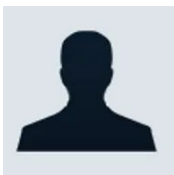


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Apple Talk: Is FaceTime video chat Steve Jobs's latest clever call?

Apple the marketing masterWritten by **Seb Janacek**, Contributor on July 30, 2010**Apple the marketing master**

Apple's genius has been for redesigning, repositioning and marketing other people's inventions. Its FaceTime video-calling technology is no exception, says Seb Janacek.

Former Apple CEO John Sculley offered a telling insight into the company in [a 1997 interview with *The Guardian*](#). He told the UK newspaper: "People talk about technology but Apple was a marketing company. It was the marketing company of the decade."

Apple makes some very high-quality products, as do a number of other companies but few enjoy such commercial success and brand loyalty as the Cupertino firm.

Despite the claims of its followers, Apple is not always the trailblazer in new tech. It has displayed a deft touch in repositioning existing products and turning them into commercial successes.

Tablets, smartphones and MP3 players - it's nothing new

Take the tablet computer, smartphone and MP3 player. None of these was invented by Apple. Reinvented possibly but their origins lie elsewhere.

One of the iPhone 4's new features is a perfect example of this mix of technology and marketing - FaceTime video calling. When images of the pre-launch iPhone 4 were splashed across the web after a test device was left in a San Francisco bar, it was clear Apple had added a front-facing camera to the smartphone. This feature, very obviously, meant the iPhone would support video calls.

Video calling was touted some 10 years ago as being one of the killer apps for 3G phones. Unfortunately, the revolution was cancelled. Not only did video calls fail to take off but I have yet to meet a single person who even tried to make one on a phone.



FaceTime on an iPhone 4

(Photo credit: James Martin/CNET)

However, at the iPhone 4 launch, not only did Steve Jobs announce FaceTime, he also decided to choose it as his 'one more thing' - the Apple keynote equivalent of the halftime Superbowl advert slot. In other words, it was prime time for FaceTime.

FaceTime - a brave new world?

During a demo marred by wi-fi problems caused by hundreds of people frantically live blogging, Jobs held a short and slightly terse conversation with chief designer Jonny Ive.

Jobs and Ive waxed lyrical about the brave new world of video calls they had invented, comparing it to the world of *The Jetsons*, the cartoon space-age family they had both apparently watched on TV as kids, despite their 12-year age gap. They studiously ignored the previous 10 years of phone models capable of video calls, devices that had utterly failed to capture the public imagination.

The FaceTime technology itself is neat, efficient and simple in a way that Apple has grown accustomed to delivering in its software - but the messaging is simply brilliant.

The FaceTime advert Apple produced for the keynote is easily...

...the most compelling piece of marketing I've seen in a long time. The soundtrack for the advert is Louis Armstrong singing 'When You're Smiling'. It features a number of scenarios for video calls.

As the music swells, we see a woman showing her partner their smiling baby while he's stuck in a hotel room on a distant business trip. Three generations share a graduation moment. Friends give and receive sartorial advice. A pregnant woman undergoing an ultrasound shares live video of her unborn baby with her partner, a soldier stationed overseas. Finally, a couple communicate with each other wordlessly using sign language.

The message is that FaceTime lets you connect with people in a way that voice messaging cannot. It's not about the technology behind video calling but about a higher and more intimate form of human interaction.

FaceTime open standard

In addition to using FaceTime as a focus for its iPhone 4 marketing, Apple is making it an open standard to let other phone companies develop around it. It wants competitors to adopt this metaphor for communication, it wants to move on the conversation.

Just as it did with iPad, iPhone and iPod, Apple didn't invent the technology. It is not the originator of the video call but it may yet champion it. Even if iPhone 4 owners don't persist with it I'm guessing most will want to give it a go.

FaceTime is available via wi-fi only - even 10 years later, the promise of 3G has yet to come to fruition. Currently limited to iPhone 4s, it is simple to invoke - simply make a call when connected via wi-fi and press the FaceTime button, talk away and don't forget to smile.

At the beginning of E M Forster's novel *Howards End*, a novel about relationships and connections, lies the perfect motto for the wired world: "Only connect". It's Forster's most concise axiom and one which Apple's FaceTime marketing aspires to.

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