

**M**ANY YEARS AGO WHILE WORKING FOR the ad agency TBWA, I found myself at a party at the Playboy mansion in Los Angeles. Well, in the garden of the mansion anyway. The reason for this was a management conference celebrating the agency's philosophy of "Disruption," and specifically disruptive brands, of which Playboy certainly was one.

Back then, TBWA was responsible for the advertising for perhaps the most disruptive brand of all time, Apple. At an earlier event our speaker had been Steve Jobs, and it remains a memory and an education I shall treasure. His views on what a brand should stand for ("Apple at its core...", as he famously said) were about two things: thinking differently, and keeping technology away from the customer. In other words, designing products and their presentation in a simple, human and intuitive way.

While standing in the garden, I bumped into a man I didn't recognize, and introduced myself. "Hello," he replied, "I'm Jony." It would be a lie to tell you that I immediately knew who he was. This was 2007, post Mac, during the iPod phenomenon. It was before the iPhone and iPad. Sir Jony Ive had not been profiled to the extent that he has been in the intervening years, and so while undoubtedly famous, he was not yet as recognizable as he would become. A recent story in The New Yorker about his impending departure after 27 years at Apple called Sir Jony "the most famous industrial designer in history."

"What do you do, Jony?" I asked. Yes, embarrassing to recall, but he was charm and humility personified as he told me his full name.

The conversation that followed was one of the most privileged and fascinating 30 minutes of my life. I remember asking him why he had chosen tech design as opposed to any other product category, and recall him sharing his views on the limitations of items such as a glass, the limit dictated by volume, and by the weight and the shape of the human hand. Or a chair, limited by the shape of the human body, and specifically the length of the calf and thigh. Things that don't occur to most people. But with tech, he reflected on his early view that computers needn't be box shaped and beige, or manufactured to a single screen size. If you thought about them as tools for creative minds, then by definition the computers themselves should be more creatively expressive.

We then discussed the iPod, the earliest incarnations of which not only put "1,000 songs in your

MerchantCantos  
CEO **MATT  
SHEPHERD-SMITH**  
recalls an encounter in the garden of the Playboy mansion with Apple's legendary Chief Design Officer, who is set to leave the company at the end of 2019.

## A Memorable Moment with **SIR**

recently confirmed as a new product in development. The game-changer in this instance, he explained, had been the emergence of touch-screen technology. At the time, the leading mobile phones on the market were made by Nokia and Motorola. While the Motorola Razr was hinged with a flip-up screen, both were conventional button-based devices with basic call and text ability, but no more. "So what's going to be different about the iPhone?" I asked.

And quite extraordinarily then, Sir Jony said, "I probably shouldn't do this..." and pulled out of his

pocket" via the digitalization of music ("Steve's idea"), but required a revolutionary design. The elegance and simplicity of form behind all Apple products now defines all that the brand does, but this was not the case as Jony Ive pondered the design of the iPod. How would someone navigate their way around a library of so much music?

The solution, as with most great ideas, came from an insight. While holding a mock-up of the shape of the product in his hand, Jony wanted the device to be simple and effortless to use. Simple would mean one hand rather than two. But how would you push the buttons? Simple, don't have any. Instead, with the insight that the only available finger on a hand that's holding something is the thumb, he noticed that the freed thumb worked in a circular motion, and thus was conceived the central "dial" for navigation. A simple solution which he combined with the pressure points north, south, east and west to scroll, click, play, *et cetera*, as required. Genius. And not an ounce of arrogance about it.

Pushing my luck a little further I then asked him about the as-yet unseen but much anticipated iPhone, so long rumored, but at that time only

## **JONY**IVE

pocket one of the very few working prototypes of the iPhone—one of the others, needless to say, belonging to Mr. Jobs.

He proceeded to demonstrate the collection of music, photos, emails, the as yet unfamiliar notion of "scrolling," and the very first array of the then-unknown concept of apps.

It is hard to articulate to you the impact of what I saw. Game-changer does not do it justice. This was a disruption and revolution in mobile software design unlike anything seen before or since. But I must

emphasize that it was not only the software that was extraordinary, but the hardware too.

We are now so familiar with the iPhone that we forget how radical a disruption it was at launch. Sleek, full screen, button-free rounded objects of immediate desire that have changed the face of mobile phones the world over. A truly extraordinary achievement.

And the funny thing was that he then popped it back into his pocket like it was the most normal thing in the world. Which now, of course, it is. ♦

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