

The Perfect Thing – How the iPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture and Coolness

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The other day, my daughter had me listen to a “really great” song. Of course we were listening to it on her iPod. I asked her how she heard about this song and where she had gotten it from, and her answer reminded me that “radio stations” may some day be a thing of the past. They no longer seem to influence what teens listen to. This is one of the topics which Steven Levy, Senior Editor and Chief Technology Correspondent for Newsweek, discusses in his new book. From his vantage point, he has a unique perspective on the development of the computer industry, including iPods. His stand-alone chapters, which are themselves shuffled depending upon which copy of the book you happen to buy, trace the effect of iPods on our society and relates these little boxes to the history of the computer. Along the way, Mr. Levy lets us in on secrets, such as what does “MP3” mean? (It stands for Moving Picture Experts Group 1 Layer 3, which was the standard way of processing recorded music into a compressed file and came out of an international computer programmers’ convention in Southern Germany in 1988). Among other things, he maintains that the younger generations now expect their world to be only what they have selected and in random order. The Perfect Thing is worth reading for these grander conclusions, even if you read it quickly, skipping over those paragraphs that are too detailed for the non-technical among us.

So where did my daughter get that “really great” song? She saw the video on MTV, went to the MTV website and downloaded the promotional song, and is now carrying it around in her pocket along with 1,000 other songs and a few TV shows. My how things have changed since the days of vinyl!