

Cool Tools Show Podcast 001 Transcript 5/27/2014

For links and audio, [click here](#).

Mark: Welcome to the Cool Tools Show Episode One. I'm Mark Frauenfelder, Editor In Chief of Cool Tools, a website of tool recommendations written by our readers. You can find us at CoolTools.org. I'm joined by my cohost Kevin Kelly the founder of Cool Tools. How's it going Kevin?

Kevin: It's great!

Mark: Good. So, in each episode of the Cool Tools Show Kevin and I talk to a guest about some of his or her favorite uncommon and uncommonly good tools they think others should know about. Our guest today is David Pogue.

David is the founder of Yahoo Tech, having been groomed for the position by thirteen years as the Personal Technology Columnist for the New York Times. He's also a monthly columnist for Scientific American and host of the science shows on PBS's nova. He's been a correspondent for CBS Sunday Morning since 2002. With over three million books in print, David is one of the world's bestselling how-to authors. Hey David, how's it going?

David: Very well!

Mark: Good. So glad to have you on our inaugural show. We've talked to you a little bit in advance. You have some tools to talk about, things that you use and would like to recommend. Go ahead and tell us about one of them.

David: Well first of all, before that I would like to acknowledge the history making honor of being on the number one (001) podcast. When they dig up the rubble of our civilization they'll find the one that started it all. Episode one. So, thank you for thinking of me.

As you noted from that over-long bio, I'm a little overcommitted. There's a lot going on and there's absolutely no way I would get through it, no way I would manage all these different things, if I didn't have some really powerful and clever hardware and software, so your whole Cool Tools movement and book really struck me where I live. I'm a big believer.

My life revolves around the calendar. I use a Mac and there's this really cool calendar called Busy Cal and what's neat about it is that it builds on the same database as Apple's own calendar program. So, you get all the benefits of all the work apple has done to, for example, synchronize your calendar between your phone your tablet and your computers, but they've added more features and a better design on top of it.

One of my favorite things about BusyCal is that on any other month-view calendar today's date is where it would fall if it were on a wall calendar which might be on the bottom row, but by definition you're looking at a calendar to plan ahead. Busy Cal has the option of having today's date be at the top of the calendar even if it's the last week of the month. It's a perpetually scrolling month view and it makes so much sense, so you're always looking ahead.

Mark: It really does! It's such an obvious thing, yet I've never seen any calendar do that before.

Kevin: One of the dissatisfactions that I have with the calendar programs is that the tint they use for "Today" is often very subtle and I can't even tell where "Today" is. Does it solve that problem as well?

David: Why yes it does, Kevin. All you need to do is go into settings. Of course, it's much more customizable than apple's own app, so you can make the text date, like May 23rd much bigger and bolder, for example. I love that there's a keystroke also in apple's program "command t." that always jumps back to today's date and highlights it, in this case, in bright blue so it's quite easy to find.

Kevin: And is it shareable? That was the genius of, say, google calendar is that you can share it with your family or coworkers or your assistant. Does Busy Cal also do that?

David: Yeah, so it does because it builds on Apple's shareable, so of course you can share individual categories with anyone who's in the apple ecosystem. So I can share my fantasy sports league calendar with you if you have an iCloud account, but it also speaks all the common calendar and wireless languages like Google Calendar and Yahoo Calendar and Outlook. All the things that Apple's own calendar would because again it builds on Apple's calendar database so even if BusyCal goes out of business you're not going to be stranded with some now obsolete program. You can always just fall back on apple's own, so really clever.

Mark: What do you use for your iPhone calendar, david?

David: I still use the regular built in calendar. I tried some of the other ones and I didn't really find them quite as compelling as something like busy cal.

Mark: Have you tried Fantastical?

David: I have! I didn't stick with it maybe because I was just too hurried.

My experience with coot Tools is that there's always of course an investment to switch your habits over to it and you never know when you make that investment if it's going to pay out. That's why reviews and ratings are so important. You're relying on the wisdom of the masses.

