

## Mobile Devices Should Be About Neither Mobility Nor Devices. Discuss.

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In the beginning every human-to-human connection was unmediated and local. We lived each day in communities where contact and conversation helped us to share goals and coordinate actions. With today's complexities, it ain't that simple. Today technology mediates, enables, and spreads our conversations across divergences of time, space, and experience. Despite touch-based UX and because of cloud-based connectivity, human networks have intricate fractal structures, making our interactions fragmented and flawed. The complexities of distributed communication mean that we're as confused as we are elated when we add tweets to SMS or GPS to GSM.

Is there any way ahead here?

I've found that by returning to universals it is possible to see beyond the latest add-on app and to situate collections of features in the unifying context of human need. This is what Youngho Rhee and Juyoun Lee have done by using "sharing, contacting, and collaborating" as the basis for designing wireframes and developing UI features. The result is a clear hypothesis of benefits, and a clear relationship between intent and design. Which raises the question, how far can we go with universals? For example, can universals say more about mobility and community? I believe so.

One universal we may forget is that our bodies are naturally untethered—that is, wireless is our natural state. Being tied to a desktop computer and then to a wired connection was a temporary, historical anomaly. Having our devices always with us—as if part of our bodies—and seamlessly connected to the human network is much more "biological." Put another way, to be mobile is to be human. Let's get beyond the thrill of mobility; we're only getting closer to what it should have been all along. So I suggest we say, "Noted. Thank you. Can we move on?"

Here's another universal: Human beings live in a social world, which they co-create in conversation. Enriching our conversations with shared experiences brings us closer together. We naturally want to share our photos and videos and ideas and to meet together. It is in our nature. And when we share experiences, we increase trust, which lowers anxiety and frees up mental and emotional bandwidth to live freer and potentially better lives.

So just as "mobility" is a natural state and hence a distinction we can lose, "social networking" is a natural state, to which 50 years of computing is just now catching up. Since all media is social media, I hope we can move beyond the vague and redundant "social" tag and focus on better ways of living together, through shared experience, through better conversations—even those mediated by technology. For example, how can we make these fabulous digital channels carry more than 140 characters of "great burger at shake shack just now"? Where do tweets fit with everything else we have? And what's missing? In the universals, answers may be found.

Mobile devices, check. Social media, check. Next up, shall we have a go at expanding the number of cool apps, or perhaps design for being human? Think about this and then ask what it would mean to carry a thousand friends in your pocket?

### About the Author

Paul Pangaro is the CTO at CyberneticLifestyles.com in New York City, where he consults at the intersection of product strategy, marketing, and organizational dynamics. He is recognized as an authority on search and related conversational impedances in human-machine interaction, and on entailment meshes, a highly rigorous framework for representing knowledge. He was CTO of several startups, including Idealab's Snap.com, and was senior director and distinguished market strategist at Sun Microsystems. Paul has taught at Stanford University.