Jacobs oversees the technology organization at the Gilt Groupe, a members-only website launched in 2007 with steep discounts on high fashion and designer labels. On Gilt, shoppers can find Zac Posen, Jimmy Choo, and other luxury brands at up to 60 percent off. Jacobs joined Gilt in 2009 to build out its data engineering team, after which, he quickly rose to the chief information officer position a year later.

On landing in the fashion world, Jacobs says, “As a broad generalization, engineers are not fashionable and I’m no exception, though I have noticed incremental improvements in my own style. That said, Gilt does boast some of the most talented and fashionable engineers.”

Jacobs has straddled technology and management throughout his career, beginning with Poindexter Systems, an online ad personalization company, where he was responsible for development, architecture, and operations. He later worked at Merrill Lynch and is currently involved as a mentor for NYc Seed, an early-stage investment fund.

He joined Gilt for many reasons but says, “The most surprising motivator for me was how passionately customers felt about Gilt. When I tell people where I work, their faces light up and they tell me, ‘I love Gilt!’ or ‘I got these on Gilt!’ pointing to some article of clothing. Sure it’s only fashion, but there aren’t a lot of places to make people that happy on such a large scale.”

The engineer in him has always been obsessed with improving things, even as a kid.

At age 8, Jacobs created a system that would automatically open his bedroom door with a press of a button.

“As I’d walk up the stairs to the second floor, I would press a button, which would cause a motor to turn on in my bedroom and pull open the door via a string so it was open by the time I reached it,” he says. “Huge time savings!”

Jacobs earned his three degrees in electrical engineering from Columbia Engineering and feels lucky to have finished his PhD at a time when the Internet was booming.

“There was a lot of entrepreneurial activity to admire at Columbia: professors taking sabbaticals to start companies, the patent office encouraging and looking for good ideas to patent, partnerships with the business school in the form of joint classes with business and engineering.”

That melding of philosophies has been part of Jacobs’s life since college. He started his bachelor’s at Bard, where he studied physics, and went on to complete the 3-2 program at Columbia, where he took classes his final two undergraduate years.

“A lot of innovative ideas come from applying something from one industry to the problem of another,” he says of his career, which has included work in finance, online marketing, and now e-commerce.

“The combination of Bard, a small liberal arts school in the woods of upstate New York,” he adds, “and Columbia, a large university in Manhattan, was the perfect set of extremes for me to experience two very different ways of learning.”

Kind of like engineering and fashion.