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Apples and oranges? What's the same and different at the Microsoft Store?

Posted By [eric.yates](#) On July 2, 2010 @ 10:51 am In [Business](#), [Local News](#) | [4 Comments](#)

Riding on the coattails of last Thursday's Apple iPhone 4 launch was the grand opening of the new [Microsoft Store in Fashion Valley](#) [2]. On that day, just a couple hundred feet away from the Apple Store, Microsoft opened its first store in San Diego to bring its total count to four stores opened nationwide since last October.

Although Microsoft has a reputation for copying Apple, you cannot blame Microsoft for copying the Apple Store anymore than you can blame Apple for copying the Gap retail stores. (Apple even brought the Gap CEO onto its board of directors in 1999).

Hey, you go with what works.

The similarities between the Apple and Microsoft stores are striking. I really noticed (or almost didn't notice) the similarities when I saw a Microsoft employee talking to an Apple employee inside the Microsoft Store. Both were wearing identically colored blue t-shirts and I didn't notice a difference until the word iPod, on the Apple employee's shirt, jumped out at me along with a tiny Apple logo on his sleeve.

The two stores had about the same number of patrons, but it felt more crowded in the Apple store since it's slightly smaller. Both have a full glass window front without any signage other than the Windows logo or the Apple logo.

Microsoft's response to Apple's free Genius Bar is the Microsoft Answers Bar, where customers can make appointments for help and tech support.

On display in the Microsoft Store was every imaginable type of laptop, from the ultra-thin to the huge and hefty. One key difference about the computers purchased here is that they don't have any Windows or Intel processor stickers on them and trial-ware is deleted from the hard disk.

I was surprised how little space was devoted to Microsoft's less expensive consumer products such as the Zune and the Kin (Microsoft's version of the iPod touch and iPhone, respectively). Perhaps these weren't selling as well as the iPods and iPhones?



[1]

I like your shirt. I like your shirt, too. Let's be friends! (Photo by Joe Moreno)



[3]

The centers of attention at the Microsoft Store were two of its most impressive technologies: Microsoft Surface and Kinect for Xbox 360.

If you think of the Apple iPad as a large iPod touch then you can think of Microsoft Surface as a huge iPad converted into a table. But this is definitely not a consumer product with a starting price of \$12,500 for the basic unit.

The other hot gadget on display at the Microsoft Store was the Kinect for Xbox 360, which will debut this November for \$149 as an add on to the Xbox gaming system. If you enjoy physical video games such as the Nintendo Wii, then you're going to love the Kinect system. Just imagine the Wii without the need for controllers.

The secret to the Kinect is its multi-camera system, which replaces the game controllers. One of the cameras projects an infrared grid on the player's body. This invisible grid can follow a player's full body movements as it tracks up to four players at once. Getting rid of the need for video gaming controllers is the holy grail equivalent of getting rid of styluses for mobile devices.

Without a doubt, the Microsoft Store is the place to go for your questions about Microsoft products. (So good job with naming the store appropriately). The energized and engaged Microsoft employees that work there, commission free, are a huge breath of fresh air compared to the big box consumer electronics stores. They know what they're talking about and they were no less eager to tell the story of Microsoft and its technologies than an Apple employee in any Apple Store.

If a casual observer walked, blindly, into either of the two stores, it would take a little time to figure out which store they were in except for one glaring exception. In the back corner of the Microsoft Store was a "suit", as the techies called him; an older gentlemen dressed in a full suit with the persona, presence, and ice cold stare of a Secret Service presidential bodyguard.

He was definitely creepy.

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[1] Image: <http://www.sdn.com/sandiego/2010-07-02/local-county-news/apples-and-oranges-what%e2%80%99s-the-same-and-different-at-the-microsoft-store/attachment/microsoftappleemployearrows>

[2] Microsoft Store in Fashion Valley: <http://www.sdn.com/sandiego/2010-06-24/local-county-news/microsoft-store-hopes-to-challege-apple-for-nerds-dollars>

[3] Image: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSgxvsGLZ0g>

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