

The Greatest Commercial That Almost Never Aired

Every true Macintosh fanatic has seen, or at least heard about, the famous *1984* television commercial that heralded the introduction of the Macintosh. The spot, with its distinctive Orwellian vision, is indelibly imprinted in the minds of Mac users the world over. What you don't know about the commercial will surprise you; what you think you know is probably wrong.

First of all, the commercial was not inspired by the Macintosh. In late 1982, Apple's advertising agency, Chiat/Day (www.chiatday.com), had devised a corporate print campaign featuring the Apple II for *The Wall Street Journal* that was designed to play off George Orwell's totalitarian vision of the future.

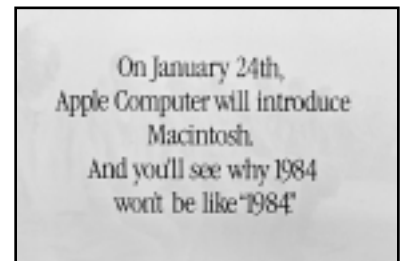
"Six months before we knew about Mac, we had this new ad that read, 'Why 1984 won't be like 1984,'" reveals Lee Clow, creative director at Chiat/Day. "It explained Apple's philosophy and purpose—that people, not just government and big corporations, should run technology. If computers aren't to take over our lives, they have to be accessible."

The ad never ran and was filed away, only to be dusted off in the spring of 1983 by Steve Hayden, the agency's copywriter, and Brent Thomas, the art director, who were looking for some hook to make a bold statement about the incredible new Macintosh. With considerable reworking, the Chiat/Day team put together a storyboard of the *1984* commercial they proposed to shoot.

The mini-movie would show an athletic young woman, chased by helmeted storm troopers, bursting into a dank auditorium in which rows upon rows of slack-jawed, drone-like workers watched an image of Big Brother spouting an ideological diatribe on a huge screen. The heroine, wearing bright red jogging shorts and a white Mac T-shirt, would smash the screen with a baseball bat (later changed to a

"Am I getting anything I should give a shit about?"

Steve Jobs, upon first meeting Lee Clow, creative director for Chiat/Day



This famous tag line was originally intended for the Apple II, not the Macintosh.

sledgehammer for dramatic effect) and a refreshing burst of fresh air would pass over the masses as they literally “saw the light.”

In the closing shot, a solemn voice would intone “On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984 won’t be like 1984.” The computer itself would never be shown.

After Chiat/Day presented the storyboard to Apple, John Sculley was apprehensive, but Steve Jobs insisted that the Mac deserved such a radical spot. They gave the authorization to shoot the commercial and purchase time to air it during the upcoming Super Bowl.

On the strength of his successful science-fiction films *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, Chiat/Day gave Ridley Scott a budget of \$900,000 to direct the 1984 spot as well as a Lisa commercial called *Alone Again*, in which, believe it or not, Apple actually emphasized the fact that the Lisa was incompatible with all established standards.

In September, Scott assembled a cast of 200 for a week of filming at London’s Shepperton Studios. To play the part of the despondent, bald-headed workers, Scott recruited authentic British skinheads and paid amateurs \$125 a day to shave off their hair. Casting the heroine proved trickier. Many of the professional fashion models and actresses had difficulty spinning in place and then accurately throwing the sledgehammer as called for in the script. In fact, one errant sledgehammer toss almost killed an old lady walking down a path in

“We wanted people to say, ‘What the hell is this product?’ The idea was to use the commercial as a tease, not a product introduction; to make sure the world knew a new product was here and that it was a significant event.”

*Chiat/Day director of planning
Mary Terese Rainey*



The beautiful, athletic heroine was the embodiment of Apple’s youthful self-image.

Hyde Park, where the casting call was being held. As luck would have it, one model, Anya Major, was also an experienced discus thrower. She was hired to play the female lead because she looked the part and didn't get dizzy when spinning around preparing to hurl the hammer.

When the rough cut was assembled, Chiat/Day proudly presented it to Jobs and Sculley. Jobs loved the commercial, and Sculley thought it was crazy enough that it just might work. On October 23, the commercial was aired publicly for the first time at Apple's annual sales conference in Honolulu's civic auditorium. The 750 sales reps went wild when they saw the piece.

