



Asia's Best TECH PIONEER

Wireless Wonderboy

Programmer John Gomes wants your home printer to expand its horizons

By **Daniel Gay** / Singapore



Munshi Ahmed for Asiaweek.

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Wireless Wonderboy

Programmer John Gomes wants your home printer to expand its horizons

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John Gomes sprawls in his jeans on the games-room sofa. It's a cozy spot for a snooze during all-night programming sessions, says the 24-year-old. And a fittingly informal place to meet a tech whiz kid bringing a welcome touch of creative disruption to Hewlett-Packard's otherwise orderly Singapore R&D headquarters. Gomes's virtuos skills as a computer programmer and knack for seeing unusual solutions ; helping the computer giant rethink the role of one of its most important products, the printer, and begin to retool its business strategy for the wire age.

Gomes is the inventor of HP Wire, a service enabling cellphones to talk to desktop printers and fax machines over wireless Internet connections. A user can print locally a document stored on a distant computer simply by send instructions via mobile phone from one device to the other. Although the partly to offer convenient file access for those on the move, the most innovative aspect of Gomes's system could ultimately be how it transforms and expands the standard uses of printers and fax machines. HP envisages a future where desktop printer will be a post office, ticket booth and newspaper vendor rolled into one.

Raised in Calcutta, Gomes attributes his success to ambition born of a humble background. He cut his programming teeth on an early BBC microcomputer the age of 10, scrounged computer books and won a scholarship to study in Singapore. He quickly caught HP's eye by pitching the idea for HP Wire during a holiday internship; he wound up with a full-time job. Gomes feels lucky to spend every day exploring a subject that fascinates him. "I love technology," says. "My work is my hobby."

Despite a passion for computers, Gomes is no nerd. Setting aside time to his success is equally important. He finds inspiration in rock-climbing, going clubbing at weekends and takes backpacking trips across Europe and Asia.

Gomes's invention faces some stiff tests. Commercial launch is likely to be delayed because WAP, the mobile-Internet standard for which Gomes first developed his service, has flopped worldwide. HP Wire is flexible enough to

work with other systems, but the real challenge will be to convince consumers they need all the bells and whistles souped-up printing has to offer. Gome is undeterred. He reckons "all sorts of devices" will one day talk to each other and is working on expanding HP Wire's applications. He may not yet have changed the world through technology — but time is on his side.