

**Steve Ballmer**

By Paperitalo Staff

A recent issue of Fortune magazine had an article profiling Steve Ballmer which holds Ballmer responsible for Microsoft's inability to get beyond Windows and on to cutting edge ideas. The article contrasts him to Steve Jobs of Apple and the dazzling array of new products constantly coming out of Apple.

Their stock prices reflect the concern the article postulates. While Microsoft continues to make profits most companies would die for, there seems to be little in the pipeline that can get stockholders or potential stockholders very excited.

The Fortune author ought to come over to the pulp and paper industry if they want to see caution. It is no big secret that we possess some of the most cautionary genes on the planet, especially in areas where the "modern" industry has been long established (North America, Europe). But that is exactly why we have to put "modern" in quotes. We in North America and Europe are no longer the most modern parts of the industry. One looks to South America, China, and to some extent, India, for the most modern assets and ideas.

This is reflected in who is eager for information on the industry. The Cellulose Community, for instance, which we operate as a technical site at [www.cellulosecommunity.org](http://www.cellulosecommunity.org) and as a management site on [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cellulosecommunity), have a base population of North American and European members. The emerging markets, however, including China, is where 2/3 of the new members come from. People who are eager to improve and willing to be risk takers accept information from anywhere. People who are comfortable or who have something to lose do not.

This makes the so-called high tech industry a rapid simulator of what is going on in our own industry. Microsoft, and now even Google, are showing signs of age and caution. Apple, which is ironically far older than both of them, is not. New offerings such as Facebook, Twitter, Unisfair

and others are becoming the leaders. If things continue, they will leave Microsoft and Google in the dust.

We have the same problems and opportunities here in our industry--they are just slightly slower in their manifestation. However, they are every bit as visible. I'll bet if I gathered a half dozen people knowledgeable on the overall business of four or five distinct grades, they would be able to come up with, without collaborating, the same rankings of grade specific companies that are rising and falling. It is just so plain obvious which ones these are.

Are you working for a rising company or a falling one? I'll give you a couple of clues on how to evaluate this. Is your bureaucracy growing or declining? Is it harder and harder to obtain capital? What percentage of your customer base is less than five years old? What is the average age of your work force and how much of their career have they spent with your company?

Timidity is an issue. I have always said the Wright Brothers would never have been able to fly if they had insisted on keeping one foot on the ground. Don't be foolish--do your homework, but then act with confidence on your convictions. Many mills do not do this today.

What I find discouraging is when I meet a member of our industry whose whole outlook is something like this: "I hope my company stays in business until I retire." Good grief! What an attitude! Are you so numb that you really don't care any longer? I'll be blunt--get out now so we can find some fresh, young optimistic person to replace you--someone who know no better than to try something out. If your company is going to survive, it will not survive because of superior old stale knowledge, it will survive because reasoned and rational risk takers took hold of the controls.

For safety this week, closing or staying open, we have to stay safe. If you get overly worried about your career at your current site, you can become distracted and have an accident.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##