Apple iMac

(CPU+CRT) = iMac

Imagine the bevy of candy-colored, translucent iMacs bursting into the universe of drab, beige office machines in the late 1990s. The iMacs had a futuristic name, eye-catching design, and an eye-popping constellation of features.

There were some drawbacks. While the combination of machinery and display looked cool, it was hard to adjust in terms of position. The iMac's new circular Mouse was charming but also difficult to use. And the iMac was ahead of its time in providing a drive for CD-ROMs but none for floppy disks. Unquestionably, however, it had capacity, power, versatility — and a built-in modem. As its "i" signified, it was ready for the Internet revolution. One famous critic called the iMac "the Gold Standard for desktop computing."

The iMac was also attractively priced. Comparable desktop computers at that time cost around $999. The iMac cost $1,299, but it offered a great combination of computing capabilities and options, as well as its cool looks.

The result was a huge triumph for the iMac's designer, Jonathan Ive (b. 1967) and also for Steve Jobs (b. 1955), who masterminded this project. It earned Jobs the nickname, "the Comeback Kid." Jobs, of course, is the charismatic co-founder of Apple Computer. He left Apple not long after its initial successes in the 1980s. He went on to found NeXT Computer Inc. and to rebuild Pixar Animation Studios. But by 1997, Apple's own sales had been dismal for three years. Things had grown so bad that Jobs was invited back as "interim" CEO to reorganize the company. The iMac was the first new project under his direction. It was so successful that it made Apple a profitable company again.

According to Jobs, one iMac sold "every 15 seconds of every hour of every day of every week" of the entire year of 1998: 800,000 units in all. It did even better its second year out: by the end of 1999 the cumulative total was nearly two million units. It was by then the top-selling desktop computer.

In 2001, Apple unveiled a "sunflower" iMac with a flat-panel display.