Apple’s new iPhone 5 is simultaneously “the best phone on the market and really, really boring,” said Mat Honan in Wired.com. Blame it partly on outsize expectations. We’ve become so accustomed to Apple’s giant strides of innovation that nothing less than game-changing devices will do anymore. But with this latest smartphone, the world’s most successful company—now valued at more than $650 billion—has apparently decided it “has little reason to shake things up.” The iPhone 5 offers a few minor upgrades, including a bigger screen and a faster processor, but little else to satisfy eager fans. Steve Jobs would be apoplectic, said Dan Lyons in BBC.com. The company he built is now playing it safe. Even worse, it’s aping the competition, with a bigger screen that mimics those on popular Android devices. But that’s what happens when a number cruncher like Tim Cook takes over from a visionary like Jobs. You get a company “less interested in blowing people away than it is in milking profit out of the existing lineup.”

The iPhone 5 “is certainly no game changer,” said Chunka Mui in Forbes.com, but it’s still “good enough for Apple to continue to dominate.” Just look at the market’s reaction: Customers snapped up more than 2 million of the new phones in less than 24 hours, double the record set by the iPhone 4S last year. That’s the strength of the Apple cult at work, but it’s also the enduring weakness of Apple’s rivals, all of which have utterly failed to design an iPhone killer. Apple fans don’t want a radically reinvented iPhone anyway, said Ben Bajarin in Time.com. They’ve “invested time, money, and energy into Apple’s ecosystem,” and don’t want the fuss of learning a new system, whether it’s Apple’s or anyone else’s. They simply want products that look cool, are easy to use, “and just work”—and the iPhone 5 more than satisfies.

Five years after the iPhone revolutionized the industry, we’re probably seeing the end of “quantum leaps” in smartphones—at least for a while, said Nick Wingfield in The New York Times. Technology often downshifts into periods of “slower evolutionary change after a big disruption”; it happened with both cars and PCs. In the near future, we’re more likely to see “technological bunny hops,” with the industry producing variations on Apple’s standard. That may sound unexciting, but the incremental changes will add up. “The difference in smartphones from year to year may not seem spectacular,” but the “long arc of technological progress” certainly will be.

Charity of the week

KaBoom (kaboom.org) is dedicated to creating quality playgrounds in communities across America. With many existing community play spaces disappearing or falling into disrepair and recess being eliminated from school schedules, children today often get little daily playtime, which exacerbates the growing childhood obesity problem. Since 1996, KaBoom has helped build more than 2,100 playgrounds nationwide. It also offers community groups online tools to help design and raise money for innovative and fun new play sites. Its crowd-sourced Map of Play tool, which features 90,000 sites, allows parents and community members to find play spaces, rate them, and identify where new playgrounds might be most useful.

Each charity we feature has earned a four-star overall rating from Charity Navigator, which ranks not-for-profit organizations on the strength of their finances, their control of administrative and fund-raising expenses, and the transparency of their operations. Four stars is the group’s highest ranking.