

Unforgettable D conferences

Craig Gamble
FAST LIVING



So what do Katy Perry and *The Wall Street Journal* have in common? It's rather a six-degrees moment, but here goes. If you have ears, as I suspect most of us have, you will have heard at least some of Katy's gigantic hit *I Kissed a Girl*. Well, before Katy's there was another song, moderately successful, also called *I Kissed a Girl*, by American singer-songwriter Jill Sobule. Sobule is also something of a performance artist, and one of the venues she has commonly performed is the D conference, an executive digital conference hosted by Walt Mossberg and Kara Swisher of, you guessed it, *The Wall Street Journal*.

I admit it's a long bow to draw, but what I'm trying to illustrate is, Katy's hit might be unmissable, but over the last six years the D conference has been equally unforgettable. The conference has grown out of the reputation of one journalist, Walt Mossberg, who has written about personal technology for the *WSJ* since 1991 (allthingsd.com) and in that time established such a reputation for his honest appraisals that it's said his yay or nay can hugely influence any product's success. The latest iteration of the conference, D7, took place last week.

The conference always produces memorable moments, not least because it's structured in a very casual way. Walt and Kara get some of the industry's movers and shakers up on stage with them, and simply talk to them, feeding their own and our curiosity. Undoubtedly the most memorable event of the last few conferences was the Steve Jobs and Bill Gates double act, where the two giants of the tech world spent a good hour candidly discussing their rivalry, their history and what they saw as the most farsighted quality in



each other. They were equally funny, interesting and knowledgeable: so much for the rumours of their private hate-fest. You could sense that they didn't always agree, and that perhaps Steve was keen to prove he was just a touch wittier and cooler than Bill, even though Bill has been the more successful. But each was honest enough to admit to the strengths of the other's company, and willing to share stories of their early days, when Microsoft and Apple were quite closely intertwined. The Apple/Microsoft divide is so deep in the minds of some consumers you would think the two companies had philosophies as different as the two versions of *I Kissed a Girl* – which have nothing in common other than they're both

music. Listening to Jobs and Gates on stage, though, you could almost hear their very shared geek-boy origins coming out.

This year the conference focused on what Walt and Kara are calling Web 3.0. Not that they claim that term as their own, but they do claim that the next iteration of the Web is here. They say, somewhat tongue in cheek, "we think something major is happening at the intersection of tech and media", and that Web 2.0, characterised by sharing and social networking, is at an end. I say tongue in cheek, as even they admit they need to make a bit of noise for the sake of some conference "buzz", but they have a point. They say that, finally, after years of false starts and broken promises by tech companies,

Unforgettable: D7 co-executive producers Walt Mossberg and Kara Swisher at last week's conference. Photo: Asa Mathat/All Things Digital.

we finally do have a working model of a proper mobile world. One where you can get almost any type of media – be it video, email, web-sites, games, GPS location, social networking feeds or, yes, telephone calls – straight to the device in your hand, whether that be a mobile phone or an iPod. Coupled with the device and the software is access to your data, stored safely and accessed quickly from the "cloud", or a type of online database. Yes, there are bugs and gaps in the coverage, and in some countries rather steep prices to pay for this type of coverage, but it is nevertheless here.

This year's conference lacked a mega duo like the Steve and Bill show, but featured plenty of big hitters in the technology world, with top billing probably going to the founders of Twitter, Biz Stone and Evan Williams. Twitter could hardly be hotter property, with the number of page views on a rapid rise, meaning exponentially more people are visiting the site every day. Apart from the Twitter peeps, there were appearances by Microsoft's new boss, Steve Balmer, Yahoo's new chief executive officer, Carol Bartz, and Nokia's Olli-Pekka Kallalavuo. Large telephone companies were represented, like AT&T's chief executive officer Randall Stephenson, along with people like Jeff Zucker from NBC/Universal who make some of the content we all so desperately want to share. My must-see interview was with Mitchell Baker and John Lilly of Mozilla, the makers of the free Firefox web browser, I'm dying to know what they really think of Microsoft's competitor, the ubiquitous Windows Explorer.

So, if you have a spare hour or two, and want to get an insight into the minds behind much of the technology shaping our world, head over to the All Things Digital website and sample a few of the interviews or video, or read some of the stories. Otherwise, I guess you could slip *I Kissed a Girl* into the CD player and dance around the house in your pyjamas yet again.

A perfect meditation in deep thoughts about knitting

SLOW LIVING



It's well and truly knitting season, and the brown cardigan I promised my beloved several years ago is once again both "possible" and "unlikely".

It's not that I'm a slow knitter – my pace is average and my confidence a little above. It's just that it takes a really long time to make a cardigan, and the amount of kudos from a beanie or a pair of striped wrist-warmers is far greater. I can produce gorgeous beanies and fancy wrist-warmers all winter and experience almost constant celebrity status.

Prototypes can be whipped up, adusted and perfected over a few days and row-counting is minimal.

A brown cardigan is altogether different: apart from taking so long to knit, it requires careful attention to, yes, row-counting, tension, overall measurements, dye-lots et al. If self-designed – at my level, at least – it will also entail the crossing of fingers from day one till completion.

But once embraced, the making of a cardigan, especially a brown one, takes on a meditative, if not actually religious, aspect. The design phase is esoteric to the non-knitter and straightforward to the adept: the transformation of tapering grids of small crosses into strings of letters, numbers and arcane abbreviations

like "psso" is a bit like casting a horoscope ahead of the impending pilgrimage. The subsequent process, for the mind, is not unlike saying the rosary 229 times while doing a giant sudoku puzzle. There is magic, certainly, in this transformation of Ks, Ps and K2togs into the soft and supple curves of a finished garment.

I know this because I did knit a cardigan once – though it wasn't brown. As I let go of the notion of boredom, the quiet clicking and counting slowly absorbed me; it was indeed a kind of meditation in the midst of whatever activity took place outside my field of vision.

Row built upon row; I marked the tally page accordingly, with runic scratches. The segments grew with



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the slowness of mountains, rewarding me with their summits. Once the decrease rows began, each piece was like an accelerating run to the top, culminating in a blissful two-or-four-stitch peak. Patience was a virtue, and the process took precedence. The cardigan was and is treasured.

Knitting counts as "slow clothing" but not all knitting is "slow knitting". For me, the brown cardigan remains "unlikely" rather than "possible" this year. But when I do finally make it, it will signify a season when I immersed myself in something soft, and the world revolved without me.

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