



## TEXT SUPPORT

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In conversation with  
**Leander Kahney**

THE CULT  
OF THE IPOD

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**THE CULT OF IPOD BY LEANDER Kahney**, who is editor of *Wired News* ([www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)), is everything a great book should be. It is well written, filled with all the right information, a great balance of both substance and trivia, visually laid out in a way that captures the pop culture world he places the iPod in, and reinforced by great colour photos. It excites as it educates and encourages one to think about the ripple effect of this little device.

Apple Computer Inc. rung in approximately 100 iPod sales a minute in the 2005 holiday season. In your book you start by taking us back to the hype around the launch of the iPod and the tepid response by most journalists to Steve Jobs' dramatic unveiling. Why do you think most journalists failed to see

the enormous success this product was to unleash?

There were plenty of other MP3 players on the market, and even a couple that used hard drives. Many Apple-watchers had convinced themselves the company would re-introduce the Newton, the PDA it had discontinued a couple of years before, and so a simple MP3 player was a letdown. They'd been expecting a handheld computer instead.

Also, the market for legal music downloads hadn't been kickstarted yet. There was plenty of music online, but only on the file sharing networks (which is a large reason the iPod succeeded). There was a lot of skepticism digital music would ever turn into a business.

The iPod accessories market is red hot. What does it mean to have a technological product also become a fashionable accessory?

The iPod is what happens when a tech product turns into fashion accessory — it takes off like a rocket. The hottest accessory right now is a pair of white earbuds or a shiny little iPod nano.

FAST  
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**Favorite author:**

I have many, but at the moment it's Philip Pullman and Graham Greene.

**Favorite Web site:**

Robot Wisdom weblog  
(<http://robotwisdom.com/>)

**A good book...**

Should be utterly different the second time you read it.

**Guilty pleasure:**

Beef

There's been no other tech product like it in recent memory, except for the cellphone. The only danger of being fashionable is becoming unfashionable. Fashion is fickle, and the iPod may become passé.

You note that we are a society of multi-taskers. The iPod allows us to be mobile and engage in other activities for hours without having our music enjoyment interrupted. How though has it changed our relationship to music or the way in which we listen to music?

Music has been mobile and personal since the Walkman. But the iPod gives you instant access to an entire lifetime's worth of music, not just a CD or two. The iPod really brings a big music collection alive. Instead of CDs sitting unplayed on your shelves, you have instant access to the very first single you bought, as well as your latest obsession. Put it on random shuffle, and it will play music in surprising and sometimes delightful combinations. It mixes music in a way no human ever would, and sometimes it seems to be reading your mind by playing just the right song at just the right time.

Also, the iPod's size and convenience reawakens peoples' interest in music. I've heard it over and over: People say they've fallen in love with music again because of the iPod. Before people were too busy to listen to music — they'd turn on the radio in the car instead of lugging around a big case of CDs. But the iPod makes it easy to take a vast library of music with you, so you never get bored of what it has to offer.

Podcasts create strong communities of listeners but is there a down side to information being continually filtered and tailored by technology?

Well, some people argue there's a Balkanization of the audience. Instead of (everyone in the U.S.) tuning into the Presidents' fireside chats, we're all listening to our separate, niche shows. But I think that's the Internet's great strength. It connects people of like mind no matter where they are and creates communities that wouldn't form any other way. Instead of being the only person in town who uses a Mac, you can go on the Internet and be part of the global community of Mac users. And people still tune into mainstream pop culture — just look at American Idol.

Podcasting is really about convenience. It promises to be like Tivo for radio. Instead of being a slave to a broadcast schedule, you choose when to listen. It's also great for producers — they can push a constant stream of new content to subscribers, instead of waiting for the audience to come to them.



INSIDER

## Ruff times ahead for robot dog owners

CONSIDER IT A DARWINIAN SIGN OF THE TIMES. We're about to see a species become extinct through lack of technical support.

Sony's Aibo debuted in 1999. Although in original demos the robotic canine behaved as if under the influence of serious sedatives — doggie downers, if you will — in subsequent generations the behaviour improved to the point that it sparked a cult-like following.

(Appropos not much, I notice Sony never bothered with a robotic cat, probably since people feel alienated enough without living under the icy, indifferent stare of a lump of batteries and chips that lies around, licking its stomach, ignoring them entirely and destroying the furniture.)

Last month, the *New York Times* reported that Aibo was among 15 product categories that Sony will put to sleep. (Sorry, that's the *Times*' joke, not mine.) Remaining inventory will be sold off on Sony's Web site, and the company will offer technical support for another seven years.

Now, I'm a dog person in theory; that is, I like other people's dogs, as long as I don't have to follow them around with a plastic bag. So I should be the target market for Aibo — the demographic that appreciates a dog's companionship, but doesn't want to have to clean up more than a couple double-As left lying around the house.

Still, Aibo didn't even have theoretical appeal to me. Not so the legions who have purchased robodog. Sony has sold about 150,000 of the critters. Many owners have more than one. Some that the *Times* spoke to have such a population of cyber canines that they've got to be breaking some kind of animal control bylaw.

The *Times* spoke to one California man who has spent more than \$90,000 amassing a pack of 56 Aibos. A Chicago man quoted has 40. I nominate Rancho Cordoba, Calif., and the Windy City as hotspots that should be monitored closely for any evidence that a comic-book-scale über villain is about to loose his army of mechanical mutts, bringing civilization



to its knees and forcing us to do his bidding under the unblinking, watchful eyes of a battalion of snarling hounds who can recognize 1,000 words and show incorruptible loyalty to whoever changes the batteries.

I, for one, will be relieved when the warranty runs out on this... dammit, I've run out of synonyms for "pack," "robot" and "dog," so you're gonna have to finish this column yourselves.

Arf.

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