



By [Amy L. Dickson](#)

Once a year, the [University of Washington's Information School](#) holds an "unconference" called iAffiliates Day. The iAffiliates program is a strategic initiative designed to connect community partners with iSchool faculty, researchers, students, and alumni in a variety of ways – including a morning of information exchange and learning. Participants ranged from a HR rep with Alaska Airlines, to a Point-of-Sale program manager from Costco, to an information services manager for a countywide library system.

What did we all have in common?

As the Information School tenants say, in today's knowledge economy, information is the single most important asset for any organization. We all came together to exchange ideas on how best to create, store, access, manage, use, and share information.

While the morning program was loaded with helpful sessions, I zeroed in on one I thought most useful to my line of work with Blink UX: *Wearable Technology: Hype or Future?*

Facilitated by Nam-Ho Park of Forum One, we covered the full gamut of wearable tech from heart monitors to hearing aids to Google Glass. How many of us have a FitBit or a Fuel Band that we bought, used religiously, and then tossed in a sock drawer three months later? According to Park, that number is higher than you might think. So what's causing this disillusionment with wearable tech?

You guessed it: Bad [user experiences](#). The barriers to higher adoption all feedback into a distasteful UX. Short battery life. Clumsy interface design ([see Samsung's Gear Fit reviews](#) and you'll see how scathing reviewers can be). Sometimes the experience promise goes unfulfilled, sometimes the non-standard protocols get in the way of easily integrating the device into your daily life, and sometimes it's just not durable enough to last.

The most popular wearables these days are based on quantified self, which essentially means increasing people's self-awareness about their behavior, but they're not very good at taking the next step after that. Once you know that you generally walk 8,000 steps a day, what do you do?

And who wants to be THAT GUY wearing the Google Glass in the back of the bus? Wearables, for better or worse, are a fashion statement as much as they are a utility. Do they say what you want them to say about you?



Google Glass

While mature technology is making wearables a reality, I still think, for the most part, one of the problems wearables face in the consumer market is that they do not yet have a clear "job-to-be-done." Additionally, each OEM is wrapped up in their own brand story, so much so that a Samsung watch and an Apple iPhone won't necessarily play nice together. Not yet, anyways.

So what's ahead for wearables? As a group we decided standards and protocols are going to pave the way to greater use and proliferation. The industries that will lead the way in terms of wearable tech innovation, and that have the most to gain? Health care, pro sports, transportation, and even defense.

The easier the devices are to seamlessly integrate into your life (and your wardrobe), the more adoption you'll see. Make them simple and delightful to use, and you'll see a hockey stick in sales growth. As one group participant said, "Wearables are not inventing new interactions, they are just enhancing them."

We all agreed, in the end, wearables are more than hype; whether we like it or not, they are here to stay. But instead of being fancy pedometers or eyewear the next step is to ensure these devices provide meaningful interactions and experiences for their users as the industry matures.

**Valentina Ferrari and Tom Satwicz, Ph.D. contributed to this report.*