Inside the Wired25 Summit

Insights on the future of tech from Wired's gathering of iconic leaders.

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Wired, one of the chief publications dedicated to technology and its impact on culture and society, was founded 25 years ago as the Internet age boomed.

Now a title in the Conde Nast family, Wired held a weekend of public events to celebrate its anniversary, followed by a day-long Summit.

The Summit, held in San Francisco on October 15, convened some of the top names in tech for an all-day discourse, led by a number of Wired reporters and the editor in chief, Nick Thompson. The crowd of 700 heard from senior executives including:

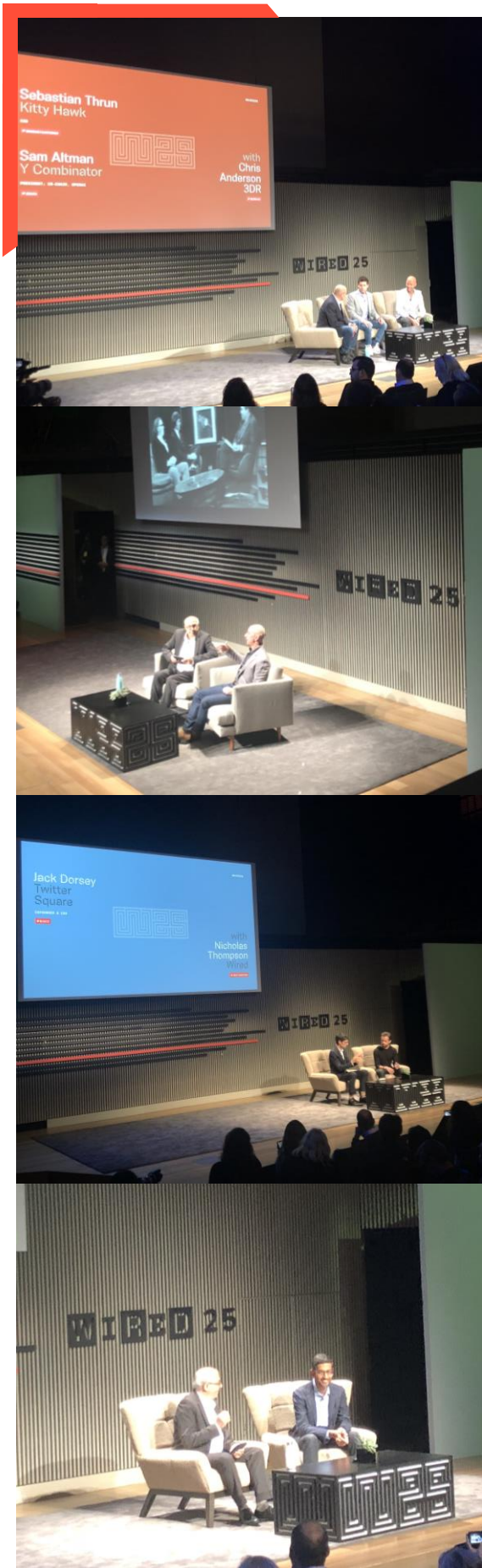
- **Jeff Bezos** (Amazon and Blue Origin)
- **Sundar Pichai** (Google)
- **Jack Dorsey** (Twitter)
- **Marc Benioff** (Salesforce)
- **Satya Nadella** (Microsoft)
- **Jony Ive** (Apple)
- **Kevin Systrom** (Instagram)
- **Anne Wojcicki** (23andMe)
- **Susan Wojcicki** (YouTube)
- **Sam Altman** (Y Combinator)

+ several others.

The program covered an array of topics, from space travel to gene splicing, and a common theme emerged: despite current challenges (real-world consequences, ethics questions, and so on) these technology leaders are still optimistic. After all, the past few decades of digital transformation have fundamentally rewired the fabric of society in many ways we (collectively) would not want to abandon.

There was also acknowledgement that not all developments are positive, but most speakers felt that what we can do is put structures into place — in their view, these should be company- and industry-led, with the possibility of *some* (but not too much) regulatory input — to help avoid past issues and ensure technological advances will be of more benefit to society going forward.

One thing seemed clear, according to these leaders: innovation will not stop, both in established companies and start-ups.



1 Ethical Responsibility: Tech as a Force for Good

Across the viewpoints on stage, the overarching consensus was that tech does bear an ethical responsibility not only to customers, but to society and the world at large. All businesses, including tech, can no longer view corporate social responsibility as an optional initiative, in large part due to recent backlash against the tech industry's growing list of unforeseen consequences. One after another, senior executives espoused their optimism about the positive benefits of tech for society now and in the future — but virtually all added a caveat that this vision will only be the case if we proactively develop more transparent ethical guardrails into product systems and processes.

