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Steve Wozniak discusses his dependency on a MacBook Pro and his affinity for transistor radios



by Billy Steele | @wmsteele | 1 year ago

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Every week, a new and interesting human being tackles our decidedly geeky take on the Proustian Q&A. This is the [Engadget Questionnaire](#).

Steve Wozniak pioneered the personal computing industry with the Apple I and II. In a throwback to our 31st issue of [Distro](#), we'll take a very [thorough](#) look at the mind and habits of the Woz. Spoiler alert: he has a thing for the bitten fruit.

What gadget do you depend on most?

Macbook Pro 17-inch for most of my email, including web links and video links.



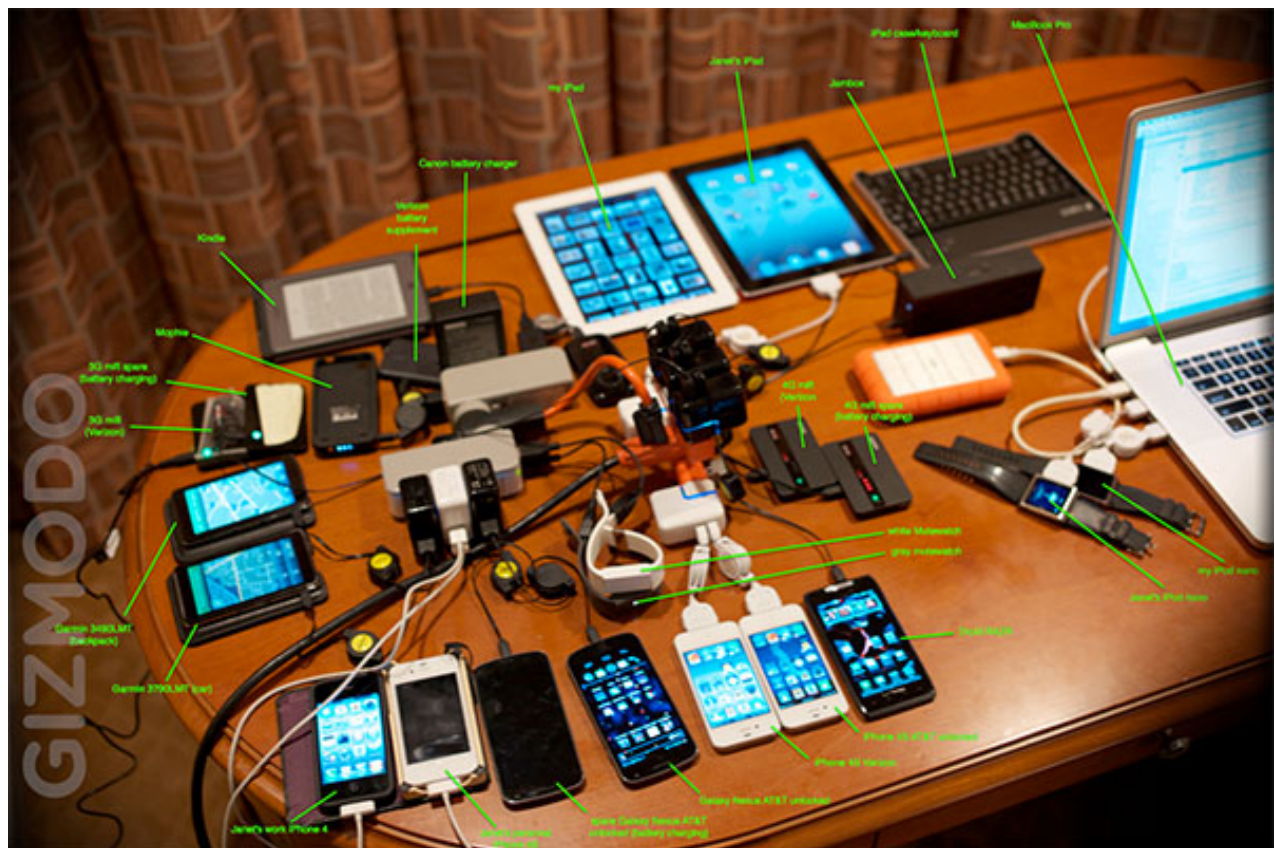
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I have a calendar life that is complicated, so I use BusyCal and Google Calendar. I keep two different browsers open to avoid some confusion. I enter calendar dates with time zones, which I can't do on my iPhone. I watch DVD's since I don't have broad-band where I live. I record videos for promotions and interviews and it's handy to have the notes in front of me on the screen. I do a lot of Skype interviews and it's handy to see notes for those as well. I often copy from one source (web page maybe) to an email I'm composing.

