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[◀◀previous](#) **Document 33 of 125.** [next▶▶](#)

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The first human-friendly computer, the Mac, turns 20

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BODY:

Twenty years ago today, **Apple Computer** Inc. officially introduced the Macintosh, and the employees who designed the new personal computer fervently believed they had created something that would change the world.

In many ways, they were right.

That first \$2,500 Macintosh, and the way Apple marketed it as the "computer for the rest of us," popularized the idea that you didn't have to work for a big company or be a computer scientist to benefit from owning a personal computer.

Twenty years later, inexpensive personal computers, controlled with the point and click of a mouse, are as embedded in the fabric of everyday American life as the automobile and the airplane, even though most people now own computers built by companies other than Apple.

"It helped catalyze a total change in the way computers were used," said Jef Raskin, the former Macintosh project manager credited as the father of the Mac.

The Mac unveiled by Apple co-founder Steve Jobs before a packed house at Cupertino's Flint Center on Jan. 24, 1984, wasn't a totally new invention. It combined and built upon concepts that had been developed in Silicon Valley for years.

At the time, the IBM PC dominated the personal computer market, especially in businesses. But Macintosh designers were "driven by a religious fervor, because we knew how computers should be," said Bud Tribble, who Jobs lured away from medical school to join Apple as the first employee hired to write Mac software.

The Mac "was a computer for the rest of us, those of us who didn't want to learn computer-ese," Jobs said during his keynote speech at this month's Macworld Expo in San Francisco. "Nobody had ever seen a mouse. We had to teach people what pointing and clicking was, what cutting and pasting was."

The Macintosh platform has stood the test of time, remaining the cornerstone for the profitable Cupertino company. Even though the overall computer market is dominated by machines that are based on Microsoft's Windows operating system, Apple generated a robust \$6.2 billion in revenues during its last fiscal year.

An entire generation of Americans has grown up knowing only computers that use pictures or icons to launch programs on color monitors. And when someone says "mouse," they're referring to the device that controls their desktop.

But back in 1979, when Raskin began drafting a design and marketing plan (naming the project after his favorite variety of tree-grown apple, the McIntosh), computers were still expensive and operated by typing strings of text-based commands with a typewriter-style keyboard. And a mouse was still a rodent or a cartoon character.

The idea of a "graphical user interface" or a hand-operated device that resembled a mouse with a long tail had already been developed by others, such as the

Augmentation Research Center at the Stanford Research Institute and Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center.

Yet their use in a personal computer was still controversial, even among computer scientists.

"We were going against the grain," said Tribble.

"The feeling at the time was that these precious (computer) cycles should not be spent on frivolous things like drawing graphics on the screen," said Tribble, who is now Apple's vice president of software technology. "This whole concept that we should harness the power of the computer to make things easy to use was not in the mainstream."

In March 1979, Raskin began proposing that Apple build an inexpensive computer designed to work around the ways humans would operate it, not how the computer would process applications.

In a prescient report he wrote later that year, Raskin advocated development of an "**Apple Computer Network**" that would give people reasons to use a computer at home and make it appeal to a wider mass market.

Raskin wrote that such a network would give users access to an infinite variety of applications, including news, stock market reports, soap opera summaries, message forwarding and distribution, weather travel information, plane and TV schedules and computer dating.

At the time, Apple had the successful \$1,200 Apple II and Jobs was heading a division working on the Lisa, a higher-end computer that also used a mouse and a graphical user interface.

Jobs, who was unavailable for comment, took over the Macintosh project in 1981 after being forced off the Lisa project. Raskin, who left Apple in 1982, said he and Jobs disagreed on a number of design decisions, including Jobs' insistence that the Mac would use a mouse and his rejection of an **Apple Computer Network**.

But the Macintosh team, famous for putting in long hours and raising a pirate flag atop their building, drove on, hoping to beat the Lisa team to market.

"We all believed that the world could be a better place because of the personal computer," said Guy Kawasaki, the 50th employee hired for the Macintosh division. His title of "software evangelist" told of his mission to spread the gospel according to Apple and get developers to write programs for the Mac.

The first Lisa debuted in 1983, but at \$10,000, was not a big commercial success. Then on Jan. 22, 1984, the huge TV audience watching the then-Los Angeles Raiders defeating the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl XVIII saw "1984," a memorable Apple commercial that helped bring the Mac into the mainstream.

Directed by Ridley Scott, already known for movies "Alien" and "Blade Runner," the \$1.5 million Orwellian-style spot showed an athletic woman running past rows of oppressed humans and smashing a giant telescreen image of "Big Brother," which at the time was supposed to represent IBM.

Two days later at an Apple stockholder's meeting, with his trademark flair for marketing dramatics, Jobs pulled the cover off of the first Macintosh, which had a 9-inch black-and-white display, 128 kilobytes of memory and a 32-bit microprocessor.

The folks over at Big Blue were impressed, but not blown away. After all, IBM already had sold 4 million IBM PCs, introduced two years earlier, said Dave Bradley, a member of the original IBM PC development team and a current member of IBM's Academy of Technology.

"As clever as it (the commercial) was, I personally didn't think anyone needed to be freed from the tyranny of the personal computer," Bradley wrote in an e-mail. "From a hardware engineering perspective, the Macintosh was state-of-the-art, but not revolutionary. I'll remember the Mac for its major contributions in software architecture, and, most importantly, marketing."

