

Revenge of the Nerds

Tech parties change the game: Geek goes chic and the Twitterati call the shots | *By Hays Sibley | Illustration by Spencer Matern |*

DC's digerati know how to increase their bar-side bandwidth. After long days of slinging code, the local tech tribes are meeting up in real time, bringing the cyber-elite out to plug and play in the public domain. It's not the geeky scene you think. The players include Tweeters and tech millionaires, and the venues are aglow with the lights of iPhones and the buzz of our technocratic future.

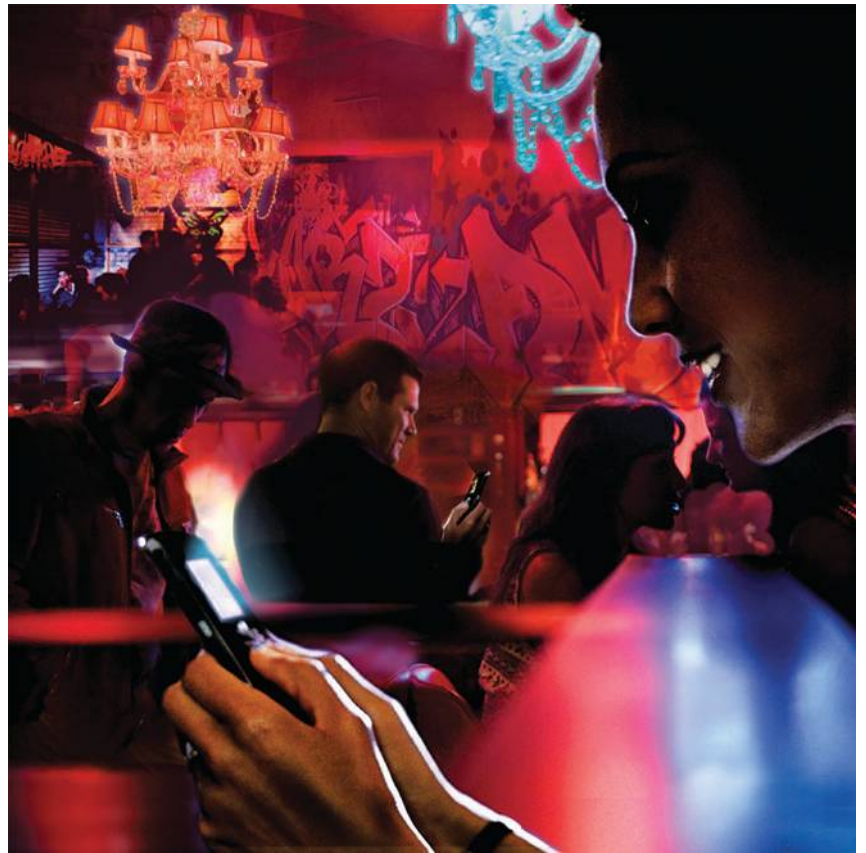
At the TECH Cocktail party, held at LeftBank in Adams Morgan, DC Web 2.0 insiders were sipping caipirinhas and soaking in the Wi-Fi, as local startup makers and shakers scored some face time. "Connecting the dots and then actually meeting someone in person—there's nothing like it," says TECH Cocktail co-founder and AOL evangelist Frank Gruber, whose contact list is a Rolodex of DC's cyber-elite. "We've had people find their startup soul mate at events," he says.

Of course, getting together over a cocktail may not be a revolutionary concept, but for the cyber-clique that spends 12 hours a day building social networking sites, a vodka among vloggers is the perfect tonic.

And TECH Cocktail isn't the only gathering on the calendar. BarCamp, Ignite and Refresh also have their cursor pointed to DC and host "unconferences" (the tech buzzword for meet-ups). Developers, designers and social media minds gather to talk Web accessibility, widget-building, Ruby on Rails and other trends, while constantly Twittering highlights of the brainstorming sessions. "It's just a whole lot of knowledge sharing," says John Croston III, the lead organizer of November's BarCampDC.

The tech set is hot for action, says iStrategyLabs' Peter Corbett, co-organizer of BarCampDC. "There's a cacophony of activity—it's nearly impossible for me to go to everything anymore," he says. Corbett's latest venture, TechArts, connected the geeks and the creatives at a U Street Halloween party, complete with DJs, VJs, LED lights and cocktails a-go-go. He's also organizing Big Ideas Big Action at Woolly Mammoth Theatre in December, which will serve as a brainstorming session for techies from all sectors.

Whereas the dot-com schmooze-fests fixated on billion-dollar IPOs,



All teched up and no place to go? That's a virtual impossibility. "Unconferences" are all the rage among the developers, designers and social media minds who are bringing Web 2.0 everywhere.

today's DC events are more focused on the unveiling of new designs, tech developments and applications. In short, it's about ideas. And that idea is viral—events hosted at hot spots like Local 16 and Busboys & Poets are posted to dctechevents.com daily.

Other events form spontaneously through word of mouse. "The online and the offline connections are fueling each other. You can follow someone on Twitter and then meet them in two seconds," Gruber says. Talk about instant messaging. ■

Tech Party Hook-Up

Rockstars

THE DEETS: Coders are the real celebrities at these two convivial networking gigs.
THE DIGITS: Nov. 5, 6PM, Startup Rockstars DC 7 event at Affinity Lab (2451 18th St., NW); Nov. 17, 6:30PM, Social Rockstar Networking event at Lotus Lounge (1420 K St., NW); startuprockstars.com.

2nd and 4th Tuesdays

THE DEETS: Capital Cabal's Tuesday night sessions are hot events for getting linked in with hip "Cabalists."
THE DIGITS: Nov. 10, 5:30PM, Gua Rapo (2039 Wilson Blvd., Arlington); Nov. 24, 5:30PM, Topaz Bar (1733 N St., NW); capcabal.net.

She's Geeky

THE DEETS: Don't know what a Twitter hash tag is? No problem at this weekend "unconference" for the chicest geeky women in the Washington area. Check the Web for party times and places.
THE DIGITS: Nov. 13 & 14, Raul Yzaguirre Building (1126 16th St., NW); shesgeeky.org

BarCampDC3

THE DEETS: A boozy, BlackBerry-toting pub crawl follows this daylong gathering of 250 developers, designers and social media minds from the Beltway and beyond.
THE DIGITS: Nov. 14, all day, Martin Luther King Library (901 G St., NW); barcampdc3.eventbrite.com.

Refresh DC

THE DEETS: This monthly meet-up stars designers, developers and new widgets. Previous speakers covered topics like "From Goya to Google: Traditional Design Principles at Work on the Web." The tech troupe hits a bar following the event.
THE DIGITS: Nov. 19, 7PM, refresh-dc.org.

Tech Cocktail DC 7

THE DEETS: This buzzworthy quarterly event unveils the latest and greatest local startups. Financiers and DC-area VCs come to search out the next hot things in tech.
THE DIGITS: Dec. 3, 6:30PM, LeftBank (2424 18th St., NW); techcocktail.com.