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INSIDE SILICON VALLEY



'Environment' the buzz word during TED2

IT'S BEEN a long time coming, but the scary state of the environment is finally becoming an active topic of conversation and concern in the technology community. For many years, the wasting of natural resources and large-scale industrial pollution were largely pooh-poohed or pushed under the rug as the kind

of topics only thought important by hippies or Greenpeace-type "fanatics."

But that's beginning to change, judging at least by what went on recently at **TED2** (Technology, Entertainment and Design), a four-day gathering in Monterey of 500 big names in the fields of technology, entertainment and design. Though the conference itself — the second of its kind — was broadly focused on tracking the convergence of the three industries, the battle cry that issued forth unforeseen from the ranks of presenters and attendees alike was "Save the planet!"

One such cry was from **Nigel Holmes**, graphics director for **Time Magazine**, who ended his presentation with an astonishing story about how much paper it takes to produce *Time* — 15,000 trees, or 3 million pounds of paper, per issue — and about Macida, a city of 340,000 in Japan that recycles enough paper every 36 days to make a roll of toilet paper that could wrap around the globe. One roll of toilet paper is about 90 feet long, said Holmes, which would

take about two seconds worth of recycling.

Ted Nelson, a "Distinguished Fellow" at Sausalito-based **Autodesk**, gave his usual fiery talk about hypertext, his Xanadu publishing system and his dream of creating a universal, world library of information. But he ended with an impassioned plea for recycling and an end to pollution.

The most moving statement on the environment came from **Payson Stevens**, a scientist, designer, author and president of the firm **InterNetwork** in Del Mar, Calif. Stevens does most of his work for the scientific community, and his mission is to find ways to bring complex scientific data into meaningful, recognizable forms.

Payson, who says the dominant images of the 20th century are the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima and the first photo of the earth from outer space, got standing ovations for the HyperCard projects he's done for the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration**, the **U.S. Geological Survey** and **Robert Redford's** recent Greenhouse/Glasnost Sundance Symposium, some of which graphically showed the effects of pollution on the environment.

One of the most pointed was a chart he did for Congress about global warming, which showed how much of the Capitol would be under

water if the ice caps continue to melt. "You've got to show them something they'll understand," he said with a grin.

Stevens' Saturday morning presentation came on the heels of an amazing Friday night "salon" hosted by conference attendee **Eric Utne**, founder of the bi-monthly magazine **The Utne Reader**, which is becoming a must-read for anyone without the time or money to read all the good journalism coming out of the alternative press.

"I came to (TED2) not expecting to talk about the environment at all," said Utne. But when he was roundly applauded after a surprise introduction by conference co-chair **Richard Wurman**, Utne blurted out that he wanted to host a salon to talk about environmental issues. He was stunned by the response.

Some 45 people converged on the Beau Thai restaurant for the meeting, and many more were turned away. "There was clearly a lot of interest," said Utne of the newspaper and magazine editors, hardware and software developers and venture capitalists who attended.

"I heard three questions raised at the dinner that began to frame the discussion," said Utne. "One was, 'What is the impact of technology, entertainment and design on the environment?' The second

was, 'How can computers address and help solve the environmental crisis?' And third, 'How can the intelligence and creativity of the group at TED2 be focused on saving the earth?'"

What came out of that discussion was a commitment to take action, perhaps in the form of a conference specifically about the environment for people involved in technology. Philanthropist **Joshua Mailman**, president of the investment company **Mailman Brothers** in New York, came up with the name EcoTech, and enlisted the help of **Dan Farber**, executive editor of **MacWEEK** to pull it together.

"I think a meeting in the Bay Area or Silicon Valley, focusing on technology as a force for change, can creatively address the problems," said Mailman. "It would be a kind of 'technofreaks for the environment.' The idea is: how do we apply the resources that we have to do things that will help the earth and affect the lives of the poorest people out there, the people who are in worse shape than the society? If we don't answer that question as a culture, nothing else matters."

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