

Russia's "Apple Generation" Mourns Steve Jobs

By [Roland Oliphant](#)

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Flowers and candles lying next to a portrait of Apple founder Steve Jobs at an Apple store in Moscow on Thursday.

If any proof were needed of how ubiquitous the bitten-apple emblem has become in Russia, it came Thursday as mourners laid flowers at Apple stores across the country and President Dmitry Medvedev led the nation in a tribute to company founder Steve Jobs, who died late Wednesday night after a battle with pancreatic cancer.

"People like Steve Jobs change our world," tweeted Medvedev on Thursday morning. "My sincere condolences to the family and all who admired his wisdom and talent." The president met Jobs during a visit to California last year.

It was a powerful illustration of just how far Jobs — and more importantly his products — have penetrated contemporary Russian society, especially the business and political elite in the four years since he gave the go-ahead for Apple's launch of operations in the country.

Those who knew him would remember his "spirit of innovation and perfection," Valery Lanovenko, former head of Apple Russia, told The Moscow Times.

"He knew how to focus on just a few things — but those things had to be perfect. And frequently they had to be a new way of doing things. This applied not just to products, but to product promotion, business processes, partnerships and even negotiations," Lavonenko said. "He was the one who blessed the decision to start operations in Russia in 2007."

Medvedev aide and fellow "modernization" enthusiast Arkady Dvorkovich, who also met Jobs during the U.S. visit, admired "everything Jobs achieved in his not very long life."

Even those who had never met him heaped the Apple founder with praise. Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy wrote on his blog that Jobs was "an example to a generation."

"Maybe, somebody, inspired by this example, will create in Russia a company that will make a breakthrough in innovation and make the world finally revise their attitude to us as a country with a commodity-dependent economy," he wrote. "Our officials could learn a lot from him."

United Russia Duma Deputy Robert Shlegel changed his Twitter avatar to the image of the day — a silhouette of Jobs' profile on the Apple emblem.

Shlegel, who has seldom been seen without his iPad in recent years, was among dozens who took to Twitter to express their deep sense of loss with the hashtag #thankyoustevejobs.

"I switched to Apple three years ago — I needed technology that doesn't fail. Because it's my tool of work," he wrote, later revealing that he has no less than 10 Apple products.

And it was not just politicians who were paying tribute. Apple had \$900 million of sales in Russia in 2010, according to Robert Farish. That kind of success confirms the company's reach to everyone interested in consumer electronics.

"He changed the world of technology. He brought the Internet to people's pockets," said Sevastyan Peredyreyev, a market trader who was selling counterfeit iPhones at the Savoylovskiy market on Thursday.

"I regret the death of a great man, who changed the digital world. From now on, the company Apple and its fans will certainly miss his sense of style," said Dmitry Shchyolokov — who was at the same market pedaling the genuine article.

Lyudmila Semushkina, spokeswoman of the re:Store Retail Group, a premium Apple retailer, said fans of Jobs in Russia were also bringing flowers to the stores across the country.

In Omsk, local Apple fans planned to organize a flashmob near a retailer's store and bring apples with a missing bite — the company's symbol, superomsk.ru city news portal reported.

Semushkina said none of Russia's Apple stores adjusted their work schedule on Thursday. Only one change was made: Monitors were displaying Jobs' black-and-white portrait.

"We think it's the best way to pay tribute to him," Semushkina said.

The last foreigner Russia so publicly mourned was Michael Jackson. And like Jackson, as the trader Shchyolokov pointed out, more than anything else Jobs will be remembered for an ineffable sense of style. A combination of simplicity and sophistication that made his products must-haves for aficionados of design.

Jobs famously pointed out that "design is not just what it looks like; design is how it works." And Apple is not only the symbol, but also the preferred tool of designers.

Artemy Lebedev, perhaps Russia's most influential designer, told Vedomosti that the "single strongest and most lasting influence on his life" was the Macintosh computer — using one in 1989 to create the Soviet Union's first and only school wall newspaper with a subscription fee.

The Moscow Times, like most newspapers, has been produced on Macs since its founding in 1992.

Jobs as a personality only began to achieve fame in Russia with the stream of i-branded products that Apple began to churn out after his return to the company in 1997, after a 12-year absence.

And more than anything else it was the iPhone, which Jobs unveiled in 2007, that sealed his place in the Russian consciousness.

No one was prepared for how quickly it became an essential accessory for presidents, businessmen, the golden youth and Moscow's hipster — even before it was being distributed officially in Russia.

When Medvedev came to power the following year, the iPhone became the symbol, and Jobs the poster child for "innovation" — the catchword of the Medvedev era.

For those who dream of a different Russia, Jobs was living proof of the possibility of honest success — a living rebuke to "political demagogues" who claim "it is impossible to make a billion honestly," as Sergei Alexashenko, director of macroeconomic research at the Higher School of Economics told Vedomosti Thursday.

Each time a well-heeled businessman scrolls through the contacts on his iPhone or a Duma deputy idles away a parliamentary debate playing Angry Birds, they are confirming Alexashenko's insight on the example Jobs provides: that a fortune could be created "without oil, gas, high-placed friends; without kickbacks and embezzlement."

The iPhone mania reached the highest corridors of power and even made the public, at least half-seriously, question how the president's deeds matched his words.

When Jobs presented Medvedev with an iPhone 4 in 2010 — before that model was available in Russia — observers wondered how the president would obtain the code to unlock the device for use locally.

But Medvedev had already been photographed using the new model before Jobs gave him

the present — meaning that the country's president, who at the time was making political hay out of a much-vaunted war on "legal nihilism," was possibly flouting intellectual property laws in desperate pursuit of the bitten-apple emblem.

One Moscow Times employee who recently found himself at a dacha party thrown by a prominent oligarch noted that all the guests were sporting an iPhone.

Only the host was without one, carrying instead a dilapidated Motorola.

That is perhaps the greatest irony of the Apple story in Russia. The products — created by such an idiosyncratic, famously single-minded individualist — are a must-have for aspiring professionals; only an established oligarch can afford not to have one.

Steven Paul Jobs was born in San Francisco on February 24, 1955. He died on Wednesday, October 5, 2011, aged 56. He is survived by his wife, Laurene, and three children.

Staff writers Alex Winning, Alexandra Odynova, and Justin Lifflander contributed to this report.

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