

There are no doubts-- **it has been quite a full year.** From natural disasters to protests and ousted dictators, there was truly something for everyone on the headlines. And as for our business, well, we're about to take a look at what went on during past 12 months, with a Top 11 for 2011...

1. Farewell, Steve Jobs : The biggest story this year was certainly the untimely demise of Steve Jobs at age 56, following a 7 year struggle with cancer. During those years, Apple brought us the iPhone and the iPad. Jobs had already stepped down as Apple CEO on Aug. 24th 2011... and most of us knew the only only reason he would walk away from the company would be his ultimate demise.

One cannot understimate Jobs' effect on the industry-- his return to Apple in 1997 turned a company Jobs himself described as weeks away from bankruptcy into one of the the biggest in the world (and the biggest for a few weeks), fuelling customers' lusts for technology in the process.

2. Bye bye, Best Buy : The biggest retail headline this year was definitely Best Buy leaving the UK, closing its 11 big box stores in the country, following £62 million worth of losses last fiscal year. Not that Best Buy is completely out of Europe-- it still keeps its joint venture with Carphone Warhouse.

The UK pull out follows something of a pattern for Best Buy, as it also left Turkey (after a 2-store trial) and closed all 9 Best Buy branded stores in China in favour expanding the more profitable Five Star brand (no doubt it will do the same with Carphone Warhouse).

3. The HP Garage Sale : On August 2011, then HP CEO Léo Apotheker announced the company wanted to sell of its PC business, the HP Personal Systems Group. Failing that, the company was ready to spin out the division. The garage sale also resulted in the killing off of the promising webOS device business. Never a hardware lover, Apotheker wanted to turn HP into an IBM-alike enterprise solution vendor, having already overseen the purchase by HP of database search software company Autonomy. However...

4. The HP Garage sale Turn Around : ...just months after announcing the Garage Sale, HP turned back on its decision as replacement CEO Meg Whitman realised the value of remaining in the PC business. No such luck for the webOS business though, as the ex-Palm division got killed off while webOS itself was "contributed" to the open source community. Why? Maybe HP failed to buy a willing buyer...

5. Nature strikes: Natural disasters hit our industry twice this year: on March, Japan was struck by earthquakes and tsunamis, hitting semiconductor, panel and battery cell production in the country . Following that, the monsoon season (from July til December) brought disaster to Thailand , with flooding hitting, amongst others, the HDD industry's biggest players such as Western Digital and Toshiba.

6. Kesa finds Comet "buyer" : Kesa managed to find a "buyer" for ailing UK store chain Comet. The price of sale? "An aggregate consideration of £2." The buyer, a group of companies headed by turnaround specialists OpCapita, even got a £50M dowry in the bargain.

7. New iDevices: The iPad and iPhone both got their yearly refresh, in the shape of the iPad 2 and iPhone 4S . As expected, both devices are upgrades on their predecessors, rather than complete reinventions-- the iPad 2 is thinner and lighter while carrying beefed up innards, while the iPhone 4S proved to be a disappointment for those expecting an iPhone 5...

8. Tablets dominate the headlines : Tablets were 2011's new hotness, and all vendors scrambled for a slice of market share. The HP TouchPad got some favourable reviews before getting killed off in the company Garage Sale, the Android OS got a tablet-focused upgrade in Honeycomb and Amazon surprised with the

Kindle Fire
. Even RIM tried to get in the tablet game with the
PlayBook
, only with rather mixed results.

9. Nokia and Microsoft team up : February saw the announcement of a "broad strategic partnership" in smartphones between Nokia and Microsoft. So far, the alliance saw the release of 2 Windows Phone 7 smartphones from Nokia, as the company moves away from both Symbian and MeeGo operating systems. Too little, too late? We'll see next year whether Nokia-Microsoft will turn top-dog or plain old underdog.

10. TV slows down: European TV demand falls short of analyst expectations (according to DisplaySearch), while Nielsen expects
TV ownership to start dropping in the US
. The reasons are roughly the same on both side of the pond-- increasingly cost-cautious customers in tough economic times.

11. Motorola Mobility goes Google : Is Google planning to duplicate Apple's success in hardware-- or simply hoarding patents, of which Motorola Mobility owns 24500? Either way, Google will now be able to make a whole variety of devices, including smartphones, tablets, Bluetooth-based accessories and even STBs. Google insists Motorola Mobility will be run as a separate entity and Android will remain open source... but one has to read between the lines.