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Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak

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Boston's Fest for Apple

by Mary E. McCann



When Apple came to Boston in June, everyone left a winner.

Making its debut June 6 and 7 under the sponsorship of BCS's Apple/Boston User Group, Applefest '81 boasted 112 booths showcasing 90 exhibitors of Apple-specific products, plus ongoing seminars of topical interest. The only thing missing from the two-day show seemed to be enough elbow room for the 10,000-odd attendees who jammed Boston's Plaza Castle.

By most accounts, BCS's pioneer effort in convention management was a huge success. As the first national computer show devoted exclusively to Apple end-users and potential purchasers—and the first of such magnitude to be pulled off by a users' club—Applefest quickly dispelled the notion that only Apple Computer can run a successful Apple show. Comments such as this exhibitor's from Compress were commonplace: "I've been going to shows for 23 years, and this has been the best run, best organized I've ever been to. It's been first class all the way."



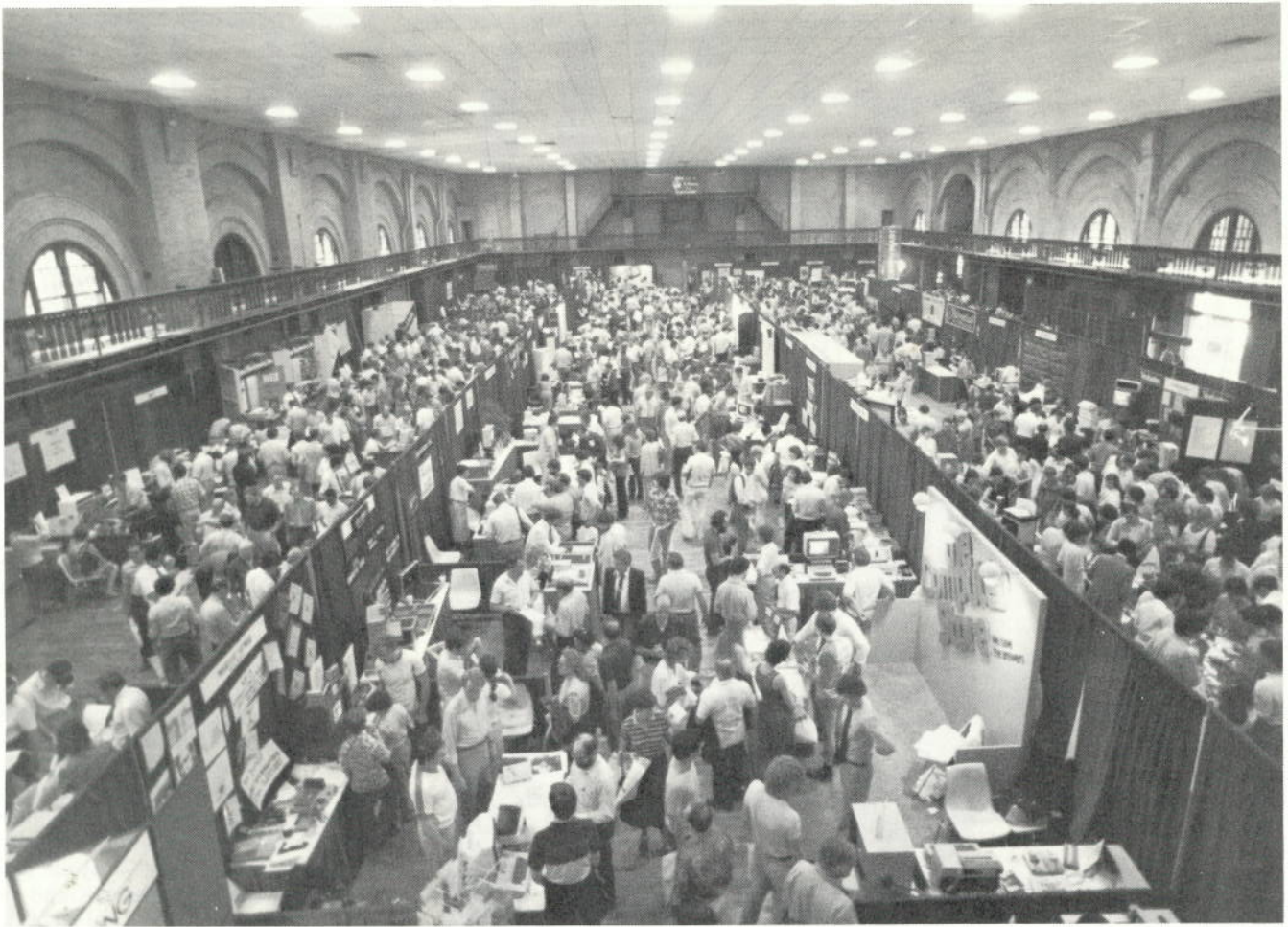
Applefest was international

Everything but ordinary, Applefest attracted global interest. In addition to people from all over the country, attendees from Hong Kong, Mexico, Canada, England and South America were counted among those who had traveled specifically to attend the show. Not only did the Apple users' community show up, but the co-founders of Apple—Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak—came as well, their celebrity status generating its own electricity among Apple fans.

Add to this enthusiastic, well-represented group an eclectic mix of smallish companies displaying innovative products, and the chemistry for success was born.

The show unfolded with few glitches. Opening day found lines of people stretching for blocks waiting for admittance—mostly computer literates who spanned all age groups and seemed at ease in their

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electronic surroundings. But even those along just for the ride found plenty of entertainment: Washing down applesauce cookies with apple cider and lemonade, they watched their features projected on dithertizers and listened to strains of computer-generated rock music. One hitch was the combination of high temperatures and lack of air conditioning that eventually wilted a few people, not to mention Apples.

Company sales were high

As a selling show, Applefest sold, confirming that small computers and their trappings are big business. Hawking equal mixtures of practicality and whimsy for Apple users, vendors lured in people with creative teasers and then offered discounts that were hard to pass up. The public's enthusiasm for the products on hand translated into concrete sales to fill company coffers and to put smiles on exhibitors' faces.

