

Why 'SoLoMo' Isn't Going Anywhere

If you've ever wondered who to blame for a particular tech buzzword, there's a decent chance the culprit will either be a startup founder or a venture capitalist. Fred Wilson is usually listed as the father of the amorphous phrase "native advertising," Tim O'Reilly takes credit for the catch-all "Web 2.0" and John Doerr is said to be the one who coined the ubiquitous acronym "SoLoMo."

At least for SoLoMo, however, it was somewhat of a group effort. Doerr, a partner at the influential VC firm Kleiner Perkins, was working on a presentation in the dining room of his Bay Area home in mid-2010 along with two other partners at the firm: Bing Gordon, the former CEO of Electronic Arts, and Chi-Hua Chien, a former venture advisor at Accel Partners who helped drive that firm's early investment in Facebook.

Earlier that year, the trio wrote a guest post on TechCrunch talking about how Apple's recent release of the first-generation iPad would help spur a shift to "interactive, connected applications" and kick off an era of "proactive" technology that works "seamlessly, unobtrusively, and comfortably in the spaces between us, between you and me and others."

Doerr started referring to this shift as the "third wave." The first wave was all about PCs; the second wave was all about the Internet. The third wave, as he saw it, was about the combined opportunities of mobile platforms like iOS, social networks like Facebook and local commerce, which at that time was embodied by the rapid growth of Groupon.

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Facebook started out as a static directory for engaging with friends, but then it launched Open Graph in 2010, which let users carry their social identity across the web. Apple launched its App Store in 2008 and Google launched its version in 2010, which made it easier and more enticing for smartphone users to do more of their Internet activities on the go. This gave rise to a new era of consumers constantly being online and connected to one another, which presented an opportunity for merchants to personalize offers based on the customer's location and who they know.

While working on the presentation in Doerr's dining room that day, he, Chien and Gordon decided to come up with a phrase to encapsulate these three big trends. "We thought what we should really do is try to put an inclusive concept around these three megatrends that seem to be driving a lot of new value, and point out that it is at the integration of these three megatrends that a lot of products and services are being created," Chien says.

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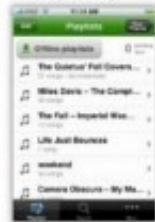


Music Sharing

Shazam



Spotify



FB Connect for Mobile – Built in Friend Connectivity, Share, Virality

Invite Friends



Share



Feed



Image via *Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers*

Gordon, whom Chien refers to as the "poet laureate of Kleiner Perkins," is often brought in for brainstorming sessions like this one. The trio toyed with a few ideas for a catchy term, before Doerr settled on SoLoMo.

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For the partners at Kleiner, the goal of coining the term SoLoMo was largely to declare an area of interest for future investments, according to Chien. But within a few months, the term started to pop up in lectures and articles debating how marketers and startups should best capitalize on the changing habits of consumers.

Some, like Forrester analyst Jenny Wise, have taken issue with the buzzword and argue that it creates a "limited view" of how companies should be catering to tech-savvy consumers.

"It's not 'social,' it's person. It's not 'location,' it's the entire context," she says, noting that it's important to factor in why someone is where they are and what they want to accomplish there, rather than just focusing on a single piece of data like location. "It's not 'mobile,' it's just device-agnostic — whichever device they have near them when they want to find out what they want to find out."

Some companies have managed to tie together these three forces into effective products. Wise offers the example of Nike, whose Nike Plus running app has social, location and mobile components that all reinforce each other. But she believes this kind of success doesn't come from working backward from the

assumption that you have to unite all three. "If the customer use case calls for all those components to be there, then it's good to include them," she says. "But that isn't the place to start."

For better or worse, SoLoMo doesn't appear to be going away. In fact, there's a chance the buzzword might actually get even longer in the not-too-distant future.

Chien speculates that the rise of wearable computing like Google Glass could give rise to a "fourth leg" in addition to social, local and mobile, which consists of apps and services that can anticipate the user's need based on all the data these new gadgets will be able to collect. "These wearable computing devices will have full context and know where you are, what's around you, the temperature, the sound around, how fast you're moving, so much contextual information," he says, "that what they can start to do is provide products and services to you proactively."

We asked if this might end up being coined SoLoMoPro, but he didn't like it. For now, it seems, we're still living in a SoLoMo world.