



APPLE RUNNING OUT OF STEVE

"Genius is non-transferable... The most likely scenario is that Apple will continue to shine for a few years while the initiatives that Jobs started are still in the pipeline, and then slowly the company's radiance will start to dim..."

I wrote that 5 years ago on the occasion of Steve Jobs stepping down as CEO of Apple.

This week Apple took a big hit. This was not a surprise. Just a few weeks ago [I wrote](#):

"...the thrill is gone. It has been a very long 5-year drought of innovation and imagination in Apple products."

Or as the great Jay Tannenbaum says, *"They're running out of Steve."*

Between 2004 and 2008 Apple startled us with creativity: iPod, iPhone, iTunes, iPad, Apple Store. While the concepts weren't always original, the execution was always brilliant. The design and simplicity consistently blew away the clunky offerings of competitors and resulted in Apple becoming the world's most valuable company.

But in recent years, Apple seems to be going in the same wrong direction it was heading in the late-90's when Jobs re-took the reins and simplified things by eliminating a confusing, unnecessary disarray of products.

Instead of dazzling us with new product ideas, Apple has been confusing us with unrestrained product proliferation and bewildering complexity. Walking through an Apple retail store today what we see are mostly line extensions of products developed years ago.

- There are now 77 SKUs of the iPad alone (for those not familiar with marketing jargon, think of an SKU as a product version.)
- iTunes has become unfathomable. It is supporting way more weight than it can carry and has become terribly confusing.
- The Watch is said to have outsold the iPhone in its first year. But I suspect the acceleration of sales is nothing like the iPhone. Based on my personal visits to the Apple Store, the watch display is the loneliest table in the store. We'll see.

The obvious place for Apple to work its magic is in TV. Video delivery systems have become a pig's breakfast.

No consumer can keep track of the explosively expanding variety of video delivery systems. It is in need of simplification. But Apple TV still hasn't broken through.

It's the kind of challenge that Apple would have found a solution for a decade ago. Their reputation for brilliant innovation may rest on whether that magic can be rediscovered.

Shooting My Mouth Off

I will be in Europe next week speaking to the TV industry in several countries. I may not get around to writing a newsletter. Have an extra cocktail instead.



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