

Don't focus on the tools

To quote a long ago mentor, Gad Almaliah (of blessed memory), the computer is just a tool. You have to know how to use it. Gad was an artist and graphic designer who started his career when people still worked with blades and pens and glue. He learned the fundamentals of design and applied them whether using the old tools or the new.

You don't become a software engineer simply by owning a computer and you don't become a writer by having a pen. It sure helps to have the right tools, but you have to know how to use them to make them reach their full potential.

As you are probably aware, Steve Jobs died yesterday. I have seen a number of tributes to Jobs, focused on his stewardship of Apple and the Mac. Apparently, many people's lives have changed because they now have the iPad or the iPhone or a Mac on their desk. However, I have to say that no matter how snazzy and cool your Apple product may be, it is not going to make you creative or smart. A designer may be able to do more with Macs, but he or she must know the fundamentals and have a vision and creativity. The Mac, without a human operator who has the capacity to do with it what he or she dreams, is just a machine or tool.

Tools alone are not enough. You must develop strategies. You should encourage creativity and problem-solving. After all, the focus on the tool (for instance Twitter or a iPhone App) instead of the message will not help your communications campaign.