City of San Francisco Bans Apple Computers

San Francisco has earned a reputation for being, in certain regards, the nation's most permissive city, but even the City by the Bay has certain limits. Take, for instance, one's choice of computers: If you work for the city, you will not be allowed to procure an Apple using city funds. Why? Because the computer industry giant with its headquarters less than an hour away from San Francisco is not "green" enough.

San Francisco's ban on the purchase of Apple computers came in the aftermath of the Cupertino-based company's decision to withdraw from participating in the "Electronics Product Environmental Assessment Tool" (EPEAT) ranking of consumer electronics. Apple had been voluntarily submitting 39 different products to the EPEAT standards, but the company has now decided to withdraw from participation, and is electing to adopt a different standard: one overseen by the federal government. As FoxNews reports, the company's move to the Energy Star 5.2 standard (one which is overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy) keeps the company in compliance with stringent environmental standards:

> A statement released Tuesday by the company indicates Apple's intention to make products as green as possible — under a different energy efficiency label.

> "Apple takes a comprehensive approach to measuring our environmental impact and all of our products meet the strictest energy efficiency standards backed by the US government, Energy Star 5.2. We also lead the industry by reporting each product's greenhouse gas emissions on our website, and Apple products are superior in other important environmental areas not measured by EPEAT, such as removal of toxic materials."

However, it appears that the city is unimpressed by the federal standards. In an article for ZDNet.com, Heather Clancy offers a revealing quote from the city's "toxics reduction coordinator": "We strongly believe that eco-labels are essential for green purchasing, and Apple just withdrew from the list," Chris Geiger, San Francisco's toxics reduction coordinator, told the MercuryNews. "We want to register our displeasure, and urge Apple to reconsider."

If this is an accurate summary of the city's decision-making process, does this mean that the city's "toxics" policy simply boils down to "branding," and the only means for a government body to express its disapproval of a lack of such branding is a boycott?

Why adherence to federal standards is insufficiently environmentally stringent for the city of San Francisco remains unknown. However, one thing that seems certain is that the city's decision to boycott Apple is likely to prove irrelevant to the company's bottom line.

According to press reports, the city of San Francisco spent $45,579 on Apple products in 2010. The significance of the city's decision to cease future procurements of Apple computers can be seen in a simple fact: In the first quarter of 2012, Apple posted a quarterly revenue of $46.33 billion, and a profit of $13.06 billion. (By comparison, Apple's chief rival, Microsoft, reported revenues of $20.89 billion in

the same time period.) The loss of the city's business is likely to be imperceptible in the company's annual sales. As Clancy wrote for ZDNet:

> The thing is, will this really hurt Apple in the long run? As more businesses embrace a BYOD [Bring Your Own Device] device philosophy, it will be harder to tell employees what they can and cannot buy or can and cannot bring. The most powerful device in BYOD today, the Apple iPad, isn't even covered in the EPEAT database. Today, the only products that can be registered are notebooks, desktops, integrated all-in-one systems, monitors, thin clients and workstations.

As Clancy observes, businesses are increasingly requiring employees to supply their own computers, and that trend is likely to expand into local government. Meanwhile, the city of San Francisco's decision to block the use of city funds to buy Apple products is likely to be irrelevant to both Apple and the decisions that many city employees make regarding their choice of computers in the office.

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