So for example I'm a huge, huge fan of text expanders. The iPhone has a built in one and it syncs to the mac and I also use a third party one called TextExpander. Over the years I must have built up five or six hundred little two letter codes that expand to bigger words.

I write a ridiculous amount. I write an article a day or more and so when you calculate words like "because"

"computer" "internet" even "you" "the" "that" "problem." Words that I use a lot are all one or two letter abbreviations now. For me, if I want to say "the problems is because of windows" I would type "t. space p. l. space is b. c. space of w. z." So I type a third of what you would type.

[Laughter]

Mark: That's great!

Kevin: Because you're typing that sentence so many times in a year, right?

[Laughter]

David: Let's just say "those words."

Mark: So David if you have TextExpander open right now could you click on the statistics button and tell us how many hours you've saved so far?

David: Oh wow! Okay, so TextExpander, statistics. Oh, I've never looked in here. This is cool. I'm clicking the statistics button and it's not opening. Bummer!

Mark: Oh, that's too bad. Well, I'll just tell you. I reinstalled text expander recently after I reformatted my hard drive, so I don't know how long ago. It wasn't that long ago. It says that I have saved 90.62 hours so far with TextExpander. That's a lot!

[Laughter]

David: Oh man! Here we go, hours saved: 83.84 at eighty words per minute.

Mark: Alright, I'm doing forty words per minute because I'm a horrible typist, so you're closer to twice as many hours saved.

Kevin: So David do you have a mail client that you use or are you just using Gmail directly on the web version?

David: Yeah I'm using Apple's own mail program. It's got bugs and it frustrates me, but it has also some unbelievable efficiencies built into it.

I don't know if you guys know about the data detectors, but these are phenomenal. So anytime anyone emails you and says "why don't we meet Thursday at one o'clock to discuss the new bowling schedule," you just point to it without clicking and Mail puts a dotted outline around it. It knows that this is somehow data that you can use. You click it and it parses that and adds it to your calendar, "Thursday, one o'clock, bowling meeting." It knows!

The same thing if someone sends you their contact information or you point to their signature at the bottom of an email. You just point to the contact information. It puts a dotted outline and proposes putting that into your address book. It parses it into first and last name, email, phone number, street address, Twitter account. It puts all that for you. It just saves so much time.

Mark: That's great! So, the reason that I abandoned Apple's Mail app a couple of years ago, a few years ago, is that the search was so slow. Has that improved?

David: The search isn't slow for me, but it is very frustrating. I frequently can't find stuff that I know is there and I haven't quite figured out what I'm doing wrong or what Apple is doing wrong.

Mark: Yeah that's the unfortunate thing about it, I think

Kevin: Both of us moved over to Post Box. Because I was moving from Eudora, you know.

David: Oh, wow!

Mark: And before that, Pine.

[Laughter]

Kevin: Eudora was the oldest piece of software that I was using. So, that's the interesting question. What's the oldest piece of software, oldest meaning in a sense you've used the longest without changing?

David: Oh, man I love this. So, in the eighties I was using this program called Quick Decks. It's a free form kind

of Hyper Card or database where you can use it for names of addresses or recipes or driving directions, kind of like Evernote really.

For years and years it was upgraded. It was called things like iData. It changed names but it was still maintained and I kept chugging on where everybody else had their addresses in fields like name, address, phone number. I chug on with my entire life in this freeform one card per person [program].

It became increasingly problematic because I didn't have any of this in my phone, so I finally bit the bullet and hired somebody to transfer all these cards painstakingly into Evernote. So, now at least I sync across my devices. Evernote is pretty amazing.

Kevin: What software is the oldest that you're using now?

David: The oldest thing that I'm using now? Well it's probably Microsoft Word. Still using that to type and again I've got that thing, quick keyed to the hilt. I have got so many macros and defined styles over the years. No-one else would be able to use it.

Mark: Are you using Google Docs at all for your word processing?

