

Insanely Great Marketing

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Apple is famous for its products, but shrewd marketing has been an essential component of the company's success. Former Apple CEO John Sculley was not being entirely cynical with his famous observation that Apple was, first and foremost, a marketing company. While it's fair to say that Apple's engineers are the company's foundation, it's clear that without Apple's marketing and public relations teams, its mythic aura would long since have vanished. Here's how the company does it.

1. A Clear Sense of the Customer

Apple has positioned itself as the tech provider for the creative class, so it often injects a dose of avant-garde savvy into its advertising. The iPod's boldly colored ads, for example, could have doubled as art school projects (or acid trips). Other spots simply articulate and emphasize the investment Apple has put into its design "language" — the engineering and styling that make its products so instantly recognizable. In almost every instance, Apple strives to appeal to anyone who lives (or aspires to live) a more creative life, and the results flatter both Apple's products and the people who use them.

2. No False Modesty

Apple is not afraid to market its devices as game changers that are far better than the alternatives. Nobody would ever call Apple shy or self-effacing. That does wonders to reinforce Apple's brand, but it has a risky downside: Apple's barely concealed undercurrent of arrogance makes its fans feel like part of a special group, but it also repels some potential customers.

3. Standout Advertising

Whether you prefer a Mac or Windows PC, an iPhone or a Blackberry, there's no denying that Apple has become one of the world's most recognized brands, and Apple's advertising and marketing efforts have done much to make that happen. Apple's traditional advertising campaigns have been managed by the same ad agency, TBWA/Chiat/Day, since 1997. Ambitious, nonconformist, and witty, Apple's campaigns do more than just feature products: They also take explicit potshots at key competitors. The "I'm a Mac" ad campaign, for example, which contrasts a cool hipster (representing Apple) with an uptight office drone (representing Microsoft) was typically effective. Of course, the depiction of Microsoft as a bumbling, Dilbertesque suit recalls the powerful message of a much

earlier ad campaign: the famous “1984” spot that Apple ran in 1983 to mark the launch of the original Macintosh, which characterized IBM as the agent of dystopian corporate conformity.

4. Not-Too-Public Public Relations

Apple’s PR department, which maintains contacts with traditional journalists, bloggers, television shows, and just about anyone who covers the company regularly, has never fit the stereotype of fawning, eager-to-please flacks. “The genius of Apple’s PR is the way the company uses secrecy and misdirection to generate buzz around its product announcements,” says Nick Ciarelli, the creator of [Think Secret](#), a now-defunct Apple blog that aroused the company’s ire. The launch of an Apple product resembles nothing so much as a military assault: months of impenetrable secrecy and denial, misdirection campaigns, waves of rumors, and finally a massive barrage of publicity as the veil comes off. “It’s a strategy that infuriates partners, big corporate buyers, and the press, but it allows public speculation to build to a fever pitch,” Ciarelli says.

It’s also fair to say, however, that secrecy and misdirection can be carried too far. Apple’s PR attempted to pass off Jobs’ recent serious illness, which ended in a liver transplant, as a “common bug,” a whopper that helped provoke shareholder lawsuits against the company.

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