The Pebble smartwatch is making a comeback



Eric Migicovsky still wears his Pebble. Thirteen years after he founded the wearables company and found huge success on Kickstarter, and more than eight years after he sold the company to Fitbit, which was then acquired by Google, Migicovsky's watch still works. (In case you're wondering: when I saw him at CES a few weeks ago, he appeared to be wearing a white Pebble Time Round model. But he has a box full of them at home.) It hasn't gotten a software update since December 2016, though, and he's been worried for a while that it will eventually stop getting notifications, or connecting to his phone, or run into some other show-stopping problem.

Rather than buy another smartwatch, Migicovsky decided to try and get Pebble going again. He sold his most recent startup, a messaging app called Beeper, to Automattic last year and left the company in the fall. Since then, he'd thought about starting a Pebble-like product from scratch, figuring it'd be easier to do the same thing again a second time. "But then I was like, *what if I just asked Google to open-source the*

operating system?” he says. It felt like a long shot, but he knew the code was just sitting dormant inside Mountain View somewhere. So he asked. A few times.

To Migicovsky’s surprise, Google agreed to release Pebble OS to the public. As of Monday, all the Pebble firmware is available on GitHub, and Migicovsky is starting a company to pick up where he left off.

The company — which can’t be named Pebble because Google still owns that — doesn’t have a name yet. For now, Migicovsky is hosting a waitlist and news signup at a website called RePebble. Later this year, once the company has a name and access to all that Pebble software, the plan is to start shipping new wearables that look, feel, and work like the Pebbles of old.

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The reason, Migicovsky tells me, is simple. “I’ve tried literally everything else,” he says, “and nothing else comes close.” Sure, he may just have a very specific set of requirements — lots of people are clearly happy with what Apple, Garmin, Google, and others are making. But it’s true that there’s been nothing like Pebble since Pebble. “For the things I want out of it, like a good e-paper screen, long battery life, good and simple user experience, hackable, there’s just nothing.”

The core of Pebble, he says, is a few things. A Pebble should be quirky and fun and should feel like a *gadget* in an important way. It shows notifications, lets you control your music with buttons, lasts a long time, and doesn’t try to do too much. It sounds like Migicovsky might have Pebble-y ambitions beyond smartwatches, but he appears to be starting

with smartwatches.

If that sounds like the old Pebble and not much else, that's precisely the point. Migicovsky tells me over and over that the plan is not to reinvent Pebble, or AI the bejesus out of the concept, or do whatever else you'd do starting a hardware company in 2025. The fact that the Pebble on his wrist still works, and still works for him, is evidence that maybe Pebble had already finished its job. "We're building a spiritual, not successor, but clone of Pebble," he says, "because there's not that much I actually want to change."

A lot of other things have changed in eight years, though. Google, Apple, and Samsung all now have good smartwatches that are tied tightly to their other devices — Pebble always had trouble getting access to features on iOS, in particular, and that's not getting easier. Smartwatches are currently health and fitness devices above all else, and they're getting vastly more complex and powerful in pursuit of those features. Google obviously doesn't see any form of Pebble as a threat; its best chance is to chart another path entirely.

The biggest difference this time will be how the company itself operates. Migicovsky wrote a long blog post in 2022 explaining what went wrong at Pebble the first time and ascribed its failure in part to taking a bunch of investment money and letting it change the company. Since then, Migicovsky has made plenty of money from Beeper and during a stint as an investor at Y Combinator; his new company is his alone. Right now, it's just Migicovsky and a few part-time employees — it'll grow, he says, but not too much. "The core thing here is: sustainable."

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Migicovsky also hopes to be part of a broader open-source community around Pebble OS. The Pebble diehards still exist: a

group of developers at Rebble have worked to keep many of the platform’s apps alive, for instance, along with the Cobble app for connecting to phones, and the Pebble subreddit is surprisingly active for a product that hasn’t been updated since the Obama administration. Migicovsky says he plans to open-source whatever his new company builds and hopes lots of other folks will build stuff, too. “There’s going to be the ability for anyone who wants to, to take Pebble source code, compile it, run it on their Pebbles, build new Pebbles, build new watches,” he says. “They could even use it in random other hardware. Who knows what people can do with it now?”

This whole project will take time, Migicovsky cautions. He only found out for sure that Google would open-source the software a few days ago, and he hasn’t been able to use it at all yet. But he’s already working on hardware prototypes, and he’s crystal clear on what he wants the new Pebbles to be. He knows he can do it because he already did it once. The evidence is right there on his wrist. All he’s trying to do is make sure it can stay there.

https://www.theverge.com/2025/1/27/24352968/pebble-smartwatch-open-source-google-comeback