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San Francisco Chronicle

Going beyond geek chic — CeBIT

By Dov Greenbaum and Mark Gerstein | March 10, 2016 | Updated: March 10, 2016 5:24pm



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Quotes of the Week



Letters to
the
Editor,
March 13



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Going
beyond
geek chic
- CeBIT



show, will open Monday in Hannover, Germany, five days after the **Paris culmination** of the global “Big 4” fashion weeks. While one might imagine that techies would have little to no interest in fashion, these two worlds are painfully similar.

The rise of geek chic notwithstanding, the nerd stereotype is associated with poor fashion choices and a general contempt for the seemingly nonrational world of fashion. However, to survive in the software world, one has to be in tune with prevailing fads. Like the faux pas of wearing last season’s shoes to fashion week, failing to keep up with the latest developments in technology could be disastrous for software developers.



To be most effective, developers need to direct their energy to the popular platforms. For example, today’s successful applications need to be coded for the in-vogue computing platforms, like iOS or Android, not the out-of-fashion or fringe platforms such as Windows Phone or RIM’s BlackBerry.

Like the sartorial consumer, the computing consumer ought to be cognizant of fads. You create voluminous content and invest substantial time and effort in uploading, organizing and optimizing your files on a diverse set of platforms. This may involve developing automated work flows — for example, using a service such as If This, Then That (IFTTT). Users invest time and money into a whole ecosystem of applications to work with their chosen platform. But if these platforms fall out of fashion or are abandoned — remember Kodak Gallery, Google Reader, MySpace, CorelDraw, Netscape or Lotus 123? — users

are often left scrambling to export their files and relearn another site or software package.

Deciding to use a cool new website (e.g., being an early user of Instagram) or a hot new file format is akin to throwing out your bell-bottoms and betting on power suits in the early '80s.

Even if users steadfastly remain loyal to their old systems, manufacturers stop providing updates and support. And, unlike thrift shops that collect the used-to-be trendy for future hipster customers, so-called abandonware code and documentation can be lost forever.

Delicious users know what we are talking about. The social bookmarking website, acquired by Yahoo, in its heyday had millions of users. When Delicious was sunsetted and sold, many users with sophisticated web tag systems effectively lost their huge archives of tagged sites. When Apple discontinued iPhoto in 2015, it disrupted the often meticulously engineered movement of gigabytes if not terabytes of data. Myriad examples exist ranging from defunct consumer work flows such as Eye-fi image upload, software repositories such as Google Code, and utilities such as the encryption software TrueCrypt.

In the end, though, in contrast to wearing unfashionable clothing in public, investing in computing technology that eventually fails can have real, substantial and long-term costs to the consumer. One may think that a simple solution is to just stay with the leading companies and the most popular file formats. However, this would have been bad advice for WordPerfect users, and might otherwise chill innovation, preventing broad adoption of newer and better software. Betting blindly on unproven trends could be equally foolhardy.

Like the fashion elites at Vogue and GQ, the Digerati can have a strong influence on the uptake of new file formats and apps, popularizing the latest craze to make it mainstream. Software such as Microsoft's Outlook lives on, whereas Dropbox's Mailbox is slated to be

GEEK CHIC



ModCloth goes from clicks to bricks with S.F. pop-up



Bow tie trend led by young men

discontinued. But even popular styles die for no other reason than, as Larry Page put it, to put “more wood behind fewer arrows.” It remains up to the computer user to keep track of the trends or risk being the only guy with a wide tie and a Palm pilot.

Dov Greenbaum is an intellectual property attorney and an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry at Yale. Mark Gerstein is a professor of biomedical informatics at Yale.

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