

TECH VISIONS

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,



Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

PC World's list of Top 50 Tech Visionaries appeared online recently. Such things are designed to start conversations, and anyone who tries to get me talking usually succeeds. Although I read the list, I didn't read all the commentary – because I wanted to do my own commentary, and I thought it might be better to react without filtering everyone else's thoughts. The author of the study is Christopher Null.

You'll find the article at: <http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,145290/article.html>.

I knew I'd disagree with parts of the list, but I was struck with how much my opinions differed – not just on the details but at the very basic level of what counts as “visionary” and what counts as “tech.” The first thing I noticed was that many of the important early pioneers were missing, including Alan Turing, who is often considered the father of computer science, and Mauchly and Eckert, who created the first general purpose electronic computer in 1943. Then I read the preamble and noticed that the list was limited to the last 50 years, so I guess they are off the hook for the earliest innovations, although I am still wondering why they limited the list to 50 years when 65 years would have covered the whole history since the first electronic computer.

First on the list were Jack Kilby and Robert Noyce, creators of the first integrated circuits. (The two of them share the Number 1 spot.) Bill Gates and Steve Jobs are up high, as one would expect, and as much as I like to tease those guys, I must admit they do belong on the roll of visionaries. I was actually surprised to see that Gates and Jobs were third and fourth on the list behind the Google guys: Sergey Brin and Larry Page. According to PC World, the Google guys are second only to the creators of the integrated circuit as tech visionaries.

World Wide Web creator Tim Berners-Lee is fifth. I personally would have put him (and others) in front of the billionaires, but at least he made the top five. Apple always scores big in this kind of thing. A total of four Apple employees made the top 50, but what is really strange is that Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, the guy who actually designed the first Apple computer, isn't one of them.

Linus Torvalds comes in at number 21. Ken Thompson and Dennis Ritchie, the creators of Unix, don't make the

gallery at all, which seems like an oversight, considering the list has room for the creators of Norton utilities and the Nintendo Mario game. In addition to co-creating Unix, Ritchie also invented the C programming language. Doesn't he rate with Mario?

And what about Richard Stallman? Even if you're not an open source geek, it would be difficult to miss the visionary nature of the GPL. Equally odd is the lack of attention to the IBM era in a list that celebrates both technical and business achievement. Remember those four Apple employees on the list? Only one IBMer made the tally, and that was Don Estridge – creator of the IBM PC. (Didn't they also do mainframes?)

The list gets really random at the end, with people like Arianna Huffington, Arthur C. Clarke, and Herbie Hancock. Hancock gets credit for bringing electronic music to the mainstream. I like Herbie too, and you can't argue with success. But if you are claiming to cover 50 years of tech visionaries, it seems like there might be more to say. What about the controversial 1968 recording Switched on Bach by Wendy (then Walter) Carlos – the first classical record to go platinum – performed with revolutionary zeal on the visionary electronic instrument known as the Moog synthesizer? Switched-On Bach was so popular it climbed to number 10 on the pop charts. PC World might not remember that record, but I bet Herbie does.

Joe

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