



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 6, 2011

Steve Jobs' Legacy of Innovation

Steve Jobs, a man who played a pivotal role in defining the future of home and business computing, died Wednesday at the age of 56. Part of Jobs' legacy is a world in which many individuals under the age of 25 simply take for granted the innovations that he helped bring to the realm of personal computing. When Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne founded Apple Computer in 1976 the very concept of computers having a place in the home of the average American seemed farfetched — at best.



Now, the seeming-omnipresence of Apple-inspired or influenced technologies surround us every day. The fundamental change that Apple has helped to bring was symbolized when the company [changed its name](#) to "Apple, Inc." in early 2007 — the integration of phones, music, television and computing had reached the point where the very concept of computing had changed.

Jobs' passion for his product elicited enthusiasm from his supporters and often scorn from detractors; for example, his unwavering advocacy for first the [Lisa](#) and then [Macintosh](#) lines of computers — to the detriment of Apple's flagship "[Apple II](#)" line — drew criticism inside Apple and astonishment from many users. Much will continue to be written in the coming days about Jobs' famous rivalry with Microsoft founder Bill Gates; undeniably, the competition between the companies emblemized by these two men framed the context for the first several decades of the revolutionary impact of the personal computer at every level of Western civilization.

Jobs' profound influence on the role of technology in our daily lives was connected to his willingness to make firm — even controversial — choices for his company, trusting his own instincts regarding the design its products over trends within the rest of his industry. Decisiveness is rarely recognized as a virtue in an age that revels in 'groupthink'; and people with poor ideas rarely like having that fact pointed out to them by those with a better idea. Not every idea that Jobs promoted at Apple was a success, of course; but more often than not, innovations that Jobs advocated were soon being copied by allies and detractors alike.

It may seem trite to observe that Jobs' innovations at Apple fundamentally altered the way in which millions of people listen to music, read books, watch movies — and, more importantly, *create* such media. Nevertheless, the observation is accurate.

Scott Richert's recent reflections in *Chronicles* magazine on the significance of Jobs' profound influence on one industry in particular — publishing — well summarizes the importance of Jobs' influence on that industry:



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So many of the advances that make our current production process possible happened so gradually that we sometimes lose sight of the revolution that took place in publishing over the last 25 years. And Steve Jobs was there at every step of the way, through both Apple and NeXT. ... Without any one of these things, *Chronicles* as we know it today would be a different type of magazine.

And it would be a much more expensive magazine, too. Or rather, it might well have folded at several points in the past 25 years, had it not been for the reductions in cost occasioned by technologies that trace their roots back to Steve Jobs and Apple and NeXT. *Chronicles'* staff is a fraction of what it was in 1984: fewer editors; no typists and typesetters; no dedicated designer and layout person. (At one point in 1999, even before all of these advances had made it to *Chronicles*, Dr. Fleming and I put out several issues without any additional in-house production staff.) Hand-composed pages, film, and bluelines, along with the prepress services that they required, are things of the past; the PDFs that we send to the printer are now imposed directly on the plates. *Chronicles'* direct costs today are about 40 percent lower than they were when I became assistant editor back in September 1997 (and they were already much reduced then from 1984).

Richert also observed that Jobs' political views could not have been much further from those of a Paleoconservative publication; in Richert's words, "Reportedly a voracious reader, Jobs would probably not find much in *Chronicles* to his liking." Still, the influence of Apple-inspired innovation on publications such as *The New American* (which has been produced on Macintosh computers since 1989) and *Chronicles* has truly transformed the realm of publishing — and the ability to disseminate information without regard for the supposed "gatekeepers" of public opinion is crucial to a free society.

As much as Jobs' efforts at Apple and NeXT and Pixar contributed to innovations in the free market, the influence of the technologies he helped develop and promote has been, and will continue to be, of even greater significance to free speech. Jobs' influence on entire realms of industry will be felt for many years to come; the pervasive influence of the technologies inextricably associated with his legacy will not quickly be forgotten.



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