

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Where Are the Women in Tech?

Tony Rappa · Wednesday, February 12th, 2014

I was seriously stoked to kick-off the New Year in Las Vegas and it didn't disappoint. Having previously attended the AT&T hackathon in Santa Monica, I was invited to cover the main event – running just prior to CES 2014. My plan was to follow the winners from Santa Monica and tell their story. I would also spend time with the new teams and write a few articles on the happenings during the event. The story I walked away with was not what I expected.

An Unexpected Flurry of Tweets

During the first day, announcements were made about the various categories and related prizes. One of the categories contained an additional reward – sponsored by Ericsson – for the best team with a greater number of females. I thought that was cool and included it in my ever-growing stream of tweets for the day. Much to my surprise, my tweet was retweeted, mentioned, and marked as a favorite through the night and into the next morning. Indeed: Where are the women in tech?

Getting Perspective

The responses were filled with gratitude to me for having tweeted and to Ericsson for their support. Many of the responses also echoed a major concern: there aren't enough women in technology. So, I decided to follow-up on this with a couple of interviews and some research.

I interviewed an executive from Ericsson and Cooper Harris from the Young and the Restless and most recently founder of Klickly. Their thoughts, combined with the several articles I read – provided some insight into the issue.

The XX Factor

The first part of the issue is the overall suffering of the tech industry due to its current bias toward men. Stated simply – it's an issue of cultural diversity. It's easy to find studies that show women have a tendency to approach a problem differently than men. I can't tell you how many times I've looked at a situation, come to a conclusion, then asked a female friend her perspective and had a moment of: Um, that's brilliant – how did you even see that?

Let's not forget the social factor. Not only are women better communicators, but it's been shown that in group settings they tend to increase the overall group IQ. In the last two hackathon events I attended; something very fascinating came to light. Two of the teams – one of which was a finalist

– had female media personalities as team members. What really struck me was the level of creativity each of those two teams brought to the table. This leads me to a point that may seem obvious to those of you who are regular readers of Cultural Weekly. The leap from the old tech tools of creativity into the new world of creative technology is not as great as some would like you to believe. You don't have to jump from writing plays to writing code – but you should consider learning how to embrace the new forms of digital transmission. The more tech-savvy you can become, the easier it will be to build a direct connection with your audience.

The New Nerd

I think it's time for the old picture of "nerdism" to change. It no longer needs to be confined to the socially awkward individual with his face in a computer all day. It's time for us to imagine the nerd as someone from all walks of life. We now have Marissa Mayer doing a shoot for Vogue, an actress (Cooper Harris) running a technology company and the first hackathon to be held at Sundance this year.

Goodbye Paris Hilton; Hello Marissa Mayer



Marissa Mayer – photo by author

Why, then, are there not more women in technology? While I couldn't find consensus on this I did note themes amongst the opinions. Some feel that it's a school issue. It's thought that we're just not getting girls interested in the subject at an early age in school. Beyond high school, colleges may not be promoting the subject to women as well as they should. Others feel that it's a media and perception issue. The media portrays tech as being a male dominated world and isn't doing a great job at making tech interesting to girls. I think that all of these are worth considering.

With further research, I did find some college programs and online groups geared specifically toward getting women interested in tech. I had a few of my female friends (who are business owners) take a look at some of the resources and received the same response: BORING! To be clear, the women I asked are involved in the tech industry in some form. One of them is a social media expert. It's obvious there's more to be done. I'd be grateful for any suggestions you might have to keep this conversation moving in the right direction.

Featured image from Appery.io's blog, featuring TechCrunch's largest hackathon to date.

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