I read Google news and use NetNewsWire to keep up with general and tech news. I use it when I travel for Slingbox. I'm better on the large keyboard. The larger screen is great for maps and photo viewing. I also keep tons of music and movies on the SSD, although the smaller size cramps me over a full HD. I often take notes regarding business talks and paste them into TextEdit docs to view during phone calls. These calls I usually make with my iPhone. I use FileChute to upload files that I want to distribute but which are too large for email. I use Dropbox to share with my iPhones. I'm always backed up with my home Time Capsule. I write AppleScripts, too.

Most of my photos I collect with iPhoto but I use Aperture for my finer photos, mostly from my Leica M9. I keep reminder links and files on my desktop and I have categories (folders) in my dock for things like "fun relief" and "important". I keep folders on my desktop for things like the songs I'm currently attracted to and upcoming speech events. I also keep many notes of info I need all the time, like home IP numbers and game scores, in Stickies, but I close Stickies to keep things neater. I also have a few games in my dock for quick access.

If you read this you'll see why my life has many aspects that don't translate well to an iPad or iPhone as my primary gadget.



Which do you look back on most fondly?

My first transistor radio was the heart of my gadget love today. It fit in my hand and brought me a world of music 24 / 7. Even while I slept it was right there beside me playing. The ham radio transmitter and receiver I built when I was 10 was a very important gadget. I learned a lot of radio theory and [about] electronics and construction of electronic devices that would stick for life. I didn't know the word 'gadget' but I would always be in love with devices that were interactive, where you turned dials and the device responds. I wouldn't say that my first 4-function calculator was a favorite gadget but my HP-35 scientific calculator certainly was. I guess before that you'd call my slide rule a gadget.

"After my third year of college, I built a bunch of gadgets for myself and they were all favorites."

I had a tube radio that brought the early days of FM to me in my bedroom at home. Eventually, in my own apartment, I would have a Pioneer 828 Receiver that was the heart of my music life. I had a turntable, too, but I got a reel- to-reel tape recorder (GE) at a local discount store and it was a very unusual gadget for 1970. I recorded all my Dylan albums and others onto tape this way.

After my third year of college, I built a bunch of gadgets for myself and they were all favorites.

One was a *Pong* game that worked with the TV in my apartment. I would have called the *Breakout* game that I designed for Atari a favorite gadget but they got the prototype and I don't even think I kept a schematic. My TV terminal to access computers on the ARPANET over modems was a great gadget

and it got a lot of attention. Needless to say, the Apple I and Apple II were useful and fun gadgets.



After that I'd say that my first Navigation system (an Alpine unit in my Hummer) was a great gadget and life would never be the same. The Apple IIc was my favorite Apple II. I actually liked the Portable Macintosh. Possibly my favorite Macintosh ever was the Duo, although I very much like the current MacBook Pros.

Over the years I had pocket TVs and small, battery-operated video tape players for movies. I can't pinpoint the models now. I had many very thin CD players and recording Walkmen -- usually such gadgets were Sony branded.

Add to this list every iPod ever made (and every size), every iPhone and the iPads.

My first camera was a Kodak Brownie camera. I had too many important cameras in my life to detail them all here. Some early Casio PHD (Push Here Dummy) cameras were so thin I loved them and recommended them. I liked the Sony cameras with internal zoom. I've had a lot of analog and digital DSL cameras but not since the Canon D5 Mk II. Plus, I dearly treasure my recent Leica M9-P camera.

I had the Motorola 'brick' cell phone and then moved on with all the subsequent Motorola advances... Star TAC, Elite, etc. I probably used my RAZR the longest of any phone. In later digital phone days I liked my Nokia 8890 very much. When the iPhone came out, I'd carry the iPhone for internet stuff and the RAZR for phone calls, for quite a while.

The Segway is a great gadget that I haven't had to move on from, in all the time since it first came out.

"My first camera was a Kodak Brownie camera. I had too many important cameras in my life to detail them all here."

I had a couple of very nice scanners that I used to listen to analog cell phone calls. One was something like RC-1 and it fit in your palm. The other had a name like AOR 900 or something. I'd have to go out to the garage to get the exact models. I used these quite a bit and have good stories as to what I heard.

I could add many to this list.

For each of these, and many more, I have many specific memories of carrying them around and showing them off and using them in ways that meant a lot to me.

I'm sure that I've missed others.

Which company does the most to push the industry?

You have to be kidding. Apple leads the way. A bunch of companies could be like an ocean of products with waves and ripples. But Apple is an Everest. The day Apple introduces a new product you know it's not the same as before and you know it's the future for everyone.

