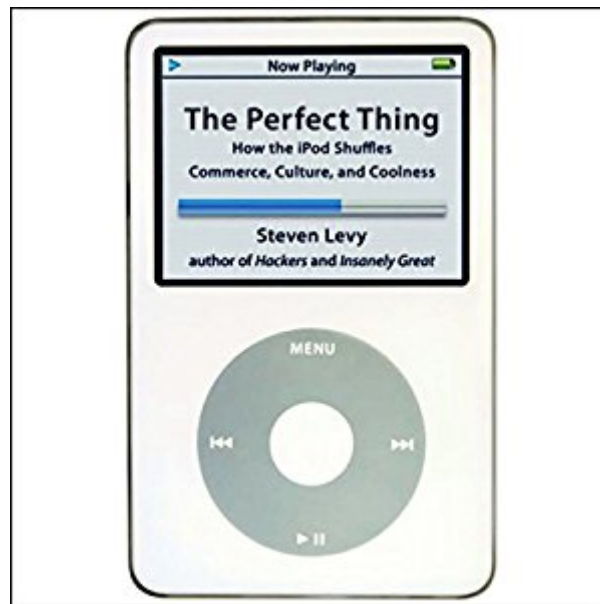


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The Perfect Thing: How The iPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture, And Coolness



Synopsis

The iPod has become a full-blown cultural phenomenon, giving us a new vocabulary (we shuffle our iTunes on our nanos), revolutionizing the way we experience music and radio through the invention of podcasting, opening up new outlets for video, and challenging the traditional music industry as never before. The design itself has become iconic: there is even a shade of white now called iPod White. Steven Levy has had rare access to everyone at Apple who was involved in creating the iPod -- including Steve Jobs, Apple's charismatic cofounder and CEO, whom he has known for over twenty years. In telling the story behind the iPod, Levy explains how it went from the drawing board to global sensation. He also examines how this deceptively diminutive gadget raises a host of new technical, legal, social, and musical questions (including the all-important use of one's playlist as an indicator of coolness), and writes about where the iPhenomenon might go next in his new Afterword. Sharp and insightful, *The Perfect Thing* is part history and part homage to the device that we can't live without. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 4 hours and 56 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Abridged

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio

Audible.com Release Date: October 20, 2006

Language: English

ASIN: B000KLPQ94

Best Sellers Rank: #106 in Books > Computers & Technology > Hardware & DIY > Peripherals
#280 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Computers #999 in Books > Business & Money > Biography & History > Company Profiles

Customer Reviews

I get an avalanche of technology-related books mailed to me, and it's rare when I actually try to read one. It's even rarer for me to read it all the way through with a smile pasted on my face the entire time. But that's what happened as I read Steven Levy's "The Perfect Thing." As someone who has covered the iPod (and, indeed, was at the iPod launch event in Cupertino in 2001), it was great to see Levy's mixture of iPod history with an analysis of how the iPod (and similar products, like the Walkman) have impacted our lives and the world of popular culture. Levy's book is never dry, and

combines a historical account of the creation of the 21st century's first iconic product with a real attempt to analyze what makes the iPod both ubiquitous and cool. Whether you're a fan of Apple's product-creation geniuses, or just of the "perfect storm" of technology that created this particular Perfect Thing, Steven Levy's book is a fun, informative, and thought-provoking analysis of the biggest technological innovation of the past five years.

Steven Levy has written an excellent book that I didn't want to put down. It not only traces the development of the iPod over the last five years, but the book is filled with independent chapters that can be, and in fact should be, read in any order. Indeed, when looking at multiple copies of this book, you'll find only chapter 1 is in the same place--other chapters are "shuffled" and appear in different orders. I found myself enjoying this feature as much as the iPod--first I read about Podcasts, then Downloading, then how the iPod remains so "cool" for such a wide range of people. I chose to read this book not only because of how amazed I am at how people (including my teenaged kids) love their iPods so much, but also because I'm curious about the future of music as we know it, the disappearance of the CD and along with it the album cover and lyric booklet, and the explosion of songs available for purchase through the iTunes store. The writing in this book is terrific--informative and provocative. I highly recommend it!

This book is out of date, but it still tells the story of the iPod, which really is fascinating. It is interesting also because it was written before the iPhone or I-touch was even out. Steve Levy obviously had some great connections to put together this story. Run and interesting read.

I have had portable MP3 players longer than most people I know (first one: Diamond Rio 500), without ever owning an iPod (current model: Sansa e260, Hall of Fame: Rio Karma). I have never owned a Mac. While I have a copy of iTunes on my Windows Media Center machine, I don't use it much (lately I've been using URGE To Go). But Steven Levy is a fine writer with a lot of connections and a personal history to the subject matter of this book. And so, it's a very good book, even though I felt like an outsider as I read it (perhaps ironically, I read it on my Treo). As many have noted, it's a bit too pro-Apple/Jobs, and too often Levy slides through with the easy "yes, others were there first, but iPods are cooler" comments. But the overall result is excellent. Since the chapters are standalones, you'll like some better than you'll like others, depending on your interests. My favorite chapter was on shuffle play, which combines history, science, and philosophy in equal parts. (Just remember, correlation doesn't equal causation.)

Other reviewers have covered the contents of this book pretty well. I just read it (April 2009), and wanted to offer two criticisms from a 2009 perspective:1. As you would expect from a book published in 2006, there is no mention of the iPhone or iPod Touch, which were introduced in Summer 2007. Unfortunately for this book, the iPhone and Touch rather masterfully complete the iPod family, combining playback with communication and portable web browsing. I haven't yet seen an industry observer who understood how well Apple has rounded out their iPod product line with the Touch (touch control, big screen, WiFi, browsing, music, App Store) and iPhone (all that plus phone).2. Although he acknowledges the depth, simplicity and market leadership of iTunes, Levy treats iTunes as an iPod feature. But without iTunes, iPod is just a deluxe, expensive MP3 player, much like the Mac is a deluxe, expensive computer. iTunes is why iPod has 70% market share in MP3 players: iPod + iTunes is a whole product, with enjoyable music shopping and simple downloads. Creative and Microsoft and others have copied and continue to copy iPod, but nobody else has come close to the whole product.Summary: enjoyable read, but dated and getting less comprehensive by the day.

I had no idea how much fun this book would be. I expected to learn how the iPod was developed, and I did. I expected to read about how cool the iPod is, and I did. I expected to read about the way the iPod changed both Apple and the music industry, and I did.I did not expect to laugh out loud every few minutes, but I did. Steven Levy is a great writer - his knowledge of Apple combined with his knowledge of popular music makes the book great fun to read. Levy is simply an excellent writer, writing about an excellent product.As a bonus, this is a valuable book to read if you design products of any kind, because it provides insights into how exceptional products are created - i.e., fanatical attention to detail, and an inner drive to make not just a good product, but a great one.If you like music and technology, I guarantee you will enjoy this book. Of course, I own a couple of iPods, so I am biased. If you own a Zune, you may disagree. But even Zune owners might find it interesting to see how great products are designed.

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