If there is one lesson learned so far in the digital age, it's that even when advanced technologies are created for good, people can still find ways to use them for bad purposes. It's the responsibility of those in power to use their resources to lead the charge in course-correcting now to set up future developments for success. While there was general agreement that the onus should be on tech companies – not users – to ensure tech is used for good, speakers also argued that it's up to us – society as a whole – to collaborate and make this goal a reality.

- **Jony Ive**, Chief Design Officer at Apple, noted part of the challenge of ensuring tech is used as its creators intended is that change is rarely foreseeable, but part of the solution may be to incorporate more of humanity into tech: "The nature of innovation is that you cannot predict all the consequences. In my experience, there have been surprising consequences. Some fabulous, and some less so. I think it's good to be connected. I think the real question is what you do with that connection. The more you remove people, the more technology can become transactional." He noted that through products like personalized emojis, Apple is working to "restore some humanity to the way we connect."
- On tech companies' responsibility to give back to their communities, and addressing the issue of homelessness in San Francisco specifically, Salesforce Chairman and CEO **Marc Benioff** argued passionately that we can no longer allow business to separate itself from society: "Philanthropy can only scale so far. What's happening [in San Francisco regarding homelessness] is just not right. We have these incredible companies, incredible entrepreneurs. But we cannot separate ourselves from others. We have to get back to the feeling that we're one, and that we are responsible for the city that we are living in and growing our businesses in."
- Twitter CEO **Jack Dorsey** made the point that global issues need to be solved by global conversations – an opportunity especially for those companies operating globally – to bring complex debates to light. As Twitter grapples with issues around free speech, content moderation and filter bubbles, Dorsey agreed that the Twitter platform may exacerbate partisan arguments instead of providing product-level features that may facilitate productive debates and opposing points of view: "I think Twitter does contribute to filter bubbles, and I think that's wrong of us, we need to fix it. But I don't think it's the chronological timeline or the ranked timeline that does it. We're not giving [users] the tools to have the opportunity to break down the filter bubble."
- **Jeff Bezos,** CEO of Amazon and Blue Origin, was adamant that while the digital age is riddled with issues worth fixing, we cannot let them stem the flow of much-needed innovation and efforts. "I think the Internet in its current incarnation is a confirmation-bias machine," he said. "I worry that some of these technologies will be very useful to autocratic regimes to enforce their will. Having technology that increases confirmation bias probably isn't good — it's going to lead to more tribalism... Society develops an immune response eventually to the bad uses of new technology, but it takes time. A bunch of things are going to happen that we aren't going to like that come out of technology, but that's not new. That's always been the case. And we will figure it out. The last thing we'd ever want to do is stop the progress of new technologies."

2 The Next Evolution: Artificial Intelligence

Almost every speaker mentioned AI and its massive potential to drive changes in the labor market, in how we communicate and transact, and much more. In general, the speakers felt that tech companies should avoid simply seizing opportunities to make use of AI (or any hot new technology), or simply capitalize on filling unmet needs. Speakers argued that in addition to expanding CSR efforts, the next step will be ensuring that data itself is built and used responsibly – most notably, for AI applications. Interestingly, most argued that "the singularity" (the rise of super intelligent machines and all the consequences thereof) is not imminent. As automated systems and services are becoming ubiquitous, AI and machine learning will be a driving force.

- Y Combinator's **Sam Altman** explained that at its core, AI is a tool we can use to analyze data in ways the human brain cannot, leading to an organized output that is useful for society. Not only does AI help us better understand datasets and the world around us, utilizing AI for certain tasks frees up our time to focus on other and often more meaningful pursuits. Altman dismissed fears of a dystopian bot-controlled future and noted, "I think we are not that far away from a world where any repetitive human work, that does not require an emotional connection, will be done by AI. I have become much more optimistic we're going to get to the good case. As such I don't see the moral burden on the AI, I see the burden on us, the people who use it. My conclusion is you can slow down the future, but you can't stop it. The technology and products that people want, eventually happen."

- **Fei-Fei Li,** Director of the Stanford AI Lab, is working on making smart software that aligns with human values. Instead of replacing people with AI systems, she argued for the importance of thinking more about how smart software can work alongside people and understand our emotional nuances. Li also underscored the importance of having a more diverse group of people building AI systems to mitigate chances that AI will replicate current biases and exacerbate them. She noted, "As much as AI is showing its power, it's a nascent technology. What's really important is putting humanity at the center. We have time, but we have to act now."

