

Secret Defiance at MOS

In 1976 I was the Product Manager for KIM-1 products developed by MOS Technology to promote their 6502 microprocessor. To understand the background of the MOS t-shirt you have to understand the situation at MOS Technology of Norristown, PA in the fall of 1976. For good background see the WikiPedia article on MOS Technology.

The brief story is that MOS sold calculator chips (which in those days used red LED displays rather than the Cmos displays used today) and Commodore bought most of their chips and assembled them into calculators. Commodore was a notoriously hard bargainer and a continually late payer for the chips they bought. This left MOS with a continual cash-flow crisis. When Texas Instruments precipitated the great calculator industry crash, Commodore bought MOS, as one company official stated, " with the money they had not paid us for our previous shipments."

MOS was a small company with a total engineering staff of perhaps a dozen men. After the merger was announced there was uncertainty over the future direction of the company under its new owners. When the old management announced a company picnic shortly after the sale there was a meeting of most of the engineers to generally gripe about the sale and the fact that they had not gotten raises in several years. One of them, perhaps Joe MacInerney the software guru of the group, suggested that we ought to make up a t-shirt for the event for all the engineers to wear. As I remember, I suggested that instead of the MOS/Commodore logo we should turn the MOS into M (zero)S, signalling our discontent with our present situation. The idea caught on and one of the engineers manufactured the t-shirts. The actual design incorporates the zero so subtly that it is virtually invisible to the uninitiated, allowing us to protest, but only amongst ourselves!

Richard (Rick) Simpson

Rick