



IMAGE CREDITS: BRIAN HEATER

HARDWARE

Smartwatch pioneer and Kickstarter darling Pebble is returning in a new form

Brian Heater 12:04 PM PST · January 27, 2025

Four years after launching the (then) most lucrative crowdfunding campaign in Kickstarter's history, smartwatch maker Pebble abruptly [closed in 2016](#), filing for insolvency before being sold off to rival Fitbit. The fitness-tracking giant went on to build much of its Ionic smartwatch with help from former Pebblers, along with Pebble's pioneering software stack.

It could be argued that Pebble was simply too early to the space. The Apple Watch [launched in mid-2015](#) and proceeded to suck much of the oxygen out

of the room. It would be massively oversimplifying the situation to suggest that it was merely another case of [Sherlocking](#), however. Apple, after all, raised public interest, ultimately setting the stage for countless other smartwatches after.

In fact, founder and CEO Eric Migicovsky believes instead that the company's rapid growth and feature expansion caused Pebble — which sold 2 million smartwatches — to lose sight of his initial vision. It certainly wouldn't be the first time a hardware startup was felled by such fate.

Yet Migicovsky is ready for round two. "We're restarting Pebble," he told TechCrunch with a massive grin on a Zoom call Monday. How, exactly? While Pebble branding faded after the company was bought, its acquirer, Fitbit, was itself [sold off](#) to Google in 2021.

Now Google, which still owns the technology and all of Pebble's IP, plans to open source the smartwatch brand's software stack.



IMAGE CREDITS: TECHCRUNCH

"This is part of an effort from Google to help and support the volunteers who have come together to maintain functionality for Pebble watches after the original company ceased operations in 2016," Google wrote in a [blog post](#) on Monday.

By open sourcing access to PebbleOS, Google is opening the door to new third-party hardware, and Migicovsky's smartwatch startup is first on that list.

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It's still in the idea stage, he says. The company needs a new name — something the Beeper co-founder and former Y Combinator partner hasn't quite gotten around to. But he tells TechCrunch that he has thrown himself into the project full time and will be able to accelerate things as access to PebbleOS opens up. He is currently its only employee, but there are plans to bring on another around March.

The startup's goals are fittingly humble. Migicovsky says he simply wants to make the watch he wants, given that the Pebble he wears to this day is now a decade old. "I've tried everything else," he says. "I have very high standards."

Those are, according to a new [blog post](#) on Migicovsky's personal site:

Always-on e-paper screen (it's reflective rather than emissive. Sunlight readable. Glanceable. Not distracting to others like a bright wrist)

Long battery life (one less thing to charge. It's annoying to need extra cables when traveling)

Simple and beautiful user experience around a core set of features I use regularly (telling time, notifications, music control, alarms, weather, calendar, sleep/step tracking)

Buttons! (to play/pause/skip music on my phone without looking at the screen)

Hackable (apparently you can't even write your own watch faces for Apple Watch? That is wild. There were >16k watch faces on the Pebble app store!)

In spite of his time at YC, Migicovsky has no plan to raise VC funds. Nor does he plan to return to the Kickstarter model that gave rise to Pebble. He is currently self-funding the project and says he plans to build it modestly, based on consumer interest.

As for whether an audience remains for Pebble in a post-Apple Watch world, he jokes, "There are at least dozens of us." He notes that the brand still commands its own [active Subreddit](#), eight years after closing its doors. A small resale market has popped up around older devices, though as anyone

who has bought a piece of consumer electronics in the past two decades can tell you, hardware doesn't last forever.

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dramatically shifted user expectations, but he's betting on not being alone in his desires.

"This is a passion project. I have a vested interest in making the watch," Migicovsky says of building a startup to create a product he wants to wear. "We're going to make this happen."

Despite being in its infancy, Migicovsky has visited Shenzhen in a bid to scope out the current state of manufacturing. "Turns out making hardware is much easier than it was 10 years ago," he says. "There were no smartwatches factories. We had to tell the factories what to do."

He also says that he feels confident about the small startup's ability to build a new Pebble for the current era. "The hard part is the software."

By opening up PebbleOS, Google made that bit considerably easier.

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Brian Heater

Brian Heater was the Hardware Editor at TechCrunch until early 2025. He has worked for a number of leading tech publications, including Engadget, PCMag, Laptop, and Tech Times, where he served ...

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