Hardware and software for every conceivable purpose were shown, along with cases to carry them, paper products to use with them, publications to instruct about them, catalogues to order them, and services to enhance them. (For a detailed report on offerings, see "Notes from the Computer Resource Center", page 6.)

Retail stores cleaned up on sales. By Sunday's end, one small store reported \$37,000 worth of business. Another larger vendor experienced such booming business in its three booths that it kept a truck filled with merchandise outside the door to periodically replenish its stock.

"This show is the single most important thing I've done for a long time," stated one vendor. "It exceeded my expectations." An exhibitor from another company that didn't have much stock on hand to sell at the show added, "Applefest is almost too good; we'll have too much work to do (filling orders) when we get back home. We almost didn't come because we weren't ready but now are so glad we did."

Other exhibitors that had no products as such to sell nonetheless were more than satisfied with the number of customer and dealer contacts they made.

Apple itself made a considerable commitment in time and manpower to the show. It brought its own booth which, positioned near the entrance, set the stage for those entering the show. Apple also offered a hands-on room and multi-media presentation, both of which drew large numbers of the skilled and the curious. Apple's stars, Jobs and Wozniak, dominated each day's seminars with their narratives of how Apple began and of

what lies in store for the future.

How Applefest grew

For all its success, Applefest had modest beginnings. According to BCS's Jonathan Rotenberg, the show originally was conceived a year ago as a small project for the Apple/Boston user group—as a kind of get-together for members. The economics of scale involved in doing a larger event, plus the fact that the market seemed ripe for such a show, contributed the impetus for the final BCS decision to enlarge Applefest's scope. Originally planned as a one-time event, the show's success may give BCS new avenues of growth to consider.

The ultimate indicator of Applefest's success came Sunday night as exhibitors packed up and dismantled their booths. Many wanted to sign up on the spot and leave deposits to insure booth space next year—for by then there was an unspoken assumption that there would be a next year for Applefest '82. So great were one company's profits, it projected it would take at least six, and maybe twelve, booths the next time around. Inquiries came as well from those who hadn't exhibited this year. Such concrete displays of faith seemed to confirm Applefest's drawing power and its promise for the future. □