What is your operating system of choice?

OS X. We had something similar in the LISA but at the wrong point in time, cost-wise. I never got comfortable when I had to use Windows. As for mobile devices, I prefer iOS. It's limited in some ways but that can be an advantage for many of us.

What are your favorite gadget names?

I'm not coming up with a good answer to this one. Apple has to be first. Newton was great too. iRobot isn't bad. Google is another great name. I have loved the name "Mophie" as well. MiFi isn't bad.

What are your least favorite?

Boring technical names, like ThinkPad xxxx. For things like cameras there are never enough names so they mostly have boring numbers.

"For things like cameras there are never enough names so they mostly have boring numbers."

Which app do you depend on most?

Mail. I wish that Eudora, the unsupported original Eudora, would run under Lion. It made my life much easier and better.

What traits do you most deplore in a smartphone?

Lousy sound quality, even for voice. The iPhone is the best that I've had, by far.

When battery life is poor. Hard to truly multitask while on a call without a second phone. Navigating

web pages can be frustrating on a small screen. Accidentally touching the screen can be disastrous on occasion.

I don't like running an app to take a photo. More and more apps and features require internet connection and servers [that are] not overburdened.

When servers are down, the messaging is all wrong, causing you to take unneeded actions like resetting accounts. Printing limitations.

Which do you most admire?

Slimness, single-handed usability, hands-free links to cars, use of camera in apps for things like QR codes and Google Goggles, phone locating services, NFC payment systems with the ability to put funds on NFC via internet rather than ATM, syncing with computer, texting, VoIP apps like Line2 and Skype, Sling Player apps, radio apps, Sirius-XM app, voice recording for reminders, photos and movie taking.

What is your idea of the perfect device?

Hard to say. Best features of all the best gadgets plus a voice recognition system that really understands me and what I want, no matter how I say it. It returns answers, rather than links to sites that may not even have the answer I want. It would 'see' me with video and gauge other things about what I'm saying or doing. It would know me as well as any best friend and always know what to say and how to say it to me. I would want to give up on human friends.

What is your earliest gadget memory?

Transistor radio, about 1958.

What technological advancement do you most admire?

The transistor or the planar process for making chips. That's technology at the component level. At the device level, I'd say the iPhone is the best current one, although the Apple II is close (taking into account when it was).

Which do you most despise?

Moving to the cloud too fast... you don't own anything out there. You aren't assured that what works today will even be there tomorrow. Things that used to be built into my iPhone now fail because the cloud is 'down.'

I despised my HTC Thunderbolt phone greatly. I hated the Sense UI and the battery would often go down in one hour.

I also despise email because I get too much for my open policies. International cellular data is very dangerous. I had a \$7,000 bill once after half a day in Germany. I had a \$16,000 bill after a day in Moscow with my iPhone in my pocket the entire time except maybe a couple of Foursquare check-

ins. (AT&T has no coverage of Russia on any international data plans and if your iPhone is locked to AT&T, you can forget about a local SIM card.)

"I despised my HTC Thunderbolt phone greatly. I hated the Sense UI and the battery would often go down in one hour."

What fault are you most tolerant of in a gadget?

Color? Screen quality? Sound quality?

Which are you most intolerant of?

Every time you do something that would seem to be the right thing based on other parts of life, but it does the wrong thing. Battery running out too fast. Apps quitting after working for a while to get data entered correctly. Something that works in one mode fails in another (Siri and hands-free connection). Too many to list here.

When has your smartphone been of the most help?

Travel -- keeping up with flight info, checking tip rules for a country, looking for concerts in a city, notifying friends, photo memories, trading contact info, etc.

What device do you covet most?

iPhone 4S unlocked. Beautiful. Easy to manage. Just right in so many ways.

If you could change one thing about your phone what would it be?

Built-in auto navigation.

What does being connected mean to you?

Not as much as to many. I don't use my mobile devices much while walking around. I save computer time for my computer. I don't like my iPhone to take me from the friends I'm with. Hotel internet is so unreliable and slow that I carry many MiFis and mobile hotspot phones though, so in that way my phones are a big part of my connectivity.

When are you least likely to reply to an email?

When I'm busy and it requires a long answer.

When did you last disconnect?

Right now I fear disconnecting from the internet but in the late 90's I took a three-week cruise in the South Pacific with no phone or internet service. I had other priorities and survived. It was a very pleasant time.

SOURCE: Distro Issue 31

TAGS: apple, distro, EngadgetQuestionnaire, interview, QandA, questionnaire, SteveWozniak