- Intel Vice President and Senior Fellow **Genevieve Bell** made the case for creating a universal framework for responsible AI. Informed by her background in anthropology, Bell pointed out that as technological advances continue, finding answers to societal and cultural questions are just as important as technological ones, given each new technology requires people to bring that tech safely to scale. Bell suggests we must produce a framework that ensures our automated systems are accountable, fair, transparent, honest and human centric in order to successfully operate to our benefit. To spearhead this novel concept, Bell is building an entirely new branch of engineering and applied sciences at the Australian National University.

- **Satya Nadella**, CEO of Microsoft, urged that each tech company must be held responsible for how its products are used, starting by ensuring the integrity of the data itself, which includes protecting against hackers. "We want to take tech and empower the world with it. Our responsibility is to ensure that what tech we provide is being used for good. One of the foundational things we go through is evaluation of the humanitarian infrastructure." Nadella also discussed how AI algorithms can help people with disabilities enter the workforce, as opposed to AI replacing the workforce as many people fear. He noted, "There are a billion people in the world who don't fully participate in our economies or societies. Technology can allow them to." Microsoft's Chief Accessibility Officer **Jenny Lay-Flurrie** added, "Artificial intelligence is going to just open up so many doors to us all," pointing to automatic captioning and software that translates sign language as examples of how AI can help more people enter the workforce.

3 Tech's Next Frontier: Health and Biotech

The next industry that tech is set to "disrupt" will be human health. Discussions of using tech for societal good turned to talk about innovations we can use to live longer, healthier lives. This vision will be enabled by combining the powers of tech and big data to facilitate the ultimate health care experience when coupled with medicine. Speakers said that the next several years will be critical for discovery in medicine as we dive deeper into understanding how genetics influence disease on a cellular level, with potential for new technologies to make huge strides in giving people the power to control their health and combat diseases. Top of mind was gene editing tool CRISPR, which has the potential to literally cut out disease, including cancer and HIV, from the human genome. As part of this health-tech revolution, data collection will help put the power of medical decisions into the hands of patients by making information about our own bodies and health more accessible.

- CRISPR pioneer **Alex Marson** explained that the scientific community is approaching human cells as hardware, and our DNA as the software that dictates how those cells behave. "We'll be able to start putting in new logic to the underlying code of immune cells to treat broad spectrums of disease, not just cancer." He emphasized that CRISPR will "help us iterate faster and faster to discover which software programs will work for which diseases."
- **Sean Parker**, founder of the Parker Institute for Cancer Immunotherapy, discussed his leap from being an entrepreneur to his current focus on life sciences, as well as the massive opportunity he sees ahead in biotech: "At some point I got frustrated with the monoculture of the consumer internet world. It was unsatisfying spending all our time making products that were as addictive as possible. Where we are now with biotech feels quite a bit like where we were with information technology in the late 1990s, when we were just interested in building products that we thought would make the world a better place. Transitioning to life sciences is incredibly refreshing, because you really feel as though the energy and time you are putting into it are helping people… Scientists have a level of humility… [they] aren't running around trying to get rich and don't have the same distorted expectations about how rich they are going to become."
- **Anne Wojcicki,** 23andMe Cofounder and CEO, talked about the role of data in consumer-facing biotech as a tool for disease prevention, not just for treatment after the disease manifests. "I really look at 23andMe as a data company. We realized we were going to have to prove out what you could do with this [genetic] information. Finding a cure or a treatment for you is one of the clearest ways to show a benefit." Speaking alongside Wojcicki, Stanford University's **Stephen Quake,** who is increasingly focused on replacing invasive procedures with cost-effective and simple tests through data collection and genetic testing, added: "If we can return that kind of information to anyone, it will be a big step forward toward creating more equity in health care."

4 Collaboration: Tech and Government Regulation

For years, tech has been at odds with government regulators. Now, tech executives recognize that the two worlds must collaborate to pave the way for progress. At the very least, they are giving lip service to the idea that the philosophy of "move fast and break things" is no longer accepted. To help ensure that regulators are more positively inclined towards the promise of tech, speakers promoted a new utopian mantra: "government is us," meaning that we are collectively responsible for our democracy. Different facets of society must work together to enable technological change to move forward. In addition to collaborating, speakers also indicated an openness to some possible regulatory oversight of technologies, barring any uninformed heavy-handedness or federal-level censorship of content.

