

Computing for Innovation:  
How Apple and Microsoft Revolutionized the PC Industry

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Individual Website

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## Process Paper

Historians claim “hindsight is twenty-twenty,” but they fail to define the point in time when one develops hindsight of a historical event. This fact inspired me to search for a more recent and relevant history topic. When I learned the National History Day topic was *Breaking Barriers*, I asked myself, what broken barrier has affected my generation? As a generation shrouded with technology (smartphones, social media, television streaming, and the internet to name a few), I immediately knew I wanted to focus on the development of the personal computer (PC). After all, it was the personal computer that cleared the way for smartphones and the internet by breaking the barrier between digital technology and the general consumer market.

I began my research by identifying the most helpful secondary history books on the topic and finding significant primary sources. I found books through my local library and the web, and most of my primary sources came from educational databases. *The Computer History Museum* website contained an extensive archive of original photographs and advertisements of early personal computers. Andy Hertzfeld’s book *Revolution in the Valley* also served as an excellent primary source for researching the history of Apple Inc. With these resources, I was able to zero in on the innovations of Microsoft Corporation and Apple Inc. in the emerging PC industry.

I chose to do a website because I had created a website for last year’s National History Day Project, so I had experience with the project format and knew I would enjoy making another website. With my experience from last year, I knew to format my research in sections that could form a webpage, emphasizing the evolution of personal computers through images, advertisements, and quotes. The irony of creating a website on the development of Microsoft and Apple Inc., while using Microsoft Office on my Apple laptop, was charming and appropriate.

While civil rights movements and scientific breakthroughs are more commonly acquainted with breaking barriers, I believe the personal computer is an often overlooked, but groundbreaking, invention. Niel Postman, author of the critically acclaimed social commentary, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, disregarded the computer as an overrated piece of technology because in the early 1980s, he could not imagine the practical potential of such a complex and expensive machine. The first generation of computers was unmanageable and alien to the common man. However, companies like Microsoft and Apple Inc. challenged the preconceived notions of computers and made the same technology that put man on the moon accessible to the average citizen. These innovators in the PC industry revolutionized business, social communication, education, and healthcare. Before the PC, businesses kept paper records and sent documents via mail services, students had to travel to libraries for information, and medical records had to be dug out of boxes. Not only have computers digitalized materials, but they have become increasingly affordable and versatile, reducing the educational divide in society and promoting creative mediums.