

Why Steve Jobs Would Have Wanted You To Go To NAMM

Steve Jobs deserves as much credit as anyone for creating the wired world we inhabit today. With the Macintosh, he transformed the computer from an industrial device to a mass market product, paving the way for the internet. His iPod and iTunes store re-ordered the way music was bought and experienced, the iPhone made it possible to access the internet anywhere, and with the iPad he created the perfect device for navigating the web's nearly infinite content. While he was one of the first to grasp the potential of the internet, he also realized its limitations.

That's why, according to Walter Jacobsen's recent biography, *Jobs*, in the last decade of his life he poured an incredible amount of time and energy into the design and layout of both the Apple and Pixar headquarters buildings. Jobs felt that nearly all of the great ideas at Apple were the byproduct of face-to-face encounters and spontaneous meetings, and that the future of his company depended on creating a workspace that encouraged employees to leave their cubicles and mingle with their co-workers. A staff that spent most of its time in solitude, staring at a flat screen display, was a recipe for stagnation and conformity. As he put it, "magic can occur" when people from different departments come together in a chance encounter, or the familiarity that comes from frequent casual meetings blossoms into a significant collaboration. "Breaking down barriers between people," he said, "encourages collaboration and creativity."

The computer pioneer's observations about the ideal corporate campus seem equally applicable to the fast-approaching NAMM show, set for January 23-26 at the Anaheim Convention Center. As an industry comprising mostly small businesses—even the industry giants are relatively small in the larger scheme of things—we are more likely than others to get stuck in a daily routine. We go to the store or office every day, talk to the same circle of people, perform a lot of the same tasks, and in many cases, operate on auto pilot. NAMM represents one of the few times during the year when you can break that routine. With nearly 100,000 visitors crowding the aisles and 1,800 exhibitors, the show is nothing if not an endless series of casual meetings and chance encounters.

And as Jobs observed, this chaotic coming together routinely produces "magic."

Tangible evidence of this "magic" can be found in the many interviews we have conducted with manufacturers and retailers over the past 12 decades. Space precludes a full recounting here, but it's amazing how many market-expanding products and successful business ventures were sparked by some completely random NAMM experience. The keyboard synthesizer, effects pedals, and MIDI are a few of the more prominent examples. On a smaller scale, though, NAMM meetings have also led to countless hirings, successful partnerships, new store openings, line extensions, and business-building collaboration. And based on the commentary in our columns, nearly all of these positive developments were completely unforeseen.

As adherents to the Yogi Berra school of forecasting—"making predictions is hard, especially about the future!"—we have no particular insights into what will take place at NAMM 2014. However, it's not much of a stretch to say that with 100,000 people anxiously looking for opportunity under a single roof, some interesting stuff is going to happen. And if you're there, prowling the show floor, it could happen to you. Don't take our word for it, listen to Steve Jobs, one of the great innovators of the past century. To stick to your cubicle is to invite stagnation. Getting out in the world, interacting with your peers, is the pathway forward. Don't miss out on a potentially magic moment. Make sure to attend the NAMM show.



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