David: Sometimes when there are things to share, things to collaborate on, but the program is always open and again it's been customized to the hilt, so it's my right hand at this point.

Mark: Yeah. You're locked in.

Kevin: So what other things do you have on your list that you want to share with folks that you think they don't know about?

David: I travel a ton so I've become sort of a ninja air traveler. Got a lot of stuff that I've honed.

For example, there's nothing worse than realizing that you've lost your charging cable for your phone. As mentioned I have an iPhone, so I've stumbled upon something called a charge key. It's a tiny rubberized

two inch strip. One end slides into your USB jack. The other end slides into your iPhone and it's a safety charging/syncing cable that's two inches long and can go on your keychain. I'm a big believer in having that as a backup. It's saved me more than once.

I'm a big believer in hearing protection on flights. I tested all the noise canceling headphones. I literally traveled with sixteen of them on one transatlantic flight to test them and wow did I get some funny looks!

[Laughter]

I tried each of them for ten minutes to compare them and the best by far are the Bose. I have mixed feelings because they're very expensive and they're kind of a snippy company to deal with, but their technology is so much better than the other noise canceling headphones.

But they're big and they're bulky and the latest version the QuietComfort 15s actually suck away so much noise that it's uncomfortable for some people, including me. You feel like it creates a negative suction feeling in your ears and it's very uncomfortable, but I've stumbled on to their ear bud version of the same thing. Noise canceling ear buds called the QuietComfort 20s.

Before the broadcast you guys and I were talking about how these are all the rage now. They're so comfortable, they cut the noise a lot and you listen to your music in great style and great sound. However, I also keep a spare for those because they have to be charged and sometimes they're dead.

Earplugs, like foam drugstore earplugs. I would say they cut the sound as much or more than noise canceling headphones. They cost a quarter and as long as you're not going to be listening to music or a movie they do a fantastic job and I'm surprised that I don't see more people wearing them.

Kevin: So the emergency USB phone charger connector; I have a version of that that slips into my wallet. It's sort of flat.

David: The same company makes the charge card, that is. The same company makes now the charge key.

Mark: Here's a little tip for that: If you're in a hotel room and you find yourself without the iPhone charger transformer device, most television sets in hotel rooms have USB ports on them and you can plug your device into that. And so you can charge your phone that way.

David: Oh, that's very good! And here's another one: If you find yourself in a hotel and you can't find your charger or you left it somewhere, go to the front desk and ask if you can borrow one from the lost and found because other people before you have left theirs behind too.

Mark: Yes, like me. Many times I have left wall warts in hotel rooms all the time and also whenever I give a presentation I leave my USB key with the AV guys. They must have a great collection of them.

David: Oh man! I have left more mac laptop video dongles. I have populated the world with those things.

Mark: Now my dongle has my email address taped to it.

Kevin: I do too. Yeah.

David: That's genius!

Mark: I should actually put my phone number so they can text me. That would be quicker, I think.

Kevin: Yeah, I label those dongles. That's what you wanna do because you can get them back that way.

David: Wow, that is so smart! Well, in exchange for that piece of brilliance I'll share something that will change both of your lives. I don't think either of you have written about this.

When you're editing and you're if you're right handed and you're editing text, you are leaving your left hand on the keyboard but your right hand is constantly and unnecessarily moving between the track pad or the mouse and the delete key as you delete and edit text, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Your left hand is wasted!

[Laughter]

So, I invented this. What you want is a delete key on the left side of the keyboard. So you can go click, delete, click, delete, click, delete with both hands in operation. I cannot function without it and, believe it or not, it's hard to set that up.

I've tried a bunch of the macro programs both for Mac and Windows and most of them don't let you remap a key to the backspace function, so I've found a free undocumented macro program for the mac called spark, just google it Spark Mac OS 10.

