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Steve Jobs: Get Rid of the Crappy Stuff

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[Apple](#) recently passed [Google](#) as the most valuable brand in the world. It's extraordinary to think that the world's top brand has a product portfolio that could fit on a small table. Of course that's part of the reason why Apple is so successful—

its relentless focus on creating a small number of simple and elegant products. When I was conducting the research for my book, *The Innovation Secrets of [Steve Jobs](#)*, I came across one story that provides a glimpse into how Steve Jobs and the company he co-founded has achieved its stunning success. The story comes to us courtesy of [Nike](#) CEO, Mark Parker. He said shortly after becoming CEO, he talked to Steve Jobs on the phone.

"Do you have any advice?" Parker asked Jobs. "Well, just one thing," said Jobs. "Nike makes some of the best products in the world. Products



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that you lust after. But you also make a lot of crap. Just get rid of the crappy stuff and focus on the good stuff.” Parker said Jobs paused and Parker filled the quiet with a chuckle. But Jobs didn’t laugh. He was serious. “He was absolutely right,” said Parker. “We had to edit.”

Parker used the word ‘edit’ not in a design sense but in the context of making business decisions. Editing also leads to great product designs and effective communications. According to Steve Jobs, “People think focus means saying yes to the thing you’ve got to focus on. But that’s not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I’m actually as proud of the things we haven’t done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying ‘no’ to 1,000 things.”

In product design, business strategy, and yes, communications and presentations, subtraction often adds value. In October 2008, Apple introduced its next-generation MacBook laptop computer. Apple design guru, Jonathan Ive, told the audience that Apple’s new “aluminum unibody enclosure” eliminated 60 percent of the computer’s major structural parts. Reducing the number of parts naturally made the computer thinner. Contrary to what you’d expect, eliminating parts also made it more rigid and robust — the computer was stronger. According to Ive, “We are absolutely consumed by trying to develop a solution that is very simple, because as physical beings we understand clarity.”

Since my book came out I often get the question, “Can anyone innovate like Apple?” The simple answer: While anyone can learn the principles that drive Apple’s innovation, few businesses have the courage to do so. It takes courage to reduce the number of products a company offers from 350 to 10, as Jobs did in 1998. It takes courage to remove a keyboard from the face of a smartphone and replace those buttons with a giant screen, as Jobs did with the iPhone. It takes courage to eliminate code from an operating system to make it more stable and reliable, as Apple did with Snow Leopard. It takes courage to feature just one product on the home page of a Web site as Apple does with each new major product launch. It takes courage to make a product like the iPad that is so simple a child can use it. And it takes courage to eliminate all of the words on a PowerPoint slide except one, as Steve Jobs often does in a presentation.

Aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry could have been summing up the Apple philosophy when he said, “A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.” Your customers demand simplicity and simplicity requires that you eliminate anything that clutters the user experience — whether it be in product design, Web site navigation, marketing and advertising materials and presentation slides. Say “no” more often than “yes.” Oh, and get rid of the crappy stuff.

[Carmine Gallo](#) is a media training and communications coach for the world’s most admired brands. He is a popular keynote speaker and author of several books including the bestsellers, [The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#), [The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#), and [Fire Them Up! 7 Simple Secrets of Inspiring Leaders](#). Follow him on Twitter: [carminegallo](#)

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ABOUT ME

Carmine Gallo is the communications coach for the world’s most admired brands. He transforms executives into extraordinary presenters—working directly with the companies that touch your life every day. A former anchor and correspondent for CNN and CBS, Gallo works directly with the world’s top business leaders to help them craft compelling messages, tell inspiring stories and share their innovative ideas with a global audience. Gallo has addressed executives at Intel, Cisco, Google, Medtronic, Disney, The Four Seasons, SAP, Pfizer, Linked In, Chevron, SanDisk, Univision, Edmunds.com, and many other global brands. Gallo is also a popular keynote speaker whose customized multimedia presentations are a hit with audiences around the world.

Gallo writes leadership and communications columns for several media outlets including Forbes.com (My Communications Coach) Gallo has also written several bestselling and award-winning books including *The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs* which is the winner of an Axiom award for one of the top three best business books of 2011. *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* has become an international bestseller and has been translated into 14 languages. Gallo’s next book, *The Power of Foursquare*, reveals how innovative businesses around the world are leveraging new mobile marketing tools to attract new customers, engage current customers, and extend their brand story to an entirely new audience of consumers.

Gallo has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Success Magazine* and on *CNBC*. Gallo has also been asked to give presentations to marketing and MBA students at Stanford, UCLA, and UC Berkeley. He graduated with honors from

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MARK HUGHES
Reel Estate

This is all a great read, but I especially commend the paragraph themed "it takes courage." That paragraph alone says everything about Jobs and Apple, to me. And it's a pretty perfectly written paragraph. That's the kind of thematic clarity I strive for in my screenwriting, actually, and this article really resonates with me both in terms of the subject matter and the structure of the article itself. Very nice!

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