Jobs and Sculley clearly thought they had a winner on their hands, so in late December, they asked marketing manager Mike Murray to screen the commercial for the other members of Apple's board of directors: Mike Markkula (Apple founder), Dr. Henry E. Singleton (Teledyne founder), Arthur Rock (venture capitalist), Peter O. Crisp (managing partner in Rockefeller's Venrock Associates), and Philip S. Schlein (CEO of Macy's California).

When the lights came back up after the spot played, the room on De Anza Boulevard was silent. Schlein was sitting with his head on the table. Markkula stared in amazement. Murray thought Markkula was overcome by the wonderful commercial until he broke the silence to ask, "Who wants to move to find a new agency?" In his memoirs, Sculley recalled, "The others just looked at each other, dazed expressions on their faces ... Most of them felt it was the worst commercial they had ever seen. Not a single outside board member liked it."

**"Some of them liked it,
some of them didn't."**

*Spin doctor Steve Jobs, describing
the board's reaction to 1984*

The board didn't demand the commercial be killed, nonetheless Sculley asked Chiat/Day to sell back the one and one half minutes of Super Bowl television time that they had purchased. The original plan was to play the full-length, 60-second 1984 spot to catch everyone's attention, then hammer home the message during a subsequent commercial break with an additional airing of an edited 30-second version.

Defying Sculley's request, Jay Chiat told his media director, Camille Johnson, "Just sell off the 30." Johnson laughed, thinking it would be impossible to sell any of the time at so late a date, but miraculously, she managed to find a buyer for the 30-second slot. That still left Apple with a 60-second slot for which it had paid \$800,000.

Campbell went on to head Claris, GO, and Intuit. He was named to the Apple board in 1997. Kvamme eventually made partner at the venture capital firm Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers (www.kpcb.com).

Still pushing for *1984*, Jobs sought the support of Steve Wozniak, who normally didn't like to get involved in such political issues. Recalls Wozniak, "One evening I was over at the Macintosh group, which I was about to join, and Steve grabbed me and said 'Hey, come over here and look at this.' He pulled up a 3/4-inch VCR and played the ad. I was astounded. I thought it was the most incredible thing. Then he told me that the board decided not to show it. He didn't say why. I was so shocked. Steve said we were going to run it during the Super Bowl. I asked how much it was going to cost, and he told me \$800,000. I said, 'Well, I'll pay half of it if you will.' I figured it was a problem with the company justifying the expenditure. I thought an ad that was so great a piece of science fiction should have its chance to be seen." Fortunately for Wozniak, Jobs didn't take him up on his offer to pony up half the cost.

"It broke all the rules; and the reaction has been, in a word, unprecedented."

Chiat/Day copywriter Steve Hayden

Perhaps seeking to cover himself in the event the commercial flopped, Sculley left the decision of whether to run *1984* up to William V. Campbell (VP of marketing) and E. Floyd Kvamme (executive VP of marketing and sales). If they couldn't sell the remaining Super Bowl minute and decided against airing *1984*, the backup plan was to run *Manuals*, a rather straightforward product-benefit spot that challenged viewers to decide which was the more sophisticated computer: the IBM PC, with its huge pile of documentation that came crashing down beside the computer, or the Macintosh, with its light-as-a-feather user's guide floating to rest next to the mouse.

Campbell and Kvamme threw caution to the wind and decided to run the *1984* commercial after all, kicking off a \$15-million, 100-day advertising blitz for the Mac. On January 22, 1984, the controversial commercial aired to an audience of 96 million early in the third quarter of Super Bowl XVIII, in which the Los Angeles Raiders defeated the Washington Redskins 38 to 9 in Tampa Stadium.

Any apprehension Apple may have harbored regarding *1984* disappeared seconds after the spot ran. Switchboards immediately lit up at CBS, Chiat/Day, and Apple with calls demanding to know, "What was that?!" Love it or hate it, the commercial demanded attention and sparked widespread controversy. It would ultimately garner an estimated \$5 million in free publicity; all three television networks and nearly 50 local stations aired news stories about the spot, most replaying it in its entirety, and hundreds of newspapers and magazines wrote about the phenomenon.

A.C. Nielsen estimated the commercial reached 46.4 percent of the households in America, a full 50 percent of the nation's men, and 36 percent of the women. The commercial garnered astronomical recall scores and went on to win the Grand Prize of Cannes as well as over 30 other advertising industry awards.

