

Apple: from icon to product

 By [Lex Faure](#)

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With the bumpy launch of the iPhone 5, and the underwhelming response to the new Apple iPad mini, attention has again been drawn to difference between Apple the brand and Apple the icon.

Under Steve Job's larger than life leadership, Apple was not just another Hi Tech company making vast amounts of money; it was a beacon of light in the murky waters of American big business. Apple was the company that stood apart. It produced products that the market did not even know it wanted. Jobs was seen as a visionary who embodied style, design and product excellence with products which one wanted to own. An Apple did not just sit on your desk and get its keys smacked, you loved the shiny aluminium sculptures which improved your living experience and made you feel good. Apples were cherished, not owned.

In the past, when Apple announced a new product, the market was excited to see what innovative new offerings the company would release to its devoted followers. Every new product had something remarkable and revolutionary which upset the technology playing fields and had competitors scrambling to play catch-up with hastily put together attempts at matching the latest from Apple.

Jobs wouldn't have allowed it

But things have changed in the last 12 months. Apple has become the largest corporation in the world. It has made massive inroads in China where sales will soon exceed sales in America. Currently China accounts for 15% of Apple's total revenue. Demand is for the Apple brand, not necessarily the vision which was part of Steve Job's dream.

Research firm IDC says Apple has 16.9% of the global smartphone market, with 68% of the market held by makers of Android phones, led by Samsung.

The dismal offering of the iPad mini shows us a company which is starting to play catch-up to the rest of the market. It would have been unthinkable for Apple under Jobs to be concerned with keeping up with the other players in the market. Jobs had previously shown his lack of interest in Apple bringing out a mini saying that the mini was too small to be used as a tablet and too big to be used as a smartphone. The resultant offering by Apple has been a very big non-event, in spite of the razzmatazz launch. Not one significant new feature. Nothing which sets Apple apart from its competitors. So why would one buy the Apple when the opposition is offering the same package for nearly a thousand rand cheaper. Why indeed? In the past the answer would have been simple. One would buy the latest Apple just because it was an Apple, but this is no longer so simple.

A subtle shift

What has in fact happened is that there has been a subtle shift in the marketplace. Maybe subtle is too gentle a word, but there has been a change. Apple is now bought by people for the same reason they buy Nike or adidas or BMW or Rolex. It is a big brand that resonates with a certain image. It is a product being dreamed up in the marketing department of a company with the objective of selling it to a public who loves brands. This is particularly true in the brand-obsessed East, where Apple sales have rocketed. The sales have been so huge that Apple was caught largely unprepared for the massive demand in Apple products. Fakes and copies are selling everywhere, and people want to have the brand without much concern about quality or performance.

Apple has become a mass market consumer product. The icon has died but the product has risen to soar to great heights. Does Apple mind? Probably not - profits are soaring, shareholders are happy, but one wonders what Steve Jobs would have thought as he looked at Apple becoming just another brand without the specialness which made it the most iconic brand of the 21st Century.

ABOUT LEX FAURE

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