Tech Trailblazer

Alumna leads engineering team at fashion-forward Trunk Club

From the first moment Candice Savino (CDM '03) discovered programming in a computer science class in high school, she was a self-described "girl on a mission." Savino delighted in programming's problem-solving challenges, whipping through course modules and experimenting on a ramshackle desktop computer at home. When it came time to apply for college, Savino researched top computer science programs in the Chicagoland area, which led her to DePaul.

"I definitely think that getting my undergraduate degree from DePaul set me up for success in my career," Savino says. "The curriculum focused on fundamentals but also real-world experience."

Hands-on assignments—such as diagramming the entire database structure for eBay for one class—served Savino well when she graduated. After holding several internships with IBM, she was thrilled to accept a position as a software engineer at their suburban Chicago office. "It was right after the dot-com bust, so the industry wasn't as alluring as it is now," Savino remembers. "My classmates and I were worried we wouldn't find jobs despite loving what we were doing."

Savino has remained grounded throughout her impressive career, which has also included positions at Encyclopaedia Britannica, WMS Gaming, Groupon and now Trunk Club. As vice president of engineering, Savino oversees a team of 55 dedicated to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the company's internal and external web applications.

"I'm fascinated by how Trunk Club is disrupting the retail industry," Savino says. The Trunk Club model pairs customers with individual stylists who create personalized collections of clothes. Customers receive trunks at their home, where they can try on each item, keep what they like and send back the rest. This process is simple in theory, but it raises a challenging question, as Savino notes: "How do you scale a personalized, human service?"

The answer requires striking a careful balance. "We've tried to figure out how many of our customers would prefer a more automated process versus how many want the 'high-touch' service," Savino explains. In 2017, Savino and her team rolled out a number of tools to help the stylists provide better service to both types of customers. "Initially, stylists were doing a lot of manual tasks that could be automated," Savino says. "We redesigned their internal tools to help manage their tasks more efficiently so they could spend time on the most high-value work." For example, the engineering team gathers data from customers' onboarding questions to narrow down their preferences in a way that's more personalized and efficient for the stylists.

Other innovations have made it possible for customers to schedule their trunk delivery frequency online and for stylists to email their clients within an internal system, instead of switching over to an email provider. "There's still a lot to do, but we're on the right track," Savino asserts. This drive isn't surprising for someone named to Crain's Chicago Business "Tech 50" list for 2017. "Trunk Club has been a different challenge and a great learning experience," Savino says. "It's an exciting ride for sure!"