Not only is it a really great macro program for example, all my programs I don't use the dock ever. I open everything with keystrokes so, "control w." for Microsoft word, "control b." for BusyCal, "control e." for Evernote etcetera and then I've set up the escape key, top left right across from the backspace key, to be the left handed delete key and it is life changing.

Mark: That's such a fantastic idea. I'm going to do that right away.

David: There you go. See? It was worth inventing the podcast just for that.

Kevin: So, David your head must be filled with all these little shortcuts and shorthand language because you have TextExpander with several hundred you have all these macros. I kind of imagine if we dissected your brain we'd see all these one or two letter combinations. How do you remember all the macros and shorthand?

David: Well that's an excellent question and the answer is, as with any skill you learn it over the years. I started out with two!

I can remember Macintosh is "m. c." and Windows is "w. z." I can remember that and then after a week of that I'm like "yknow another word I'm typing a lot is 'problem,' so let's set up one for that" so they happen every time that I discover that I'm writing something over and over I make a new one. I never would have been able to do it all at once.

Kevin: I must have a different kind of brain because every time I pick up InDesign or something I haven't used in a couple of months or Photoshop I feel like I have to relearn all those shortcuts.

It's like a language, so I'll be living and dreaming, say InDesign or something while I'm doing a book and then two months later I can't remember anything. It's like, "how do you link text?" I'm always relearning software for some reason.

David: It's so true. Maybe that's why Adobe wants you to subscribe now so you're forced to constantly use it.

Mark: Yeah, or you'll feel guilty.

Speaking of Adobe, I read that review you wrote a week or so ago about Adobe Voice. That sounds like a really cool app for the iPad. Can you talk a little bit about that?

David: Yeah it's a truly wonderful free app — incredibly visual, incredibly easy, incredibly creative — that lets you make explainer videos. I don't know how else to describe these. They're all over the web. You've seen these. They're narrated with happy ukulele music and little animated graphics that explain a product or a website or a scientific concept and they're at the top of every new website, every new company. It lets you make these to present an idea, as a birthday card, whatever.

The thing about Adobe Voice is that it hearkens back to the old days of even Mac Paint or Hyper Card or simple tools with infinite possibilities, so you sit down with this thing on each, not slide because it turns into a continuous animation. I don't know, scene?

For each scene you can choose any of three things to put on this slide or on this scene, some text, an icon. It comes with fifty thousand; you just type in "banana" or "banjo" or whatever you wanna illustrate with or, this is the real brilliance, a photo and it goes out to the web and searches the hundreds of millions of photos that have been flagged as royalty free, creative commons so you don't run into any rights problems and you choose a design, a theme, a color scheme and a kind of music and you narrate each scene, each sentence by just holding your button down on this record button. You can redo it over and over. It has audio sweetening to make it sound like you're in studio and then in five minutes you have this incredibly professional looking beautiful visual explainer video.

Kevin: That's fantastic! That's really fantastic!

David: And kids are all over it and teachers are all over it and business people are all over it. Anyone who has an iPad, and I hope they'll bring it to Android soon, should totally download this free app it's really cool.

Mark: It would be great to add to presentations too, I think.

David: Right, or instead of presentations. The beauty of it is that it's self-running or self-contained so you can post it on Facebook or Twitter and send it to someone by email and so on.

Mark: I love the Hyper Cardish-ness of it. I miss hyper card.

David: Yeah I know, right. It launched so many creative careers, that Hyper Card.

Kevin: Yeah! We produced the largest hyper card deck at the time which was the Whole Earth Catalogue in Hyper Card if you could imagine that.

David: Wow! There were some late nights, some repetitive mouse syndrome.

[Laughter]

Kevin: So, David what else do you have. Is there anything else household-wise that you use that you might have that you use in your house that is uncommon or uncommonly good.

David: Yes! I'm glad you brought that up. I think this should be government mandated ownership of this next thing. This is so important. So, most of us eat. Most of us have food in our houses.

[Laughter]

Kevin: Speak for yourself!

