

Why Amazon, Apple, Peloton and Zoom won 2020, while others like Quibi lost big

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When a pandemic hits, stay-at-home orders are issued and people are spending even less time at retail stores, e-commerce giant Amazon was there to serve.

Amazon's sales ballooned, as the initial delays and hiccups got fixed and the e-tailer figured out ways to continue moving products from one location to another, often overnight.

For that, we pick Amazon as the biggest tech winner of 2020, with Apple a close runner-up. In its most recent earnings, Amazon said sales jumped to \$96.1 billion in the quarter, compared to \$70 billion in the year ago quarter.

Millions of people were sent home to work or learn from there, and to do their jobs more efficiently, they needed to buy new computers, phones and tablets. Apple reversed a trend of declining iPad sales and flat Mac computer sales, while also continuing to sell a high-end product, the iPhone, with a top starting price of \$1,099. This, even as many people lost their jobs and faced business closures and evictions.

In its most recent earnings call, Apple said it sold \$9 billion worth of Macs, up from \$6.9 billion in the year ago quarter. Sales for the iPad also jumped, with revenues of \$6.8 billion, versus \$4.6 billion in the year-ago quarter. Analyst Daniel Ives of Wedbush Securities projects sales of 195 million iPhones for 2020, up from 185 million in 2019.

Other 2020 tech winners:

Zoom

Yes, you may have Zoom fatigue, but a year ago you probably never heard of Zoom, the video conference service. It ended the year as Apple's most downloaded app and a way of life for many of us who used Zoom for office meetings, schoolwork and catch-ups with family and friends. Zoom saw its user base increase from 10 million to 300 million post pandemic.

Streaming

Three words: "Wonder Woman 1984." Day and date with [movie theaters](#). Love the movie or hate it, do you know anyone who didn't spend Christmas evening watching the sequel to the 2017 film? Streaming, like Zoom, saved our collective minds as movie theaters closed due to the pandemic, and the only way to see first run films was to either buy them on a video-on-demand basis, or subscribe to a never ending roster of streaming services: from established players like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime, to new entries like HBO Max, Disney+ and Peacock. HBO Max owner AT&T gave the seal of approval to streaming when it announced the previously unthinkable: that all 2021 first-run films would open in theaters and on HBO Max on the same day. And Disney has several first-run films slated for Disney+ as well. Get out the popcorn, folks!

Food delivery

A trend that was gaining steam anyway just got bigger than ever during the pandemic. The ease of ordering food from a mobile phone and having it arrive at your doorstep has been irresistible, mostly to young consumers. But in an era of contactless and curbside delivery, having restaurants deliver to us became even more acceptable, desirable, even necessary. And grocers like Whole Foods, Amazon Fresh and shopping services like Instacart had a rough time keeping up with the demand. Initially, wait times for grocery orders were as long as one week, but since then, the companies have learned to adapt and are back to delivering within a few hours.

Gaming

There was no doubt that gaming's popularity is growing year over year. Sony and Microsoft just helped confirm that when in an era of app-based everything, two pieces of old technology, the [video game console](#), were released as next generation devices in November, the PlayStation 5 and Microsoft Xbox 5, and both were sold out in pre-orders and sold for two to three times the normal price on eBay and other re-sale sites.

At-home exercise

Apple confirmed that Peloton was onto something when it copied its home fitness video classes program with its own Fitness+ at the end of 2020. Peloton attracted nearly 2 million subscribers to its fitness classes and has said that it expects it to grow to 100 million. Now that most gyms are closed, online fitness classes are the next best thing. Plus, you don't have to get dressed, drive somewhere in the cold and look for a parking space. Peloton charges \$12.99 monthly for its app classes, which Apple looked to counter with a lower \$7.99 fee. Only hitch: The classes don't work unless you also fork over \$199 to \$399 for an Apple Watch.

Mobile Pay

Another beneficiary of the pandemic, as people who hadn't given mobile pay learned to love it. Who wants to exchange dirty dollars from our wallets to your cash register, when instead, we could just

wave our mobile phone—or smartwatch—over a reader, and not touch anything in the checkout process. Winners here include Apple Pay and Google Pay. Google dramatically upgraded its Pay app, transforming it from pay only to a part Apple Pay/Venmo/PayPal hybrid.

And then the 2020 tech losers:

Quibi

Quibi. Hollywood's Jeffrey Katzenberg and former eBay CEO Meg Whitman hatched an idea for a video service like YouTube that offered big name talent, shorter videos and a monthly price tag. To watch stuff that would be free anywhere else. After raising more than \$2 billion in financing, Quibi went belly up this month.

Smart glasses

For years, analysts have been saying smart glasses were the next big thing. But year after year, they fail big time. Google Glass laid a thud and was yanked in 2015. Snapchat Spectacles made a splash when it launched in 2016, but hasn't been heard from much since. Amazon introduced talking Alexa glasses on a test basis in 2020, but you didn't see them heavily marketed during holiday sales, right? Let's face it—people are happy to walk down the street and look at their phones, but that's as far as we want to go.

TikTok

The favored social network of youth got hit with messy politics, involving a president who told TikTok to shut down and go back home to China, where its corporate owner is based. The company was given several deadlines to leave, but they have been tied up in legal battles. Either way, it wasn't a great year for TikTok (though it wasn't a bad year for the content TikTok users produced).

Virtual reality

VR has been the next big thing for so long, we remember when 360-degree cameras were going to be big (that never happened) and people were going to attend movies and concerts with VR

headsets on. A nix to that, too. The only real VR action we see is the popularity of Facebook's Oculus system, but sales are a fraction of what Sony and Microsoft see for traditional console games. Can we move on to the next big thing now folks?

Uber/Lyft

Through no fault of their own, the move toward ditching car ownership for cheap rides around town via ride-hailing apps took a big dip in 2020, due to the pandemic. We didn't go out as much, and if we did, who wanted to share a car with other people? Uber and Lyft did score a win in California at the ballot box, when voters approved a measure to exempt "gig economy" companies from a new law that would have raised costs by treating drivers as full-time employees. Now if they could just get passengers riding again.

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