

Steve Jobs vs Bill Gates on Stage

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2021-10-22

I have had the chance to watch live keynotes by Bill Gates and Steve Jobs; their styles couldn't have been more different. Here's some memories from both. Of course I did not meet them in person, this is just my experience as another attendee in the room.

Bill Gates

I saw Bill Gates in person at the opening keynote of the Office System Developers Conference in 2006, in the Microsoft campus in Redmond, not far from Seattle. You can read the whole speech online.

His keynote was, by the way, presented by Steven Sinofsky himself. If you do not know who he is, you should read his excellent memories of his time at Microsoft; it's an outstanding series with lots of anecdotes about the "golden age" of Microsoft at the beginning of the 1990s.

This was shortly before Bill Gates' last day at Microsoft in January 2008, when he left the company to take care of this foundation.

The memory I have of that speech was that of a person deeply uncomfortable on stage. It really looked like Bill didn't want to be there, talking, at that moment. His mind was definitely somewhere else. His words sounded quite fake, dry, even dull. I remember I was at the second or third row from the front, and of course it was quite a moment to be there. It's not like one watches a historical figure like Bill Gates in person every day.

There's one quote that remember in particular, that made the whole room cough and shrug in discomfort:

We've got a new organization we're announcing called openXMLDeveloper.org. No organization is good unless you put the word "open" right at the front, so we've got it right out there. In fact, you know, these are three of my favorite words, "open," "XML" and "developer," and that's all in one organization.

This refers to the time when they announced the opening of the DOCX and XLSX formats. All in all, that conference in itself was quite forgettable. I

remember I was expecting to see .NET languages like C# to be finally available in Excel and Word, but nothing like that ever happened.

At that time I was already planning my migration out of the Microsoft galaxy. I was tired of the ecosystem, tired of good old Visual Basic, and of everything related to Microsoft.

Steve Jobs

I saw Steve Jobs on stage twice, during WWDC 2008, when he introduced the iPhone 3G (Engadget's live blog), and WWDC 2010, when it was the turn of the iPhone 4 (Engadget again). Both keynotes took place in the big room upstairs in the Moscone Center in San Francisco.

I don't think it is needed to say how different his style was from Bill Gates'. This was a completely different galaxy. Steve was able to actually make you feel like you had to have those things, that Apple was five years ahead from everything else in the whole world.

As you can see in the videos linked above, Steve was thin but not that much in 2008, but in 2010 his figure was shocking. He looked really thin and frail.

What I remember most from his 2010 keynote (aside from the whole Gizmodo affair) was when he wanted to demo something on the iPhone 4, but the wifi was jammed due to the interference generated by literally thousands of people blogging and tweeting with Mifi devices in the room.

After asking for a little help, he really got quite upset.

Now before I begin number 6, our guys were running like crazy backstage as you might imagine (laughter), and we figured out why my demo crashed. Because there are 570 wifi base stations operating in this room. OK? We can't deal with that. So, we have two choices. Either... I got some more demos that are really great that I'd like to show you, so we either turn off all the stuff, and we see the demos or we give up and I don't show you the demos. Would you like to see the demos or not? (Cheers) OK, so here's the deal; let's turn off the lights in the hall—several hundreds of these are Mifi devices by the way, so all you bloggers need to turn off your base stations, turn off your wifi, every notebook, I'd like you to put them down on the floor, and all of you, I'd like you to look around and police each other (laughter).

I wanted to see the demos, so I actually asked people around me to comply to his request, and of course I was met with angry looks, some expletive, and then nothing. Some did close their laptops, indeed, but not the majority.

Steve was a great speaker, he was able to drive around such a mess of a situation and deliver a great event. Not all speakers are able to do that.

You can watch the whole sequence in a video online, or read about it at a GigaOM article.