DEBUGGING VELOCITY

SHIP NEW SOFTWARE
PRODUCTS FASTER

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Debugging Velocity

Ship new software products faster

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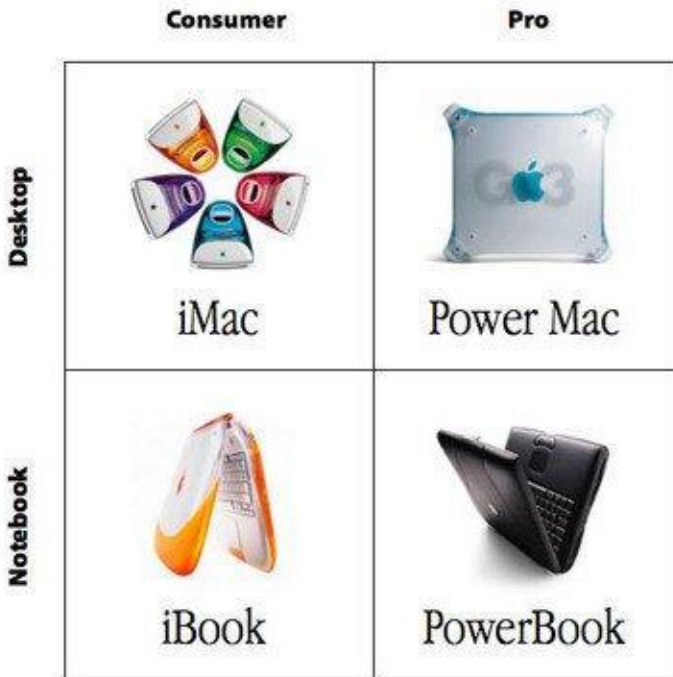# The one thing Steve Jobs did that turned around Apple

After a nasty battle with Apple shareholders, Steve Jobs, then the original founding CEO, was ousted. He went on to create NeXt computers (later acquired by Disney). In the meantime, Apple drifted as a company. It proliferated product lines. Lost focus. And the share price entered a death spiral phase. A few years later in 1997, he was recruited back to save the company from very poor public share price performance.

"Saint Steve" at Macworld 1998

When we got to the company a year ago, there were a lot of products. There were 15 product platforms and a zillion variants of each one. I couldn't even figure this out myself. After about three weeks. I said, "how are we gonna explain this to others, when we don't even know which products to recommend to our friends?"

In this keynote at 1998 Macworld, he announced early successes, such as a 3rd consecutive profitable quarter. In my opinion, one of the most powerful parts of his talk was the following grid:
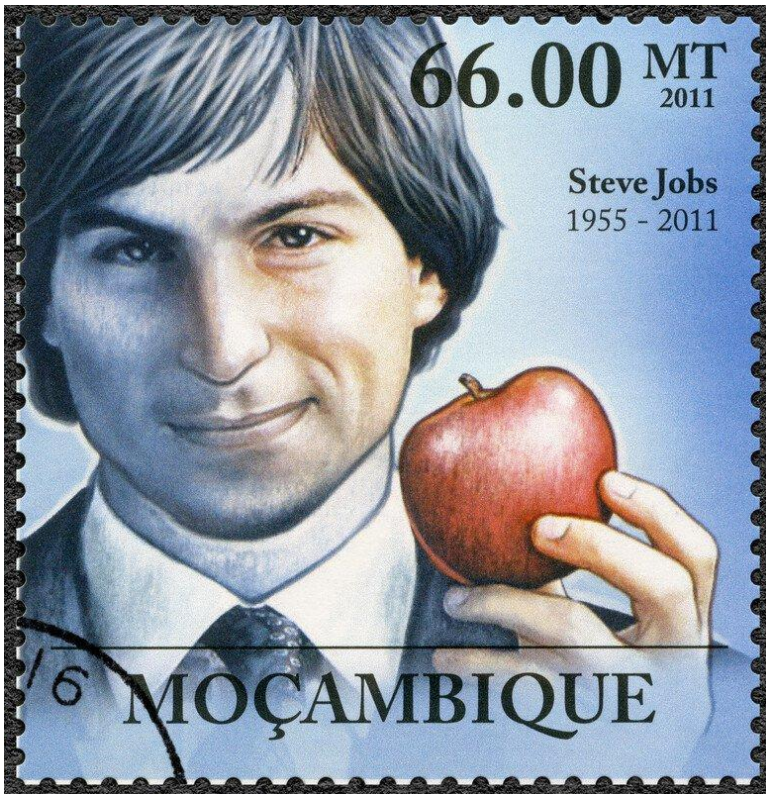
The 4 apple quadrants, source: Apple

In effect, after a strategic review of all 15+ product lines, Jobs decided that these four were the only products worth focusing on. Consumer was aimed at consumers and education. Pro was aimed at publishing and design. Everything else was shut down. Here was his rationale:

As a matter of fact, if we only get four, we could put the A-Team on every single one of them. And if we only have four, **we could turn them all every nine months instead of every 18 months.** And if we only had, four we could be working on the next generation or two of each one, as we're introducing the first generation. So that's what we decided to do: to focus on four great products. And the first one that we introduced of course was the Desktop

Pro product.

Notice that *the main practical reason Steve Jobs cited for this change is the reduced product release time, or cycle time. Or low velocity in agile terms.* He could release a lot of resources. Focus them just on these 4 great products. And get out of the bureaucratic quagmire that was holding the company back.

This was the kind of "zero-based thinking" decision that a hired gun CEO would be afraid to make, but a founding CEO could find the courage to do. To implement a company redesign and rethinking from first principles, rather than just tinkering around the edges. Steve Jobs knew

what life before Apple was like, because he was there. And he already had a successful "go" at building the company. So it didn't take much to identify that the company needed to be slimmed down and focussed in order to become stronger.

Of course, there was uproar amongst developers with vested interests in existing product lines. To a lesser extent, among clients of the cancelled products. But this marked the beginning of Apple's long climb to a corporate icon and stock market darling.