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What the well-dressed geek is wearing these days

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The big problem of becoming an aging geek is that Society keeps raising the bar on how well you have to dress if you don't want people to think you're a hobo.

When I was a kid, I could show up anywhere in a T-shirt and as long as I wasn't bleeding, I was properly dressed. Well, these days I have to have a blazer standing by, ready to go.

Incredible, isn't it? And believe it or not, I had to look around for nearly three years before I found a blazer that was up to the minimum expectations of a proud citizen of the Push-Button World of Tomorrow.

You see, most of the blazers you find at your finer thrift stores are designed to carry a couple of ball-points and a small quantity of good intentions, period.

No, no, no. That wasn't going to do at all. I need true Geek Couture.

I've agreed to attend your wedding reception, and I'm not going to bring even the smallest and least-powerful of my three notebooks. Accept this for the terrific gesture of affection that it is. Don't fixate on the fact that while everybody else was doing the Chicken Dance, I was off in a corner using my Bluetooth PDA, my cell phone, and a wireless keyboard to answer a few e-mails and maybe update my blog and keep up with a few message boards.

Clearly, I needed a blazer designed for tactical operations. ScottVest has been bravely riding the bleeding edge of Geek Couture for years, ever since the company

came out with its namesake vest. Recently, it struck a thrilling blow for geeks with the release of TEC Sport Jacket (www.scottevest.com; \$249).

The TEC jacket retains the same design imperatives as ScottVest's signature vest. From the outside, it looks like a conventional blazer. Inside, however, it's like Batman's utility belt.

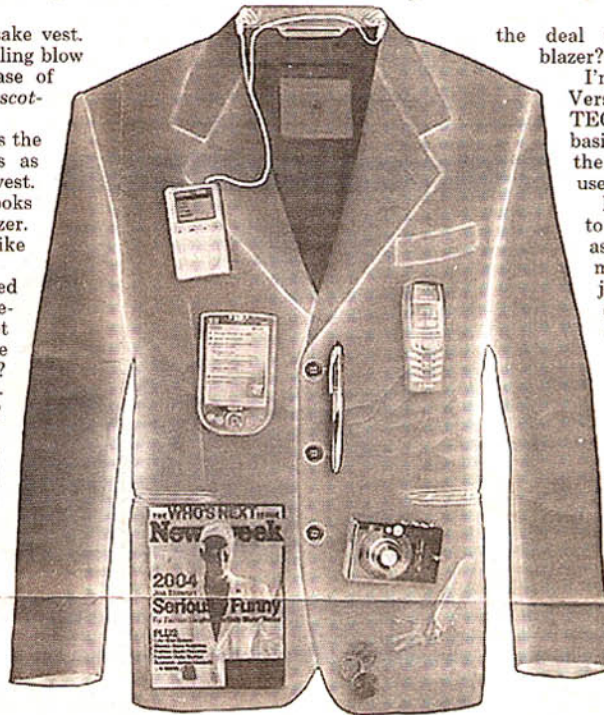
The lining is perforated with 14 zippered and special-use pockets. Pocket for the PDA? Got it. One for your pen and stylus? Check. Cell phone? Headset? Wireless keyboard? Digital camera? GPS?

Bring it on. How about an extra-deep pocket for a magazine, and one big enough to hold a file folder and a couple of reports? Done and done.

Of course, the point of the TEC jacket isn't so much that you'll fill every single pocket. The idea is that with so many pockets and pouches sewn everywhere inside the lining, you can keep your four or five pieces of gear where you want.

ScottVest also scores high on innovation. Like the rest of the maker's garments, the TEC jacket contains internal conduits for typical wired devices. With your iPod in an inside chest pocket, your earbuds magically emerge through two ports sewn into the lining, and tuck into tiny pockets in the neck. You can easily slide in and out of the jacket without feeling like you're threading your way out of a parachute harness.

But the TEC jacket has a couple of big disadvantages. First, nearly all of its pockets are zippered instead of tabbed, which makes it difficult (and sometimes painful)



ScottVest's TEC Sport Jacket has 14 zippered and special-use pockets, as shown in this X-ray-style illustration, for everything a geek might need: iPod, cell phone, camera, pen, PDA, even magazines will fit.

to quickly and safely withdraw a PDA, make a quick note, and drop it back in.

Second, the pockets are disappointingly uniform. Smaller items (like a cell phone or even a standard MP3 player) sink to the bottom, and you have to root around for them. Others have awkward openings that make a quick-draw of a specific gizmo problematic.

There's also the styling. Geeks can, do, and should prize function over appearance, but the TEC jacket is oddly tailored. It doesn't scream out "Nerrrrd!" But I'm guessing that 2 out of 11 people you meet will be thinking, "What's

the deal with this guy's blazer?"

I'm hoping that Version 2.0 of the TEC jacket takes the basic idea and makes the pockets more user-friendly.

No, when I need to costume myself as a Normal Human I slip into a jacket from TravelSmith called the Classic Care-Free Blazer (www.travel-smith.com; \$179). Travelers need lots of pockets, too, and this blazer has 10 of them. More to the point, they're more practically situated and easier to access. And while I seriously lust after some of the TEC's geek-specific features (like a special pop-out tab for affixing ID cards and con-

vention badges), TravelSmith's jacket is cheaper and smarter-looking. Mind you, I still curse the society that refuses to treat me and my ilk seriously when we appear in public wearing our colorful native garb. But thanks to my TravelSmith jacket, I can curse it from a table for two not too far from the bandstand at a nice mid-priced restaurant, instead of from a booth at the iHOP next door.

Andy Ihnatko writes on technical and computer issues for the Sun-Times.