Internet Time

@688

A field guide to the beat

HOUDINI Magazine

Six o'clock is never the same moment for everyone

Say "6 o'clock" and every listener hears a different instant. In winter, 6 PM in New York is midnight in Berlin. Daylight saving moves that gap twice a year, on different dates in different countries. A time only works after you attach a place to it, and then the listener converts it into their own day. Two people can agree on the words and still miss each other.

A corporate campaign from 1998

Swatch introduced Internet Time in 1998 as a marketing campaign. The company wanted a fresh story for its watches and the late nineties offered one. Techno-optimism ran high, and everyone expected the network to lift humanity. Swatch split the day into 1,000 parts called .beats. One beat lasts 86.4 seconds. The reference point is Biel, Switzerland, where Swatch is based. Biel Mean Time is UTC+1 all year with no daylight saving. @000 is midnight in Biel and @500 is noon there.

The campaign faded and the clock outlived it.

Détournement

The Situationists used the word détournement for taking a piece of the spectacle and turning it against its original purpose. Debord and Wolman wrote it up in 1956. A brand built this clock to sell watches. The web revival picked it up and made it ours.

The people rebuilding the independent web have no use for Swatch the company. They use the clock because it belongs to the network and to nobody's city. HOUDINI Magazine has been a large force in that revival, and ours is the most trafficked politics site on Neocities. What we say about the clock carries weight. Beats now work as a handshake on personal sites across the underground web. The person behind a page that shows them knows what is up.

> Say let's meet at 600 beats and the time is the same for everyone. It's a unifier.

Call it Internet Time

Drop the name Swatch Time. Say Internet Time or say beat time. Read the at sign as "on the beat." @600 is "on the beat 600." Tell a friend you will be there on the beat, 600, and the sentence is complete.

A clock built on the heartbeat

One beat runs about as long as a hundred heartbeats at a resting pulse, and a day holds around a hundred thousand. Technology gave us that count. A clock cut to that scale reminds me that the tools we use are part of our humanity. The web revival shows that the optimism of the nineties never died.

Learn your own day

Beats remove the conversion step. They leave the sun alone, so the work moves to you. Eastern winter time puts @000 at 6 PM and @500 at 6 AM. Write down when you wake, eat, work and sleep in beats, and use those numbers when you make plans.

1 beat	86 seconds
42 beats	about 1 hour
126 beats	about 3 hours
500 beats	12 hours
1000 beats	1 day

I'll be there on the beat, 600.

The live clock runs at
erikhoudini.com/the_crypt/touch_grass

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