David: If you think of the waste and the washing and the multiple containers...My wife turned me onto these things. They're these indestructible heatproof wash proof drop proof bowls with airtight rubberized lids. That's all it is! You get a set of these enough to hold leftovers or soup or hold dinner.

They're all different sizes with these rubberized grippy lids that are so easy to put on and Anchor makes them, those are the ones that I have, but Pyrex, Snaplock, Kinetic, Rubbermaid they're all into this game now and they're the first thing that you should buy for your home because you can mix the food in it you can bake the food in it you can serve the food in it and then when the meal's over you slap the rubberized lid on top and store it in the fridge, the leftovers in it, and because it's glass, guess what? You see what's in there in the fridge!

So my fridge looks like a commercial, it's so organized and beautiful and there's everything. Think of the saran wrap they save of people filling the landfill

with plastic that won't deteriorate for a hundred thousand years.

Kevin: Yeah these are the kind that snap down and they're very secure and you can stack the up fairly high because these lids are on secure and they will take weight so unlike saran wrap you can actually stack them up and the other thing that I discovered the real key to this is that I bought two sets.

You wanna have a gazillion of them because they come in different sizes and you can't have too many of them that way there's always one that's clean so you actually want to have more than you think you need and your refrigerator will look like an ad for these things. It's very satisfying to open up and see everything organized, too.

David: So satisfying and so great that you're doing so much less washing and so much less throwing away of stuff it's just I can't believe that these aren't a thing that everyone has like a cutting board or a microwave. It should be the way food is made, cooked, served and stored.

Kevin: Have you found that there's one make that may be better than other makes of this genre.

David: Yes, I have. Some of them have these plastic lids that snap on which are fine, but the Anchor ones have these rubber edges so they're stronger they can accommodate bigger loads and they let you stack more because the top is so strong, so I'm a fan of these Anchor True Seals. Oh and speaking of cutting boards, I found this in a catalogue and this seems to be really a Kevin Kelley idea. So it's a cutting board that folds in thirds so once you're done cutting the thing you fold up the wings and make a chute so the food slides into your bowl without falling off.

[Laughter]

Mark: Very nice!

Kevin: That is marvelous. And does that have a name?

David: Yeah, the one that I have is called Chop2Pot with the numeral 2 in it. Chop2Pot. There's a great gift for the cook in your life.

Kevin: Chop2Pot, okay. I have not seen that one. That is new to me, but it does make [sense]. It's sort of like you wanna make your chopping board into a funnel.

David: Right, exactly. So nothing falls off the side when you dump it in.

Mark: Which it always does.

David: Yeah, exactly! David Pogue Master of Not Wasting Food! He's got the anchor bowls! He's got the Chop2Pot!

The other thing I had on my list that I really want to put a plug in for anyone who has a Macbook Air laptop.

Kevin: Me!

Mark: And me!

David: Millions like us suffer in silence as the freakin' MagSafe magnet turns out not to be strong enough so every time you shift on the couch it falls out. I don't know if you have this problem, but for many of us we're very frustrated that the magnet is not as strong enough as it was in the old days. So there is this successful Kickstarter thing called a Snuglet. And it is a shim, it looks like a staple. This tiny little liner for the MagSafe jack which through some miracle of physics amplifies the magnetic grip of the power plug so that it does not fall out unless you really kick it or trip on it or something which is the original idea, so that has changed my life!

Mark: That is so cool and so who makes this and what is it called?

David: It's called the Snuglet, it's snuglet.com. Like most Kickstarter projects it's just a couple of guys who got frustrated and invented their own thing. I love the Kickstarter concept because any other way of

developing a product involves too many cooks. There's lawyers there's marketing people, there's other people who say "y'know what you should do..." and pretty soon the idea is diluted, but with Kickstarter the creators of the idea, the visionary remains in charge all the way to the end, so they tend to be very pure of vision and very successful.

Mark: And they also get to test the size of the market if there's an audience for the, for the thing their coming up with

David: Yeah I hear that a lot, that it's not so much the money as what they learn from dealing with potential customers.