Technology analyst Tim Bjarin, who also witnessed the unveiling, noted that officials at Microsoft also did not see the Mac as a "revolutionary device." However, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates did ask then-Apple Chief Executive Officer John Sculley to license the Macintosh operating system so Microsoft could extend it to the IBM PC side of computers.

Sculley, a onetime PepsiCo marketing mastermind who was ousted from Apple in 1993, turned Gates down and also decided to stick with using microprocessors made by Motorola instead of chips from Intel Corp.

Bjarin, president of Creative Strategies Inc. in Campbell, said it's hard to fault Sculley, because at the time, IBM was still the dominant computer maker, Microsoft was a relatively small player in the software market and Apple could still enjoy a large profit margin per computer by maintaining proprietary control over its hardware and software.

But Bjarin said the fact is Microsoft went on to become a software behemoth by aggressively developing its own operating system, although it would be more than a decade before its Windows 95 interface approached the Mac's. And Intel's chips went on to power the rise of upstarts like Compaq and Dell, which would even overshadow IBM.

Meanwhile, Bjarin said the Mac's inherent strength for graphics led Apple into more of a niche market for publishing and engineering. However, Apple is tapping into the new lucrative markets in digital home entertainment with its new generation of Macs and the popular iPod.

"I think if you were to ask the Macintosh division employees today are you disappointed in the results of the Macintosh, we would say we really thought it would be the predominant operating system in the world today," Kawasaki said. "On the other hand, it has made millions of people happy and has lasted 20 years."

The Mac turns 20.

1976

April: Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs form **Apple Computer**.

1980

December: Apple goes public, sells 4.6 million shares at \$22 each.

1983

April: John Sculley joins Apple as president and CEO.

1984

January: Apple airs its famous "1984" ad during the Super Bowl, giving viewers their first glimpse of the Macintosh computer. Directed by Ridley Scott, the spot depicts an Orwellian scene in which an IBM world is being destroyed by a new machine -- the Macintosh.

The Mac, which has a CPU speed of 8 MHz, 128K of RAM, built-in monitor, 3.5-inch disk drive and a mouse, begins selling Jan. 24 for \$2,495.

1985

February: Wozniak resigns to start his own company, planning to make home video products.

September: Jobs resigns to start a new computer company, NeXt.

1987

March: Macintosh II, the first color Mac, is introduced. It has a CPU speed of 16 MHz and sells for \$3,898.

1991

July: Apple and IBM form an alliance to design new software and microchips. The plans eventually lead to the PowerPC processors.

1993

February: Apple ships its 10 millionth Mac.

June: Michael Spindler replaces Sculley as CEO, with Sculley remaining as chairman.

October: Sculley leaves Apple. A.C. Markkula becomes chairman.

1994

March: Apple introduces Power Macintoshes, which use the PowerPC chip co-developed with IBM and Motorola.

September: After a decade of refusing to license its software, Apple says it will let other companies clone the Mac.

December: Milpitas' Power Computer becomes the first company to announce plans to build Mac clones.

1996

February: Gilbert Amelio takes over as chairman and CEO. Markkula becomes vice chairman. Spindler leaves.

December: The company hires co-founder Steve Jobs as a consultant and buys his NeXt Software Inc. for \$430 million.

1997

January: Market researcher Dataquest reports that Apple's market share has fallen to 5.2 percent in 1996 from 7.2 percent in 1995.

March: **Apple Computer** announces it will lay off 4,100 workers -- the largest cutback in its 21-year history and one of the biggest ever in Silicon Valley.

September: Jobs is named interim CEO.

1997

July: Apple releases Mac OS 8.

1998

May: The iMac is introduced. The \$1,300 computer is housed in a sleek, translucent plastic case that glows when the power is turned on. It comes with a 15-inch color screen and a 233-MHz G3 processor.

1999

July: Jobs takes the wraps off a mobile Macintosh: the iBook. The new laptop priced at \$1,599 and is modeled closely on the iMac. It comes with a 12.1-inch active-matrix color screen and is powered by a 300-MHz PowerPC G3 chip. It also features optional wireless connectivity.

2000

January: At the MacWorld Expo, Jobs says he's dropping "interim" from his title.

2001

May: Apple announces plans to open 25 retail stores.

March: Apple introduces Mac OS X.

2002

January: Apple introduces a line of iMacs that features a swiveling 15-inch flat screen connected to a circular base containing a G4 processor. The 800-MHz version of the new iMac is priced at \$1,799.

2003

October: Declaring "Hell Froze Over," Jobs introduces a Windows version of the Mac music jukebox software iTunes.

Chronicle Researcher Kathleen Rhodes and Cnet contributed to this report

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GRAPHIC: PHOTO (2): GRAPHIC (2), (1) An image from the Orwellian-style 1984 ad that introduced the Macintosh. Inset: Schoolteacher David Rothschild studies for an exam with his **Apple computer** at a San Francisco cafe. / Mike Kepka / The Chronicle, (2) Steve Jobs, backed by an updated still from the 1984 ad that introduced the Mac, delivers a keynote speech at Moscone Center. / Frederic Larson / The Chronicle, (3) The Macintosh computer introduced in 1984 had a CPU speed of 8 MHz and 128K of RAM, and it sold for \$2,495., (4)

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[◀◀ previous](#) Document 33 of 125. [next ▶▶](#)

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