- Kitty Hawk's CEO **Sebastian Thrun** said that regulators have surprisingly not been a roadblock to his company's approach to developing commercial flying transport. As Kitty Hawk works towards creating flying cars, Thrun said he agrees these aircraft should be regulated once they reach scale. He pointed out that regulators and tech companies should realize they are working towards the same goals and aren't as inflexible as some believe. "All these regulatory things are man-made. Regulators want to change the world as much as we want to change the world."
- Code for America Founder **Jennifer Pahlka** and author **Anand Giridharadas** made the case for a more democratic approach to philanthropy and citizen participation. Pahlka applauded those in tech who use their resources to help rebuild government systems that have fallen through the cracks: "We believe these skills that have helped people create a Starbucks or an Amazon actually do have a place in government [as long as the skills are adapted to apply to government]." While many in tech turn to philanthropy because they believe government is broken, Giridharadas claims this is the wrong approach. He noted that while these efforts may be well-intentioned, by skirting around government they actually widen the opportunity gap in the U.S. by keeping the power of change in elite hands: "The richest and most powerful people in the world are unwittingly fighting on both sides of a war—causing, by daylight, problems that they simply will never be able to undo by philanthropic moonlight."
- Google CEO **Sundar Pichai** revealed a bit about Google's reported expansion back to China (after they famously left the market in 2010). Dubbed Project Dragonfly, Pichai described their internal exploration of a limited search engine that would follow China's censorship laws (i.e. focus on entertainment rather than news). Pichai claimed that Project Dragonfly would be able to answer "well over 99%" of search engine queries, and that "there are many, many areas where we could provide information better than what's available." He did not commit to rolling out this product, but argued that the Chinese market is too important to avoid, so he is taking a longer-term view on the matter. Pichai also discussed the fact that employee protests played a role in Google limiting (or not bidding on) AI and cloud-computing projects with the U.S. Department of Defense: "We've given our employees a lot of voice and say in it, but we don't run the company by holding referendums... We take it seriously. But even on this particular issue, it's not just what the employees said; it's also about the debate within the AI community [about weaponization." He noted that Google plans to work with the DoD on other initiatives – likely cybersecurity and transportation planning.
- **Keller Rinaudo,** CEO and Cofounder of Zipline, which uses drones to deliver medical supplies including fresh blood to remote locations in Rwanda, hopes this model will be able to work in remote areas in the U.S. soon. While Zipline saw enormous potential in the parcel delivery service market, they instead decided to go after a much smaller market that would benefit people's lives in the process. By focusing on this life-saving market first, Zipline would be able to get government regulators comfortable with automated drone logistics on a smaller scale, opening doors for conversations about working with regulators on a larger scale in the near future. Rinaudo predicted that using drones for life-saving deliveries will help regulators better understand the need for new frameworks that allow innovations like drones, noting that every flight could potentially save a life. "It's a pretty cool paradigm shift for people who think all technological revolution is going on in U.S., and it'll trickle down to poor countries. This is the opposite of that."

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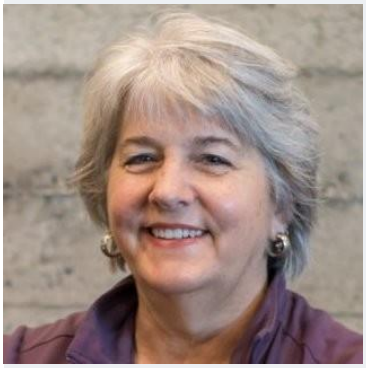

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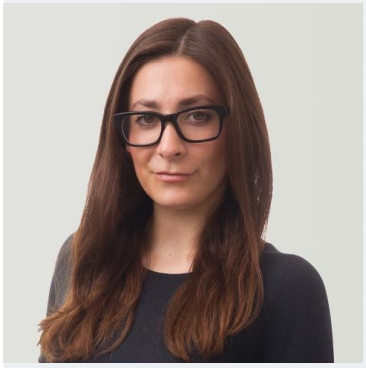
A long-time communicator and connector, Karen has worked in Silicon Valley as an editor, content creator and strategist, including long stints on the comms teams at Google (2002-2011) and at Twitter (2011-2016). She is currently a Senior Adviser to Brunswick's San Francisco office, and is about to launch her new book, "Taking the Work Out of Networking: An Introvert's Guide to Connections That Count" (Simon & Schuster, November 2018). An avid media consumer, Karen also serves on the boards of several organizations supporting journalism and news literacy.



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Zoe's work focuses on corporate and executive profile raising, reputation management and crisis situations, with emphasis on clients in the technology and non-profit sectors including Facebook, Stanford and Melinda Gates. In addition, she leads the Brunswick SF internship program and helped launch a pro-bono initiative working with the Boys and Girls Clubs of SF, Glacier National Park Conservancy and the SF SPCA. Zoe joined Brunswick in 2011 after graduating magna cum laude from Bucknell University with a B.A. in Classics as well as a B.A. in Intellectual History, where she was a member of the Phi Alpha Theta History and Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Societies. Her previous experience includes work at Morrison & Foerster LLP and the Alameda County Bar Association.