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A Look Back In Time: Pixar

Over the past few years Pixar has released many animated films that have grossed several millions of dollars each on their opening weekends, and many have excelled to the top of the list of highest grossing animated films throughout the world. These films include *Toy Story* (1995), *A Bug's Life* (1997), *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003); however Pixar did not simply become a popular animated-movie production company over night.

What some considered as being the catalyst that would lead to the eventual creation of Pixar was George Lucas' divorce from his wife, Marcia. Marcia was a top-notch film editor, who had helped George make his films during their marriage. After the divorce, Marcia wanted her share of the money from George's films during the period of their marriage, this put a huge kink in the funds of LucasFilms. In order for LucasFilms to not take a stop back, Lucas decided to sell the smallest part of LucasFilms, which happened to be his computer animation department.

Steve Jobs, who at that time was the ex-CEO of Apple, decided to purchase this department from Lucas. He was joined by other such as Dr. Edwin Catmull and Dr. Alvy Ray Smith. It was during this first year of Pixar's life, 1986 that *Luxo Jr.* was released at SIGGRAPH. *Luxo Jr.*'s great performance at SIGGRAPH caused Pixar to change their logo to the one that we all see now, with the hopping desk lamp.

Computer animated short films were not the only thing that Pixar was producing during the first few years of their life. In fact, much of Pixar's income came from hardware that they sold to targeted groups like the government and medical facilities. The computers that they produced were extremely complex to use and cost around \$135,000 a piece. *Luxo Jr.* was actually an advertising ploy by John Lasseter to show off the capabilities of the computer. There were many of these short films that were created for the same reason, like *Red's Dream*, *Tin Toy* and *Knick Knack*.

Despite the many awards that these short films won in the first few years of Pixar, the powerful computers were not selling. Pixar's only customer of note was Disney. To try to create more revenue John Lasseter and his team would create animated commercials for companies like Listerine, Tropicana and LifeSavers. This still was not creating enough income for Pixar to stay in business much longer. However, their luck was about to change for the better.

Around 1994, Disney decided that they wanted to negotiate contracts with Pixar to create animated movies for them. After their talks, Pixar and Steve Jobs walked away with a 26 million dollar contract for the movies. This was a huge turning point in the history of Pixar.

The first movie that Pixar created for Disney was *Toy Story*, which was a great hit at the box offices. However, due to the contract that Steve Jobs had made with Disney, Pixar did not see much of the revenues from *Toy Story*; most of them went to Disney. It was this that pushed Jobs into taking Pixar public in 1995.

Over the next few years Disney and Pixar's relationship had a few bumps in it. The biggest was caused by *Toy Story 2*. It was originally supposed to be a straight to

DVD film that would not be counted as part of the theatrical released films in the contract. However, there were arguments when the film was changed to be theatrically released, Disney still did not want it to count and won the battle. Over the next few years Disney and Pixar renegotiated contracts and in January of 2006 Disney announced that it would be purchasing Pixar for around \$7.4 billion. They produced *Cars* in 2006 under than name “Disney Pixar”.



The Luxo Lamp



Listerine commercial



Monsters, Inc.



A screen shot from the Luxo Jr. short Film.

References

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