

Close Encounters of a Steve Jobs Kind

“This means something.” Several times in my career, There have been moments of clarity which have defined my actions moving forward. Actions have been key, since explaining them seems to have little or no impact. Demonstrating has proven extremely powerful and effective. That was not an option when I shared a thought with Steve Jobs.

It was around 1984 while working at Audio Excellence in San Francisco. Like other traditional hifi stores, there were a few Mitsubishi TVs and NEC rear projection sets around to keep TV sales in house, little more. There was no “video.”

I had just come back from CES where I’d seen my first HDTV demonstration. It was in a tiny curtained area of the Toshiba booth. A 27” CRT was showing moving images of a Japanese garden. The picture took my breath away. Immediately outside, was a huge video reel to reel with about 1” wide tape running in it. This was pure analogue MUSE HDTV.

I walked away from the booth shaking I was so excited. Over the next couple days, I tried to learn as much as possible about the realities and hurdles it would take to get that kind of picture to end users. They were many. There were no consumer displays in existence and quarter million dollar video reel to reel machines have some “practical limitations.” Oh, and there would be nothing to watch.

My mash potato moment came when Steve Jobs was in the store. He was a regular customer so I had no qualms about talking to him. Everyone knew Apple was in trouble so I decided to blurt out what was on my mind, figuring why not, as they say.

I told him what I’d seen at CES and that I had this idea. Since he wanted everyone to buy computers, I thought a good way would be to sell graphics grade computer computers with monitors of a size suitable for living rooms (TVs were a lot smaller in 1984, the largest common size was 27 inches). It would be easy to get TV content to show on them, plus you could share your desk top, work, play games AND the computer could deliver HDTV to the set via some kind of stored media! Viola, no need for giant reel to reel Plus, he gets to sell a computer for more than one use! Everyone would want one! Apple is saved! (I get HDTV for my customers too.)

Steve paused, and looked seriously at me and said: “I don’t want to be in the TV business.”

Telling this story now it is tough to get across how radical I was thinking. Most people take for granted the crossover between technologies. BUT, nothing like what I described to him existed at the time. Nothing even close.

Now, I use computers and hi def projection displays to show consumers how to take advantage of the media they own and seek every day.

I still have mashed potato moments.