Kevin: So David tell us a little bit about your current gig. We wanted to kind of hear just a few words about your awesomeness and your new job for awesomeness, so are you going to Kickstart something there too?

[Laughter]

David: I am thinking about Kickstarter a lot. I've been hosting these Nova science specials and y'know it's a public television thing so we get our money from the government like the National Science Foundation grants and "Viewers Like You," but the National Science Foundation has ceased giving grants to television projects, so we are dead in the water for making more Nova shows. The shows that I've done have had a lot of success with kids and everywhere I got conferences, like Kevin you and I were just in the maker fair in San Francisco.

Kevin: And so was mark.

David: Oh really? Hi Mark!

[Laughter]

We were surrounded by children who were fans of the show so I thought maybe we should go to Kickstarter and seek funds for some new nova specials, but you asked about the yahoo gig.

After thirteen years working writing the tech column for the New York Times in January I moved to yahoo and founded a new consumer tech site. It's yahootech.com and you know I'm an objective critic, so I can say this: It's really cool! It's a cool tool! There is to my knowledge no other website with the same tech focus we have which is not speeds and feeds and the latest snapdragon processor, it's how to use the stuff you've already got. It's tips and tricks and how-to's and troubleshooting and how you should develop policies for your kids and it's funny and it's a lot of video and it's classic Pogue stuff, but much more of it so you can sign up to be emailed with this stuff and we've been coming along. We had our first 3 million visitor day a couple weeks ago.

Mark: Wow congratulations. That's fantastic.

Kevin: Wow, three million in one day is what you're saying?

David: Yup, in one day.

Kevin: Oh my gosh! What were you saying?

David: You know, I think that day had a number of things going for it. One was I think we were reporting on an iOS vulnerability and what to do about it. I think it was just after the Target thing so we had some good advice on passwords and I think a lot of Yahoo articles get these huge numbers when they're linked to by the yahoo main page, which is probably the single most used website on the planet. Whenever they link to you, boy your numbers go through the roof.

Mark: It helps! Yeah I remember for a while the Yahoo front page would link to Boing Boing articles occasionally and we would get five hundred thousand page views instantly from that. I was really nice.

David: It is nice.

Kevin: It occurs to me David that what you're doing is your working on what I call a techno literacy. It's this idea of trying to make people literate in a technological way as opposed to say a reading and

writing way and I think that's really an essential skill. We were talking about the difficulty of trying something long enough to make it a habit and so I think some of this stuff should be taught in school.

David: Yeah! Me too, as a matter of fact maybe I should make this announcement now on this episode 001 of this podcast. I have been in a way been leading up my whole life to this moment of techno literacy. I wrote the Dummies books for many years and my Times column and I teach people computers in person.

I gave a TED talk last year where I distilled down my ten favorite basic tips that you think everybody knows, but they really don't, like you can hit the space bar to scroll down in an email or a web page. You show people that and they're like "oh my god I've been using the mouse!" You're right there's no curriculum, there's no driver's ed., there's no government pamphlet that teaches you these things, so I have written a book that distills these two hundred things.

It comes out in the fall, so that's why I'm announcing it super early. No-one knows I'm doing this, but it's called Pogue's Basics. And that's it! It's two hundred of these things for phones and email and the web and computers and I'm quite pleased with it.

Mark: What a fantastic idea

Kevin: Y'know actually I attended your talk and I was blown away because I think at least half of them I didn't know either.

David: Wow!

Kevin: It's true I didn't know half of them and the other half I was like "I know those and you really should know them too" was the sense was that these are important and I wish other people did know them.

I'm sure of the two hundred things in your book I probably only know sixty of them.

Mark: Sounds great! Well David our time is up. Thank you so much for taking the time out to talk to us and share your tips. You can find out more about Yahoo Tech just by going to yahootech.com. David, thanks!

David: Thank you so much and good luck with the podcast!