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Steve Ballmer
Microsoft

[A Case of Cool: Microsoft vs. Google vs. Apple](#)

In Steve Ballmer's perspective

Companies such as Microsoft, Google and Apple have built not only great products, but also great brands. In this regard, competition in terms of certain products, services, for the same audience or on certain markets has inevitably lead to brand-measuring contests. While on his visit in the UK at the beginning of the past month, Steve Ballmer, Microsoft chief executive officer, discussed the perception of Google and Apple being cooler than the Redmond company.

"Google have a really great product in search, no question about it," Ballmer revealed. "But I think we're coming on strong, we will challenge them, but the truth is that most of the other things that they've done, maybe Gmail a little bit, but most of everything else they've done has not gotten very popular. (...) [But] they haven't changed Google search in about seven years. The UI of search never changes. I think that Microsoft can get cool by changing it. Because, at the end of the day, if you think that you're going to look at ten blue links for the rest of your life, over my dead body, will that be the case. I think there are some better ways to do search than we're doing it today."

In terms of brand power, a study delivered by Interbrand in mid-September 2008 placed Microsoft on the third position, behind Coca Cola and IBM (just a peg down from the latter). Moreover, while Microsoft was going down a position, Google was jumping 10, from number 20 to 10, just between Disney and Mercedes. Apple was 25th.

"In the case of Apple you have to give them credit. They've done some really good products. They haven't done products for the masses. Apple sort of does products for the elite few, they make a lot of money off of that, and we're trying to have a product line that basically most people want, as opposed to most people who either don't want, or can't afford," Microsoft's CEO stated.

Ballmer emphasized that, in his perspective, business was less about brands and more about products. In this regard, Microsoft had to find an equilibrium with its products, meaning that Apple's elitist strategy would not apply, since the software giant was aiming to a broader audience.

"We're driving Windows mobile in a new direction [via Danger and the Sidekick]. A lot of what we're doing in search is designed on the basics we're as good as the competition." he commented. "But we've got some pretty killer ideas and how to flip it around and change the experience that I hope people will view as cool. You'll see the next version of Windows Live and what we're trying to do, kind of mixing some of our properties in a social networking form, I hope that helps drive cool. Some day we'll get Microsoft Surface down to a price that you can afford, that might drive cool..."

Underlining that the products drove the brand and not the other way around, Ballmer also indicated that, in the end, it was up to the consumer to decide what was cool and what was not. Still, even so, he revealed that Microsoft was committed to deliver a wide range of products tailored to different consumer groups.

"We have to make sure that Windows PCs [are cool], and that's not just our job, but also

