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Mac 1984: Steve Jobs Revolutionizes The Art Of Corporate Storytelling

Steve Jobs, and John Sculley present the Macintosh Desktop Computer in January 1984 at a shareholder meeting in Cupertino, Calif. (AP Photo/FILE)

On January 24, 1984, PowerPoint had yet to be invented. Apple's presentation tool and Steve Jobs' software of choice—Keynote—also hadn't entered the market. Although Steve Jobs didn't have the benefit of slides that would later define his presentation style, his introduction of the Macintosh is still considered one of the greatest product launches in business history. How did he do it? Jobs went back to the basics of storytelling: heroes, villains, and characters.

When Steve Jobs took the stage at Apple shareholders meeting at the Flint Center in Cupertino near the Apple campus, he was dressed in a double-breasted jacket and bow tie. He kicked off the presentation with a quote by his favorite musician, Bob Dylan: "The loser now will be later to win, for the times they are a changin'." Right out of the gate the audience of more than 2,000 employees, shareholders, board members, and reporters knew they were in store for something wildly different than the standard, dry, corporate update.

Introduce the Villain. Every great story has a hero and a villain. A

presentation should be no different. Steve Jobs introduced an enemy that the audience could hate; an antagonist who must meet its demise for civilization to flourish. In the 1984 show, IBM—conveniently nicknamed "Big Blue"—would play the role of the villain.

Speaking at a slow pace, in a low-pitched and dramatic voice, Steve Jobs began: "It is 1958. IBM passes up the chance to buy a fledgling company that has just invented a new technology, called Xerography. Two years later Xerox is born and IBM has been kicking itself ever since. It is 10 years later, the late 60s. Digital Equipment and others invent the mini computer. IBM dismisses the mini computer as too small to do serious computing and unimportant to their business. DEC grows to become a multi hundred million dollar corporation before IBM finally enters the mini computer market."

Jobs' voice grew louder, more dramatic. "It is now ten years later. The late 70s. In 1977, Apple, a young fledgling company on the west coast invents the Apple II, the first personal computer as we know it today. IBM dismisses the personal computer as too small to do serious computing and unimportant to their business." At this point Jobs has the audience riveted. They are laughing as he builds up the dramatic tension. After walking the audience through a brief history of IBM's entry into the personal computer market, Jobs said, "It is now 1984. It appears IBM *wants it all*. Apple is perceived to be the only hope to offer IBM a run for its money. Dealers, originally welcoming IBM with open arms, now fear an IBM dominated and controlled future. They are increasingly turning back to Apple as the only force that can ensure their future freedom! IBM is aiming its guns to the last obstacle to industry control—Apple. Will Big Blue dominate the entire computer industry? The entire information age? Was George Orwell right?"

Jobs' introduction sounded less like a product launch and more like a rallying cry for war. People in the audience were audibly shouting "No! No!" An audience wants something to believe in, a person or movement they can rally around. They want a hero. But a hero, by definition, needs a villain to fight. The IBM character became the villain. In the Steve Jobs narrative, IBM wasn't simply a threat to Apple. Jobs had created a classic David and Goliath battle with nothing less than the future of humanity at stake.

The next step was to further incite the audience. Jobs played the famous Ridley Scott television ad with Big Blue as a metaphor for Orwell's Big Brother. As an announcer read the last words of the ad—"On January 24th, you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984"—the audience was going wild, hollering and cheering.

Reveal the conquering hero. The third and final step of the show was to introduce the conquering hero—Macintosh. Jobs said, "You've just seen pictures of Macintosh. Now I'd like to show you Macintosh in person. All of the images you are about to see on the large screen are being generated by what's in that bag." Jobs pointed to a canvas bag on a table in the middle of the stage. He slowly walked to the table, and pulled the nearly 17-pound machine from inside the bag. He plugged it in and, with a dramatic flourish, slowly pulled a floppy disk from his jacket pocket, inserted it into the computer, and stood aside. As the lights darkened, the theme from *Chariots of Fire* began to play and a series of images filled the screen (images created with MacWrite and MacPaint).

Cue the showstopper. As the music faded, Jobs had one more showstopper planned. He said, "Now, we've done a lot of talking about Macintosh recently, but today for the first time ever, I'd like to let Macintosh speak for itself." On cue, Macintosh spoke in a digitized voice using a speech-generating program that had been built for the Apple II:

> " *Hello, I am Macintosh. It sure is great to get out of that bag. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I'd like to share with you a maxim I thought of the first time I met an IBM mainframe: Never trust a computer you can't lift. Obviously, I can talk right now, but I'd like to sit back and listen. So, it is with considerable pride that I introduce a man who has been like a father to me: Steve Jobs.*

Letting Macintosh speak for itself was one of the most brilliant moments I've ever seen in a business presentation. Jobs had created what neuroscientists call an "emotionally charged event." I simply call it a wow moment, the moment in a presentation when jaws drop to the floor—the moment everyone talks about the next day.

Former Mac evangelist Guy Kawasaki best captures the feeling Apple employees had in the auditorium that day: "Steve's introduction of Macintosh in 1984 was a magical moment. The earth shifted on its axis a little that day. Steve took it out of its bag, and the Macintosh 'talked' for itself. For many of us who had not had children yet, it was the closest thing to having a baby."

The Mac revolutionized the personal computer for the masses. It also revolutionized the art of business presentations and turned the product launch into corporate theater.

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