



BETTER BY DESIGN

It's been 20 years since the first iMac was unveiled. Revolutionary at the time, the iMac G3 is one of the most iconic computers that ever existed.

The iMac is 20. It's hard to believe but Apple wasn't always the globe-dominating giant it is today, worth more than the GDP of some nations. When Steve Jobs got up on stage on May 6, 1998, to unveil the iMac, Apple was at a low ebb, struggling to maintain consistent profitability. In July 1997 its shares had hit a 10-year low, and Oracle's Larry Ellison was considering putting in a bid. Jobs himself was only months into his second stint at the flailing company.

"It's hard to believe today that a Steve Jobs product presentation would be met with indifference, but there was a huge amount of scepticism about Apple's product announcements back in early 1998," Jason Snell, a journalist and broadcaster who has spent his whole career covering Apple, wrote recently. "Though there were definitely signs that the company was turning it around, I also recall being summoned to Apple product events where nothing much at all was announced. Regardless, only the editor-in-chief of *Macworld*, Andy Gore, even bothered to go to the announcement that day." >







Above: Steve Jobs unveils the iMac, based on the PowerPC G3 processor

Footage from the event – shared by current CEO Tim Cook – shows Jobs, perhaps the greatest salesman the world has ever seen, describing the \$1299 iMac as an impossibly futuristic device. “The whole thing is translucent, you can see into it. It’s so cool,” he said at the time, before taking a swipe at the competition: “The back of this thing looks better than the front of the other guy’s, by the way.”

Although Jobs could be hyperbolic, he was chiefly right. Featuring an all-in-one design with a translucent blue shell, the first-gen iMac was beautiful,



especially when measured against the PCs of the day. (It also dropped the floppy drive, relying solely upon USB ports, an incredibly controversial decision at the time.)

“For years, Apple relied on pedestrian designs for its desktop computers,” *Macworld* said in a review. “The iMac is different: it demands to be noticed, sporting a fresh, ultramodern design that is at the same time very familiar.”

Evolution of iMacs

Source: Apple



1998



2000



2002

"The iMac is clean, elegant, floppy-free – and doomed"

The Boston Globe

"It's hard not to recognise the iMac's lineage: the all-in-one case, the tiny footprint, even the integrated handle – all suggest the original Macintosh. But this is where the similarities end. Using translucent plastics of 'ice' and 'Bondi blue' (in homage to the Australian beach), Apple's industrial-design group created a computer without a single straight line."

Many in the non-Mac media, however, were not impressed. "The iMac will only sell to some of the true believers," the *Boston Globe* said. "The iMac doesn't include a floppy disk for doing file backups or sharing of data. It's an astonishing lapse from Jobs, who should have learned better. The iMac is clean, elegant, floppy-free – and doomed."

Far from spelling Apple's doom, though, the iMac helped put Apple on the path to ever-greater success. In January 1999, less than a year after the launch of the Bondi Blue, Apple more than tripled its quarterly profit. (Throughout its lifespan the iMac was released in 13 colours.)

For the next decade, Jobs kept the new 'i' products coming, in the process revolutionising the world of computers, music and telephone. In 2001 Apple brought out the iPod. In 2003 the iTunes music store was launched. Then came the iPhone (2007) and iPad (2010).

"For a while now, most of the Apple Mac sells have been laptops," Snell wrote. "The iMac no longer defines

the Mac, though it does still hold an important place on the desks and tables of its users. Likewise, the Mac itself no longer defines Apple, with the success of the iPhone and other products like the iPad and Apple Watch changing how the company sees itself and how it's seen by others."

For someone who had attended that launch in 1998, he said, it would have been impossible to envision the Apple of 2018. "But without that day, and the product that Steve Jobs unveiled on that stage, it's hard to imagine that Apple would have ever had the chance to become what it is today." ↑

Below: The iMac continues to revolutionise the world of computers

