

“Get a Mac” or Get a PC?

A semiotic analysis of Apple’s “Get a Mac” campaign

Apple’s “Get a Mac” advertising campaign is the prolific technology company’s latest attempt to win over new customers who previously used PCs for all their computer needs. In the past, Macs were definitely the less popular computer choice for the average user, but in recent years, particularly with the advent of Mac laptops, Apple’s products have become increasingly more mainstream. The “Get a Mac” commercials work to highlight the differences between the two types of computers and to convince consumers that a Mac computer is the superior choice. The commercials’ main method of contrasting these two types of computers is through the characters of two men: one representing a PC and one representing a Mac.

Throughout their commercials, Apple cleverly employs the proxemic-related techniques of gaze and posture to their advantage. Although both characters are looking directly at the viewer, PC’s gaze is partially obstructed due to his glasses. Mac seems to be directly addressing his audience, a quality that allows the viewer to better identify with this character and, thus, this type of computer as well. PC, however, is somewhat blocked from his audience as his glasses act as a physical barrier between himself and the viewer, thus also restricting the viewer’s immediate connection with the PC.

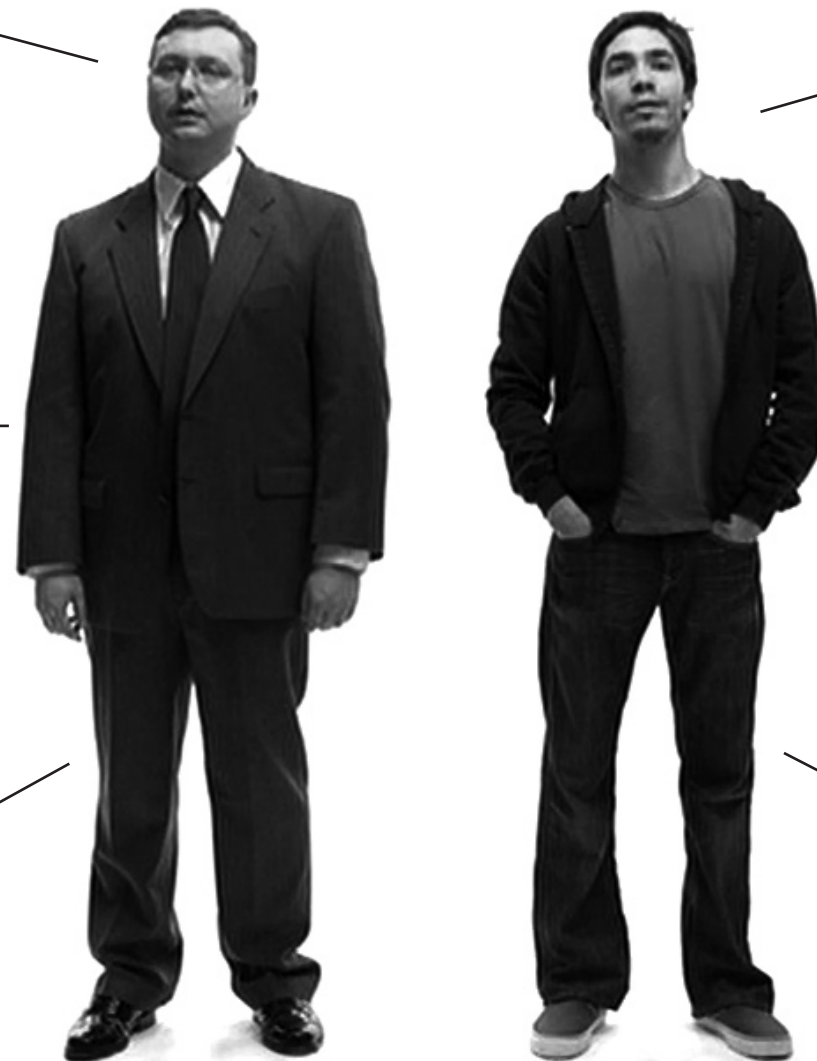
The posture of each man in these commercials is also extremely telling of their personalities. PC is standing up very straight with his hands sitting very stiffly at their sides. This posture and hand placement continues to promote the same personality traits as the character’s physical appearance. PC appears to be very rigid and incredibly proper due to his formal stance. Mac, on the other hand, continues to perpetuate his more laidback image with his more casual stance. This character is standing with his legs farther apart and his hands are resting deep inside of his pockets. His posture and hand placement are much more natural and relaxed than those of PC, and thus his proxemics appear to appropriately reflect the idea that Macs are more flexible than PCs.

PC has perfectly combed hair and large glasses. He is wearing a suit with a tie and his shirt is tucked into his pants. His physical appearance very clearly gives the impression of a man that is extremely proper, possibly uptight, and meticulous almost to a fault — not a single strand of his hair is out of place and his shirt is not even slightly wrinkled. Apple is very obviously playing upon well-established stereotypes with the character of PC and, to some extent, they are successful. Apple is trying to argue that while PCs may be suitable for making spreadsheets and pie charts (in one commercial, PC actually complains that, unlike Mac, he is “meant for work”), Macs are better suited for “the fun stuff”, such as making movies, listening to music and creating blogs.

In contrast to PC, Mac’s appearance provides the viewer with a completely opposite assumption. Mac is wearing a sweater with an untucked shirt underneath. He is wearing loose jeans, sneakers, and he appears to be slightly scruffy and not clean-shaven. Mac’s physical appearance gives the distinct impression of the kind of guy you would want to have a beer with while watching the big game. The choices Apple has made regarding his appearance make him seem more casual and more personable than PC. Essentially the idea is that since Mac seems like more of a fun guy, consumers will therefore view Mac computers as more fun than PCs.

Although Apple is trying to present two starkly contrasting characters to represent two very different types of computers, the company’s plan does not work as perfectly as intended. While Apple may portray PCs as being inferior to Macs, their act of self-righteous superiority is somewhat off-putting as a marketing strategy. PC, although maybe inferior to Mac in some ways, can be seen as ultimately more lovable and hard working than Mac. Although he does not always succeed in his efforts, throughout the campaign PC is consistently seen trying to improve himself, while Mac merely boasts about his greatness.

While Apple is trying to associate a laidback, casual man with their computers made for fun, the Mac character can be easily misinterpreted. A more cynical eye could view Mac as rather smug and extremely pretentious. He continually trumps PC in every category from security to networking, and he seemingly has no qualms about displaying his superiority in these regards. He attempts to remain rather casual about his triumphs over PC, but Mac’s constant need to prove his supremacy might cause one to wonder if he is merely hiding his desire to gloat. So really, which do you want: a slightly flawed yet endearing PC or a smug, overachieving Mac? Maybe Apple’s ad campaign is actually slightly flawed itself.



I’m a PC.

I’m a Mac.