



February 17, 2007

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## News — Technology

# Program Assists the Fashion-Challenged

Tracy Staedter, Discovery News

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**Feb. 15, 2007** — We can't all be fashionistas. Most of us look in the closet everyday with the same question hanging over our heads: "What am I gonna wear?"

The answer could soon get easier.

Researchers have developed a computer program that applies artificial intelligence techniques (since real intelligence in these matters is sometimes useless) to help the fashion-baffled.

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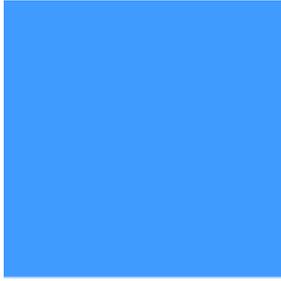
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Laying Out the Options





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The program could work for getting dressed, as well as to assist online shoppers in search of a range of products, including shoes or sporting equipment.

"Our recommender is based on the user telling us a scenario of how he or she would like to use the product. For example, 'I want to buy a dress to go to my boss's birthday party,'" said Henry Lieberman, a research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA.

Lieberman leads the project with graduate students Edward Yu-Te Shen and Francis Lam.

According to Lieberman, his team's scenario-based recommender is different from conventional programs already in use by online stores, such as Amazon.com. These programs suggest additional purchases based on the buyer's previous purchases or on items bought by other customers who have similar taste.

But these programs work best for customers with a substantial buying history and don't work at all if the customer doesn't know exactly what he wants.

Lieberman's program, on the other hand, lets a person pose a scenario, and then spits out a recommendation.

The style-confused person uses a website database application to enter the scenario immediately or he can supply descriptions and photos about himself and the clothes he already owns. He can use brand names labels (Nike, Armani, Calvin Klein, etc.) and annotate any piece with comments ("These jeans make me look sexy").

And because it's a website application, he can give friends in his social network permission to view the clothes and provide commentary.

The application uses an artificial intelligence program based on 800,000 common sense sentences (contributed by a network of

The screenshot shows a user profile for 'Edward' with a photo, location (USA), gender (Male, 26), and 140 votes. Below the profile are sections for 'Now Wearing' (giordano, levi's, calvin\_kl), 'Favorite Items' (nike, dior, tommy\_hi, dior, calvin\_kl, calvin\_kl), and 'About Edward' (I am a music lover. I like to swim very much. I love my clothes!!). A 'Sort by' menu is set to 'Date'. The main area displays a grid of clothing items with brand labels like 'american\_', 'calvin\_kl', 'dior', 'gap', 'giordano', and 'h&m'. Some items have a 'FRU' (Favorite) tag.



MIT

### Laying Out the Options

A computer program designed by a Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher stores records of a person's wardrobe and then offers outfit possibilities for any occasion.

Pictures: MIT

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volunteers) that describe a broad range of subjects concerning people and everyday life. The so-called knowledge database contains information that, for example, a wedding may take place in a church or that a boss may be an important figure.

The program uses the knowledge to categorize clothing and situations. For example, a silk T-shirt might be "luxurious," a suit "formal," a jacket "funky," a watch "elegant," a pair of sunglasses "trendy," and a sweater "sporty."

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