



The Perfect Thing: How the iPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture, and Coolness

Steven Levy

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On October 23, 2001, Apple Computer, a company known for its chic, cutting-edge technology -- if not necessarily for its dominant market share -- launched a product with an enticing promise: You can carry an entire music collection in your pocket. It was called the iPod. What happened next exceeded the company's wildest dreams. Over 50 million people have inserted the device's distinctive white buds into their ears, and the iPod has become a global obsession. "The Perfect Thing" is the definitive account, from design and marketing to startling impact, of Apple's iPod, the signature device of our young century. Besides being one of the most successful consumer products in decades, the iPod has changed our behavior and even our society. It has transformed Apple from a computer company into a consumer electronics giant. It has remolded the music business, altering not only the means of distribution but even the ways in which people enjoy and think about music. Its ubiquity and its universally acknowledged coolness have made it a symbol for the digital age itself, with commentators remarking on "the iPod generation." Now the iPod is beginning to transform the broadcast industry, too, as podcasting becomes a way to access radio and television programming. Meanwhile millions of Podheads obsess about their gizmo, reveling in the personal soundtrack it offers them, basking in the social cachet it lends them, even wondering whether the device itself has its own musical preferences. Steven Levy, the chief technology correspondent for "Newsweek" magazine and a longtime Apple watcher, is the ideal writer to tell the iPod's tale. He has had access to all the key players in the iPod story, including Steve Jobs, Apple's charismatic cofounder and CEO, whom Levy has known for over twenty years. Detailing for the first time the complete story of the creation of the iPod, Levy explains why Apple succeeded brilliantly with its version of the MP3 player when other companies didn't get it right, and how Jobs was able to convince the bosses at the big record labels to license their music for Apple's groundbreaking iTunes Store. (We even learn why the iPod is white.) Besides his inside view of Apple, Levy draws on his experiences covering Napster and attending Supreme Court arguments on copyright (as well as his own travels on the iPod's click wheel) to address all of the fascinating issues -- technical, legal, social, and musical -- that the iPod raises. Borrowing one of the definitive qualities of the iPod itself, "The Perfect Thing" shuffles the book format. Each chapter of this book was written to stand on its own, a deeply researched, wittily observed take on a different aspect of the iPod. The sequence of the chapters in the book has been shuffled in different copies, with only the opening and concluding sections excepted. "Shuffle" is a hallmark of the digital age -- and "The Perfect Thing," via sharp, insightful reporting, is the perfect guide to the deceptively diminutive gadget embodying our era.

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