

Deja vu 1999 at Tech Cocktail soiree in Lincoln Park

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The buzz of Google's \$1.65 billion acquisition of profit-challenged YouTube was just taking effect as Chicago-area Internet pros squeezed into a Lincoln Park watering hole for the 2.0 version of Tech Cocktail. "It is great to see an energized tech community again," said Michael Silverman, CEO of Internet development firm Duo Consulting. "It reminded me of 1999." Tech Cocktail, which had its first soiree in July, is a Chicago-conceived series of networking events that bring together techies, entrepreneurs, bloggers, investors and others making a living largely from the Web. No speakers or structure, rather the upwards of 300 people in attendance shared dreams and schemes fueled, in part, by several hours of an open bar. Surveying the scene were local venture capitalists Matt McCall of Portage Ventures, Bret Maxwell of MK Capital and Bruce Barron of Origin Ventures. Orbitz COO Michael Sands flew through the scene, as did Pat Ryan Jr., CEO of Incisent Technologies.

While the overcapacity crowd was a bit of a buzz kill (as was one abrasive sponsor), the optimistic energy and eclectic mix of people makes Tech Cocktail a worthwhile event.

Steve Lundin, "chief hunter and gatherer" of marketing firm Big Frontier Communications Group, hosted several cocktail-oriented networking events for Chicago Internet and technology executives between 2000 and 2002. To Lundin, events like Tech Cocktail must evolve into something other than "just an excuse to get drunk."

"When all these events started back in the day seven years ago, there was a reason to go," he said. "You had an idea and were looking to raise money, spread the word or share war experiences. Booze was the social lubricant. To conduct these events without a clear mission makes Tech Cocktail like a blurry Xerox of a Xerox."

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