

Computing Reviews News

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Featured Reviewer: Gunnar Wolf



Featured in Five is a monthly section where we pose questions to a [Computing Reviews](#) featured reviewer. Here are the responses from our August featured reviewer, Gunnar Wolf.

Q) What is the most important thing that's happened in computing in the past 10 years?

A) Contrary to many people in the field, I do not find computing to be a very fast-moving field. Most of the basics that make computing what it is, and which we enjoy in day-to-day life, come from the 1960s. Of course, we have seen a lot of change—computers today are by no means used in the same way (much less for the same reasons!) as they were over 50 years ago.

I'd phrase it in just the opposite way: the biggest changes to computing have been brought on by society, by the way we use our computing devices, by the way our social interactions find new ways to be enhanced by technology.

However, if you insist on your original question: the last decade and a half have seen a great improvement in power efficiency, in computers big and small. Not only have we witnessed an increase in laptop battery life from around two hours to over ten hours, but we have seen the growth of different markets, such as the Internet of Things (IoT) field, where dozens of computers performing very specific tasks throughout the house must draw little enough power to barely be noticeable in our monthly power bills. Computers are embedded in devices powered by the sun or charged by movement.

The impact is also noticeable at the higher end: with the growth of data centers and an increased reliance on large-scale data processing, power efficiency has become more important for all of us. And not only are today's servers more energy-efficient than they were over a decade ago; we also make better use of them: containerization and service orchestration allow servers to be shared between completely independent tenants for cloud computing, allowing for more energy-efficient usage.

And regarding desktops, we are finally seeing how the x86 grip on mainstream computing gets challenged. Several manufacturers have started selling ARM-based laptops and desktops, allowing for much better power efficiency without sacrificing throughput or user experience.

Q) If you weren't working in the computer science field, what would you be doing instead?

A) I have always enjoyed computing. When I started to work for a living, I first tried to get a job in any other field. My thoughts were, if computing is my passion, having it as a job might spoil the fun for me.

Fortunately, I didn't find any jobs I deemed good enough, and accepted both a systems administration and a technical support position.

Q) By the end of your career, where do you think computer science will have taken us? What are you working on that might contribute toward that?

A) I know better than to try and futurize. The world is nothing like when I first came into contact with computers, still a child, 40 years ago. Whatever I foresee for the next 40 years, I'm more likely to get it wildly wrong than to get it right, even a tiny bit. I will respectfully pass on this question!

My current work focus is on centralization-free trust conveying algorithms. I am interested in technologies such as OpenPGP, which can provide strong distributed identity proof without resorting to a central authority; it certainly faces important challenges, but as a broad set of technologies, it might allow for better ways for the future of humanity.

Q) Who is your favorite historical figure? Why?

A) I prefer not to single out any historical figure as a specific favorite. This might be because it's coherent with what I described above, that is, my interest in societies being centralization-free, or it may be because I admire people in many different areas and would not like to single out any one and thus leave out the others.

Q) What is your favorite type of music?

A) I am quite eclectic in what I listen to: classic rock, Balkan or Klezmer music, modern Arab, Latin American folklore... I think the music genre is an incomplete way to understand my musical tastes. I usually listen to music when I'm working, and I enjoy having a probably non-sensical, randomized, always changing collection.

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