The *1984* commercial was the first example of what Sculley called "event marketing," the goal of which is to create a promotion so ground-breaking that it deserves as much coverage as the product itself. Apple fed the media frenzy surrounding *1984* by announcing that the commercial would never be aired again.

To this day, if you ask most Apple employees about the commercial, they will claim that the only time Apple ever paid to run the commercial was during the Super Bowl. It's been repeated convincingly so many times by so many sincere people that it's now accepted as gospel. The only problem is it isn't true.

In keeping with industry tradition, Chiat/Day paid \$10 to run *1984* in the 1:00 AM sign-off slot on December 15, 1983, at a small television station (KMVT, Channel 11) in Twin Falls, Idaho, thereby ensuring that the commercial would qualify for that year's advertising awards. Then beginning on January 17, the 30-second version of the commercial aired for weeks in ScreenVision, an advertising medium played in movie theaters before previews and feature presentations (some theater owners loved the commercial so much that they continued running it for months without pay).

At the same time, a five-day teaser campaign began running a full schedule during prime time in America's ten largest television markets (encompassing 30 percent of the nation's viewers), plus the relatively unimportant television market of West Palm Beach, Florida, right next door to IBM's PC headquarters. "I would love to know what they're saying in Boca Raton," Jobs smugly mused the Monday after the Super Bowl.

Ironically, it was during the same game that IBM launched the ad campaign for its ill-fated, low-cost PCjr computer, which had just begun shipping to dealers. The light-hearted commercial depicted Charlie Chaplin wheeling the PCjr into a room in a baby carriage as the announcer introduced "the bright little addition to the family." Jobs would later remark, "I expected the computer to wet all over the television set." Reflecting on IBM's use of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* character, Jean-Louis Gassée found it "surprising that the Little Tramp, symbolizing the worst aspects of the assembly line, was chosen to advertise a company that is a humanistic one in every other way."



Drones were played by British skinheads and amateurs paid \$125 a day to shave off their hair.

You can download the famous *1984* commercial as a QuickTime movie from the following sites, but beware, it's a multi-megabyte file:

<http://www.themacad.com>

http://www.chiatday.com/product/historical_work/tv/1984/1984.html

"We were so convinced we had a major product statement that we weren't worried about the product living up to the commercial."

Apple executive VP of marketing and sales E. Floyd Kvamme

"It was all this horseshit from people who didn't have the balls to produce something like *1984*."

Chiat/Day creative director Lee Clow, dismissing his competitors' negative reactions to the commercial

"Luck is a force of nature. Everything seemed to conspire to make *1984* a hit: the timing, the product, the industry. Using the *1984* theme was such an obvious idea that I was worried someone else would beat us to it, but nobody did."

Steve Hayden, explaining the commercial's success

Big Brother Speaks

As 1984 was originally conceived, Big Brother did not have a speaking role, but director Ridley Scott wanted to give him some lines. Copywriter Steve Hayden objected at first, but agreed to put something together when Scott threatened to write the lines himself. Apple vehemently denied that the propaganda-spouting Big Brother character in the 1984 commercial represented its \$40-billion competitor, IBM. Decide for yourself as you read Big Brother's harangue from the full-length, 60-second commercial:



Is Big Brother really Big Blue? Apple insisted not, but the words speak volumes.

“My friends, each of you is a single cell in the great body of the State. And today, that great body has purged itself of parasites. We have triumphed over the unprincipled dissemination of facts. The thugs and wreckers have been cast out. And the poisonous weeds of disinformation have been consigned to the dustbin of history. Let each and every cell rejoice! For today we celebrate the first, glorious anniversary of the Information Purification Directive! We have created, for the first time in all history, a garden of pure ideology, where each worker may bloom secure from the pests of contradictory and confusing truths. Our Unification of Thought is a more powerful weapon than any fleet or army on Earth! We are one people. With one will. One resolve. One cause. Our enemies shall talk themselves to death. And we will bury them with their own confusion!”

An Apple II was used to generate the spurious data that appeared superimposed over Big Brother's face.



In a superb bit of irony, ten years after working on the 1984 commercial, Steve Hayden went to work for Ogilvy & Mather (www.ogilvy.com) as overseer of the entire worldwide IBM account.