically distracted.

In late April, we were talking about the tracking rumors. By mid-May, we were discussing a new product launch a 180-degree turnaround in just 15 business days.

When we were talking about Mr. Jobs' health issues for the third time in January 2011, we were also knee-deep in iPad 2 news. His health, it seemed, played second fiddle to the life-changing promise of the iPad 2.

Humility: Great for philosophers, the religious, and repentant politicians during an election cycle; bad for Mr. Jobs and Apple.

Perhaps I am being too harsh: the media industry is human, after all, and we are suckers for strong personalities, bravado or otherwise.

In 1983, Apple, still a seedling of its present self, launched the ambitious Lisa computer.

With a staggering near-\$10,000 price tag \$21,589 in today's dollars Mr. Jobs and Apple aggressively marketed their product.

Confidence may not have helped sell Lisa to a price-conscious consumer Lisa was pretty much dead on arrival but similar stances on a myriad of Apple products since have ultimately turned it from a computer company to an icon.

To infinity and beyond

If Apple 1.0 it is first iteration spanned from the company's 1976 founding to Mr. Jobs' 1985 departure and 1997 return, Apple 2.0 spanned from 1997 to Aug. 24, 2011, the day the 56-year-old announced his resignation as Apple CEO, due to mounting health complications.

So under this calculation, the PR world and the rest of us Apple fans are only a few weeks into the era of Apple 3.0.

Will our enchantment continue with Steve Jobs out of the picture?

Even with his downsized role Mr. Jobs was appointed chairman of the board of directors after relinquishing the CEO's post to company chief operating operator Tim Cook it seems unlikely that Apple will become rotten, or that media interest will sour. We have too much of ourselves invested in this brand.

Whatever Apple keeps putting in its magic potion is unlikely to wear off with Mr. Cook at the helm.

Unless, of course, Mr. Cook changes up the ingredients.

This may include becoming more media friendly and being less secretive, and generally telling us what we want to hear and when we want to hear it. That is a strategy generally employed by most brands transparency and responsiveness.

As long as Apple stays away from doing that, we have nothing to fear.

*Vanessa Horwell is chief visibility officer of [ThinkInk](http://ThinkInk.com), Miami Beach, FL. Reach her at [vanessa@thinkinkpr.com](mailto:vanessa@thinkinkpr.com).*

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