



Blow up your business before someone else does

In the early 1980s, Steve Jobs and a few Apple executives visited the Xerox Corporation to see a new technology they had developed. It was called the Graphic User Interface or GUI – it allowed people to interact with a computer through a series of pictures and icons instead of having to know .dos or some other computer language.

At the time of the visit, Apple was hard at work developing the Lisa – it was to be their next big idea after the Apple II. They had poured millions of dollars and an exorbitant amount of time and sweat into developing the Lisa. But this graphic user interface was a revolutionary idea...and the young Steve Jobs knew it.

Like Kodak, who invented the digital camera in the 1970s but suppressed the technology for fear that it would eat away at film sales, so too was Xerox suppressing their idea for fear it too would cannibalize their existing business.

Jobs pulled aside his executives and told them that he wanted to abandon the Lisa and develop the graphic user interface instead. Shocked, one of his executives exclaimed, “but Steve, if we do that, we’ll blow up our own business.” To which Jobs replied, “better we should blow it up than someone else.”

Apple abandoned the Lisa and, a few years later, in 1984, introduced the Macintosh; a move that would revolutionize the entire computer industry.

Steve Jobs was not unique in his ability to see great ideas. Kodak and Xerox both saw the power of their respective innovations. So much so, in fact, that they worked to keep them hidden, knowing full well the impact their technologies would have. What made Jobs a remarkable leader was not his ability to simply see great ideas but to seize them, even if it meant abandoning work already done and money already spent. He would often quote Wayne Gretzky, who said, “a good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.” And that’s exactly what Jobs believed. What’s the point of continuing to pour money into an idea that will be dead on arrival? Cut your losses and blow up your own business before someone else does. Don’t play where the market is, play where it’s going to be.



The music industry refused to blow up their own business. They worked hard to sell albums in a digital world that wanted to buy songs, only to have Apple blow up their businesses with iTunes.

Publishing refuses to blow up their own business leaving them exposed to an online retailer, Amazon, to blow it up for them.

A great idea is a great idea and great ideas cannot be suppressed...at least not forever. The ones who get to profit from the great ideas, however, are not necessarily the ones who develop them, but the ones willing to embrace those ideas before anyone else does.