

An Interview With Leading Technology And Product Analyst - Chris Shipley

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This week we're going to be running a few interviews I've done over the past couple of weeks.

Today's interview is really exciting because it's not that often that we have someone like Chris Shipley in Australia.

[Chris Shipley](#) is an award-winning writer, analyst, commentator, and strategist who has tracked the technology industry for more than 20 years.

She is co-founder of and technology analyst for [Guidewire Group](#) and the executive producer of [DEMO Conference](#), an emerging technology conference series.

Chris was recently in Australia for a series of [ANZA Technology Network](#) workshops and took the time to chat with TechNation Australia

Tell us a bit about your background / projects you've worked on.

I've been covering the personal technology industry since 1984, as a reporter and editor at a number of publications, then in the early 90s as a content manager for a number of online services. I joined DEMO in 96 and then in early 2004 co-founded Guidewire Group to focus on and help accelerate early stage companies and emerging markets.

You're in Australia for a series of ANZA Technology workshops. How have they gone?

Outstanding! The companies represent a range of industries and technology market and are often at very different stages from one another, but all have compelling business propositions and have been tremendously receptive to the workshop. The skills they honed in the workshop will serve them well as they explore and move into the US Market.

You've been out to Australia a few times now. What changes in the local startup scene have you noticed over the years?

Companies are increasingly aware of their global market opportunity and generally have a very solid understanding of what will be required to capitalize on the opportunity. The expectations are "right sized" for the market opportunities they are pursuing.

Are there any good qualities which you are consistently seeing in Aussie startups and startup teams?

Lots of great qualities, and at the foundation a sincere passion for their technologies, their products and their markets. Smart entrepreneurs – no matter where they are located – are receptive learners, listening to feedback and incorporating appropriate input into their thinking and planning. For the most part, the Australian entrepreneurs I've met are well-focused on building and improving their businesses.

What are some of the most common mistakes you see aussie start-ups making?

They tend to underestimate themselves and their opportunity, and as a result, they undersell their capabilities. In these workshops, we talk about the differences between US and Australian cultures, markets and entrepreneurs, and the most profound difference is the Aussie's humility vs. the American's bravado. My advice to Australian entrepreneurs is to over sell themselves; as outlandish as it may feel to them, it will still not match the level that an American entrepreneur talks about his business.

Do you think Australia has the potential to become a global tech hub or are we always destined to lose our best people to the US, Asia and Europe?

I've met a lot of people on this tour who have come back to Australia after time in Europe or the US, so it seems pretty clear that Australia doesn't lose people to other markets so much as it lends people to them for a time.

Australia may continue to grow as a development hub, but because the vast majority of customers are outside of Australia, the business development center of companies will remain the US, Asia or Europe. Businesses must be present in the location of their customers.

How are the current US economic woes affecting Silicon Valley?

Silicon Valley tends to be a bit immune from economic ups and downs, because one can argue that an up market is the best time to start a company and then just as easily argue that a down market is the best time to start a company. While many in Silicon Valley are concerned about economic issues, most still see information technology entrepreneurship as the path to greater economic value creation.

How do you think that will filter through to the global tech startup scene (including Australia)?

Companies will have to be extremely capital efficient, which will mean they must be more careful on spending and more demanding for value in return. The economy may slightly slow the pace of business, but in the long run, those who can continue to act quickly will be at greatest advantage.

Technology oughtn't be gender specific but it seems that the tech industry is very much a boys club. How tough was it, as a woman, to make it to the

top in the tech world?

I'm not sure I'm at the top of the tech world... 😊

Honestly, I really gave very little thought to my gender relative to my career. I can't say that this is true for all women, but my experience is that the IT business is, by and large, a meritocracy. People tend to be rewarded for their achievements. So I just try to stay focused on delivering value to my client and colleagues.

In Australia we have some really good networks of women in tech and many of our leading tech startups and blogs are run by women. Despite this, women are still underrepresented in the industry. What do you think needs to be done to get more women into positions of seniority in the tech scene both here and overseas?

More women need to want to get into those positions. Women tend to have rather non-traditional careers, a portfolio of jobs over a period of time, often with breaks taken to have and raise kids, etc., Interestingly, that's not that unlike the career of an entrepreneur who works intensely on a business, experiences some exit or reaches some milestone, then goes on to start something else.

I think, though, that many women (and men) still see a career as a straight, upwardly moving line. And when a woman stops out for a bit, she sees that as slipping back down that line, she sees a need to start over, rather than an opportunity to step into something new and advancing.

How did you become involved with the DEMO conference?

I first attended DEMO in 1994 with a company launching a product there. I then attended in 1996 as an advisor to a client who was launching a company. But I really rather lucked into the job of Executive producer. After the 96 event, I had lunch with Stewart Alsop, the founder of DEMO. Amid a wide-ranging conversation, I gave him my feedback on the event and ways I thought it could be made even more compelling. He invited me to consider the job on the spot and the rest, as they say, is history.

Does it frustrate you that the [TechCrunch50](#) team couldn't find another weekend to run their event?

It frustrates me that TC50 made a deliberate choice that confounds the opportunity for entrepreneurs. Even while DEMO and TC50 are differently focused events, we share some of the same audience, and now that audience must choose how to split its attention, which may mean that at either event, the companies and products that should be the centerpiece of attention may not get their full due.

Do you think there's scope to do a DEMO conference in Australia or is the industry still too young?

DEMO is a product launch event and the question we'd want to consider is whether the local market needs an event such as DEMO to identify new products, or whether there is an opportunity to bring more Aussie companies to

the global stage, supporting their world-wide go to market strategy.

If you could give every startup one bit of advice what would it be?

Focus and commit. (which might be two bits of advice.)

And there it is - a big thanks to Chris for taking the time between continent jumping to speak with us and to [Kathy Drask](#) for making the interview happen.

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