

Happy Independence (in IT) Day - What does Independence Mean?

In honour of just passing July 4th (Independence Day for the United States of America), something popped into my head. This is my op-ed on it.

Just about a year ago, I worked on the customer side of technology. I did this for many years. Part of being an author here at DiscoPosse.com came from the fact that I was able to speak on anything at all in technology or elsewhere. This was because I was what we call “independent”.



What does independence mean really? This is a little thought project I have been dealing with lately.

Tweets are my own*

You’ve probably seen this on many Twitter profiles. “Tweets are my own” means that anything you write on your Twitter feed does not necessarily represent the view of your employer. You may have heard that warning on TV before paid programming spots too such as “The opinions expressed in this show do not necessarily reflect the views of (the network or production company).” There are many more like it including some rather hilarious ones here:

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ContentWarnings>.

What the asterisk is in the title is this: Tweets are my own*, *but I may be in trouble for saying this, which could also offend people socially, politically, or even worse, I may be fired over something I say here...hopefully my disclaimer is enough to prevent those things.

That’s a harsh and unfortunate warning, so most people just say “Tweets are my own” instead.

Ironically, some people seem to be rather offended when people write things on Twitter that support their company. Why is that? This is where the independence thing comes in.

Disclaimer: I work at Turbonomic, and I really, really like it

I write this as a disclaimer just because I need to embrace full disclosure. Though my work at Turbonomic I am able to touch every aspect of the data center. From the physical components of network, compute, storage, and all things in between. Software from the hypervisor, to the guest OS, and all the way up the stack to the application and presentation layers. I’m lucky in that way.

Before this I worked in financial services where the regulatory bodies surrounding things like receiving gifts and providing endorsements was extremely rigorous. Even a retweet could be considered an endorsement in some cases according to certain regulatory organizations.

I work with really cool technology and people, and I do my best not to sound preachy (and yes...I know the irony of having Technology Evangelist as my title). I’ve always enjoyed how many other great industry and community advocates have been able to tell the story of challenges in technology and business without being overtly pushing a product. Part of what I get to do at my job is to do just that. I am very lucky in that they support me doing work which is independent of my day-to-day role.

Sponsorship and Community Affiliation

On my About Me and the DiscoPosse page I list my affiliations. There have been some posts by folks that have mentioned that there can be some challenges in being affiliated to a vendor community while still feeling fully independent. I'm on the side of independence with access. Despite getting VMware licenses as a vExpert, that doesn't mean that I will be more inclined to write about content that I wouldn't have if I wasn't interested in it to solve a problem in the industry.

If vendors do feel that it is unfair to have affiliations to these communities, the best way out of that is to offer community members NFR (Not For Resale) licenses and also to make engagement with engineers and product managers a more seamless and frictionless process. Most recognize this and are being very open with community members, and for that we all thank you!

Being Quiet is Virtuous in Technology/Social Media

As an independent blogger for a couple of years, I was given access to many interesting and upcoming bits of information. This comes in the form of advanced briefings, research opportunities, and non-disclosure sessions with companies on a wide array of technology. Because I work for a vendor now, I have to opt out of some of these opportunities because it could impact my work as I do have opportunities to work on product direction. That is easy to handle if done right, and I am very open about that with supporting vendors and sponsors.

I've done work with many companies in the time I've been blogging. Some who you know, and some that you won't. Every partnership and project that was engaged in was done at a time where independence was important. Another thing that comes up is that I won't remove old content, such as tweets, blogs, and other code, because I have changed what I do today or going forward. Everything was done at a point in time.

When a conflict comes up, I opt out of participation. Does this affect my independence? This is one area that I do respect as someone who is paid to do what I do. I have to abide by the best interest of my company. I am also very lucky that I have given lots of leeway to branch out into different areas of technology and only in certain situations would there be a conflict. Luckily, I've always identified these myself and opted out before creating any potential risk.

Don't think that I don't have opinions. I have plenty, but I just choose to offer them only when appropriate and when it supports a better outcome.

Company Support versus Kool-Aid Consumption

You've heard the phrase "Drinking the Kool-Aid" which is very neatly described here, but it is important to discern between passion about a product, technology, process, or person from what some may call drinking the Kool-Aid.

Again, I thoroughly enjoy what I do and I support my team. That isn't because I have been asked to drink Kool-Aid, it's because of a genuine enjoyment of what I do.

As we watch for independence in blogging and social sharing, sometimes it can be mistakenly seen as Kool-Aid when the reality is that many people are just passionate and vocal. Don't confuse the two.



Why did I write this?

This was mostly because I have seen a lot of stuff lately in the media among our social feeds. I know that I am not independent in the sense that I cannot be a Tech Field Day delegate and other such things. At the same time, I want to keep supporting the great independent technologies out there.

So, in summary, my Tweets are my own, I work for Turbonomic, I am independent in my thoughts and opinions, and I'll write about as much as I can here, there, and everywhere. Let's embrace the employed independent community, and give folks a bit of a break because they work for <insert company name>. We are all independent in one way or another. If you are feeling conflicted about having an opinion, the virtuous method of being quiet may be the best way to approach it.

One final thought: don't trash the competitive vendors. I'm not sure if you've noticed, but there are always mergers and acquisitions. Let's all play nicely, and enjoy how technology is changing the face of business and our community for the better every day.