

# Rachel Carson Center

## Perspectives

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Herbert Köpnick

## Why Wait for the Future? There Could Be a Present Without Waste

### A Dream of the Future

I have a dream. The iPhone 10 has just been revealed. Apple's new product presentation is nearing its end. Just as it appears to be over, CEO Tim Cook utters the famous three words "One more thing," briefly pausing between each word, only further fueling the burning anticipation in the room. With these three words, Cook begins the reveal of not another new Apple product but of Apple's new and innovative business model.

*"Ladies and Gentlemen," Cook begins, "I present to you our new business model, 'Apple to Apple' (A2A). As you know, Apple has been dedicated to sustainability for many years, and now, with this new model, we are taking the decisive step towards creating a zero-waste economy.*

*Up until now, our mission has been to sell products to our customers. Now though, our mission is to sell you services. From now on, you get our products 'for use'—you don't have to buy them. We at Apple simply request that people return every single iPhone, iPad, and Mac when they are ready to replace it. This, we believe, is the only sustainable way to produce new and innovative electronic goods for centuries to come.*

*Our new business model is a win-win-win situation.*

*Winner number one: the consumer. Honestly, what do you plan to do with an obsolete mobile phone you no longer use? We all know how many of you have old iPhones in your drawer at home. But do you realize how many toxic materials are in that device, especially in the battery? Storing your old phones in a drawer is a bad idea. Someday you will clean out your drawers, though, and throw these old phones away, perhaps into your trash can. This, however, is another bad idea—the reusable materials in the phones will simply be burned and vanish into the ashes. We know it is not easy for you, the consumer, to dispose of electronic products safely, and this is why we are offering a new solution: the best, easiest way for you to get rid of your*

*old mobile phones is to return your old ones to us when you buy new ones. And not to worry—we at Apple guarantee full protection of your data.*

*Winner number two of this new business model: Apple, Inc. With this new business model, we will only have to buy the majority of the needed raw materials a single time rather than yearly, as we have been doing. Apple will be its own supplier of raw materials. No longer will we at Apple worry about the changing prices of the raw material markets—we will have a secure supply of scarce raw materials like gold, silver, and rare earths for a very long time.*

*And finally, winner number three of this business model: the environment. Obtaining one tonne of gold by recycling 40 million used mobile phones is not only much easier and cheaper than getting one tonne of primary gold out of the Earth; such a method is also much less harmful to workers and to the environment. We have the technology to recycle over 95 percent of the 15 precious metals that are in a mobile phone. By employing these techniques, we can extend the lives of finite resources as much as is physically and technically possible.*

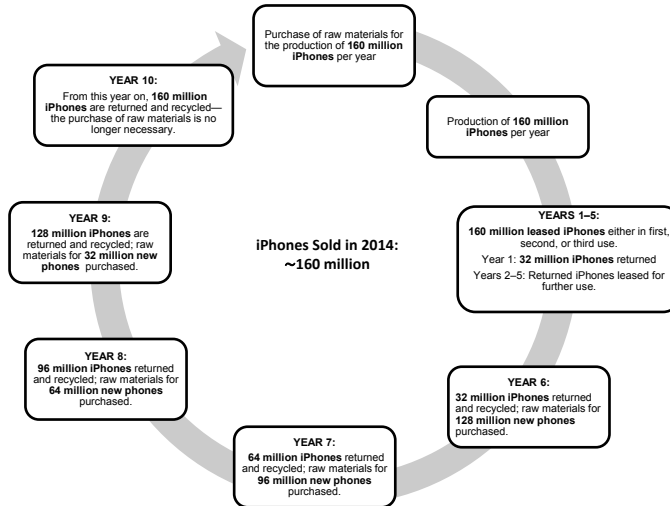
*We believe that you, our devoted customers, will understand and embrace our new A2A business model. And we hope that, just as in the past with smartphones and tablets, our competitors will follow Apple's example.*

*"Ladies and Gentlemen," Cook concludes, "let's start the new Apple era together, today."*

### **Awakening from the Dream**

Why are mobile phone companies sawing off the branch that they themselves are sitting on by using primary raw materials to produce two billion mobile phones every year—a figure that continues to increase? Why do they still pay so little attention to the dwindling supply of these resources in the long run? While I admire the innovative power of Apple, Samsung, and more recently Huawei in producing smartphones, I question their lack of attention to the waste issue their commodities create.

## The “I Have an Apple Dream” Circuit in Numbers



Some goods manufactured according to the C2C model have already proved successful with consumers; one could list, for example, several brands of cleaning supplies, biodegradable and reusable building materials such as carpeting, flooring, and tiling, and recyclable office chair designs.<sup>1</sup> I believe that consumers would embrace this model in the mobile phone industry as well. Our society is moving towards a sharing economy: an economy that emphasizes the sharing of used goods instead of ownership. We replace our mobile phones an average of every 18 months—they are clearly products that do not need to be owned forever. By changing the ways we dispose of them, we will be much closer to achieving a zero-waste economy.

I hope my dream of Apple’s “one more thing”—its new business model—will convince you that a zero-waste economy—a circular economy—can be possible today if market players, producers, network operators, traders, and consumers act intelligently and sustainably in cooperation with each other. Let’s start this new era today.

If I couldn’t convince you, I’m curious about your thoughts—let’s start a dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> For some examples see Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, “2013 Innovation Stories,” [http://assets.c2ccertified.org/pdf/Interactive\\_Innovations\\_Stories.pdf](http://assets.c2ccertified.org/pdf/Interactive_Innovations_Stories.pdf).

**Suggested Reading:**

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