



Appleied Technology

How Apple makes hard technology soft and cuddly



People love cats. Cute, cuddly and low-maintenance, they're doted on by young and old everywhere. Of the 600 million across the world, roughly half are domesticated, with the rest being wild and feral. At which point, we are reminded that they are among nature's stealthiest and most aggressive creatures: hunting, and killing whatever might look like a tasty snack, or just fun to pick-on.

It was, in fact, for their forensic rodent exterminating skills that cat ownership grew over the centuries to what it is today—although we might prefer to overlook their undomesticated side when pouring bowls of vegan cat food for our purring friends. It's hard, then, not to marvel at the brilliance of the ancient Egyptians (assuming it was they who tamed and domesticated wild cats into today's people-friendly pets) as we stroke Tiddles before letting him out to stalk the garden.

Curiously enough, today's information technologies can be a bit like those wild, undomesticated cats: capable of extraordinarily impressive performance, especially when understood by trained experts who fully appreciate their potential. They can be similarly user-unfriendly, too, if they are taken home untamed. Anyone who has experienced the pain and frustration of trying to persuade a promising new piece of 'life-changing' technology to connect to, say, a slightly incompatible broadband router will know the feeling; or, perhaps, attempted to pair a device with their smartphone only to find themselves talking into into a neighbours baby monitor. Perhaps, like me, you know just enough to dig yourself into a deeper pit as you stumble through the settings armed with DNS, DHCP, IP and MAC addresses before realising you've entered a lion's den and need that trained expert back to extricate you before things get more serious.



So, when Steve Jobs determined that Apple's products would be driven by a single-minded focus on simplicity, creativity and humanity he was on a mission 'to put a ding in the universe' (his words, not mine) by making high technology cuddly and accessible for the world. It was a tough challenge, but Apple's \$2tr valuation today would indicate that, like the ancient Egyptians, he was onto something. By maintaining a laser focus on human benefits (rather than technology for technology's benefit) and user-friendly simplicity, Apple promises to create elegant and desirable products that people will smile at and love. That promise is, in essence, the Apple brand. Unlike most other technology brands, Apple stands for a purpose that transcends industry categories and gives it licence to roam into other spaces where clever technology has the potential to be tamed, domesticated and made lovable. What might, today, be appreciated only by trained experts and too daunting for the rest of us to manage, could, in the future, be the focal point of a new Apple product launch. Think how Apple Watch has opened-up wellness, leading to healthcare which, in time, might extend to smart remedies in partnership with healthcare service providers and pharmaceutical brands. Similarly, Apple Maps might pave the way into new travel and mobility services from smart taxis to driverless cars. The Apple brand could even extend its financial services offer by domesticating investment strategies, unlocking the wealth potential of stock markets from the preserve of trained experts to anyone with an Apple device and a will to invest.

There will, of course, always be jealous rivals and technology-minded consumers who will claim that Apple products are over-

priced and underspecified, that you can buy better for less elsewhere. But that rather misses the point. That's not why the Apple brand exists. Most other technology brands are driven by a quest for technological advantage and the desire to be first to offer it—rather than finding technology-driven solutions that offer simple, relevant and usable human benefits. Just as no one ever bought an iPhone because it offered the most dazzling technology for the money, I wager that few buy an Samsung or LG because it didn't. To stretch the analogy, there may be faster and more potent breeds of rat-catchers out there, but only when they can be reliably house trained and made as user-friendly as Tiddles might they be worthy of our affection.

However you look at it, when a company's brand is worth around \$352bn (second only to Amazon as the most valuable in the world), you know that it is evidently engaging the hearts and minds of a lot of people a lot of the time. Which is what great brands do (something to contemplate as you close your iPad after reading this and put the cat out).





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An experienced marketer-turned agency planner and strategy consultant, I am a creative thinker and articulate communicator. I wrote a feature in Campaign to break into advertising, successfully persuaded McKinsey it had a brand and was handed an assignment by Rolex without a pitch. A father of four and a music-loving Francophile, I sing in New College, Oxford and lecture at a French university.

Brands that I have worked with directly include: BBC, Rolex, BAA, Discovery Channel, Deloitte, Firmenich, Farrer & Company, Reed Elsevier, BP, Ford, Jaguar, Citroën, McKinsey & Company, Goldman Sachs, Towers Watson, BT Global Services, Thales, Hitachi, Samsung and Motorola.

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