

Apple Store: thousands attend the opening

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There are no official estimates, but, in all probability, as many as **3,000 people** came today to Carugate, to stand in line for the queen of music. We are not talking about a Madonna concert, but the opening of the new **Apple Store in Carugate**, the second Apple Store in Italy after the one in the “Roma Est” shopping Centre.

This morning, Saturday 5 September, in the new store in the Carosello Shopping Centre, it was like being at a rock concert, with **the young and not so young standing in line for hours**. Some of them were already technology enthusiasts, armed with iPhones, ready to publish live photos on the Internet; others were just curious. Security guards watched the orderly queues and, every ten minutes, a small group of people were allowed to enter this elegant “Mecca of technology”, accompanied by the applause from the staff and the public. The first person in the line was **Paolo from Riva del Garda**, who had planned well ahead, and had started waiting at 11.30 a.m. ... on the day before the opening. Apple decided to reward the most faithful customers by giving them the highly coveted commemorative “Apple Store Carosello” T-shirt; **there were 1000 T-shirts, which all went in 40 minutes**.

The scenes were surreal, unjustified for the store itself. The Carosello Apple Store clearly cannot compete with the one in New York, it is, after all, much smaller: **850 m², including warehouses**, against the 2300 m², open 24 hours a day, all year round, in New York. Despite this, the Carosello Store, which is only a few minutes from Milan, is a symbol, and not only for enthusiasts.

In the minds of Apple fans, a genuine, organized community, who have been present in Italy since the early 1980s, the Apple Stores are places of worship. **Designed by Apple itself** (the entrance cube of the Store in New York bears Steve Jobs’ signature), the stores are more like cathedrals than shops; completely white, with an enormous, brightly-lit, apple in the entrance. The materials are simple: steel, glass and wood. Every product stands on its own pedestal, with a lot of empty space around it, and can be freely used; there are Macintosh computers, iPods and iPhones shining as never before, upon their altars, but accessible to everyone.

However, the Stores are also significant for the non-Apple enthusiasts, because they have tried to **revolutionize the “point of sale” concept**, and, for this reason, they are greatly imitated by

competitors. The product takes up very little space; the **service** is the most important thing and it continues also after the sale. For example, anyone who purchases a Mac in one of these stores can contact a personal assistant, who has been trained by the company itself, who will give them a personalized course to teach them how to use the computer. Before purchasing a Mac, iPod or iPhone, anyone that wishes to can book a personal shopping session, on-line, with an assistant, who will give their undivided attention, free of charge. And if a product does not work, there is an area with computer geeks (pleasantly called *Genius*) who will immediately repair it on a counter similar to that of a coffee bar.

The store in Carugate, too, promises to be independent, providing with seminars, training courses for every age, and even summer camps for activities like digital photography, music and creating short films. The modernity of a technology mega store has been combined with the friendly human figure, like local stores in the old days. The aim of this additional development of the multinational chains is clear; they want to give us feel we are buying a computer just as we would buy apples from a greengrocer. All this, combined with the feeling of safety that comes from buying the product from the person “who made it”, a sort of extreme branding.

This strategy has been taken to an extreme by Apple, and now, just as McDonald's did in the past, it is being **exported all over the world with the very same format**. Everything is copied identically, from the windows to the furniture, from the staff's T-shirts to the new products (which, obviously, Apple keep hidden away in warehouses, giving the order to display them only at the time of the official launch, everywhere).

Last year alone, Apple attracted **more than 100 million visitors**. Even the scenes at the openings were the same: never-ending queues, applause and gift T-shirts. Then entry into the Apple temple, where technology, more than hamburgers, has become the object of worship in the third millennium. And it may be surprising to discover that worshippers are of every social class and every age, even in Italy.

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