

FROM COMMONS TO CITY HALL

Planning, measuring and managing technology and creative events
that impacts communities, industry sectors and the city-at-large

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ABSTRACT

There are many ways to bring about collaboration in the intersection of technology and creative communities. As studies done by Florida, Breknock, Landry, Bianchini and others have brought up, the city's capability for this could be encouraged and initiated top-down, from the governmental level. This paper proposes that grassroots-level initiatives that are initiated from the *bottom-up* in the form of events can affect the development of technology and creative communities on two levels:

1. Individuals and groups
2. Companies and industry sectors

That, if planned, managed and measured properly, will contribute to the city's socioeconomic prosperity.

For event organizers, community managers and citizen participants, framing the context of every event planned through these three lenses, particularly if the event is non-profit and free, is critical to guarantee success. First, we identify Portland's fitness to initiate such events and activities, and then we provide a three-part tool to plan, manage and measure them, seen through the eye of an event attendee, sponsor and planner, respectively. We end with an assessment on where the city ranks in innovation and creativity capacity, and propose recommendations on:

1. Citizen-centered research focused on the impact of grassroots initiatives on city-sponsored programs
2. Assembly of city sanctioned, top-down alliances

INTRODUCTION

Why your city is the perfect place to start (and what to do about it)

Many researchers, most of them cited in this paper, suggested that a city's capacity for creativity and innovation can mostly be expanded by ways of government-centered, top-down initiatives.

This paper was written to arm event organizers, community managers and citizen participants like you with the right set of tools to plan, manage and measure a great technology or creative event—then demonstrate that it can not only impact the technology or creative community you're in, but also companies and industry sectors, and ultimately, the social and economic development of the city itself.

The government's role, then, is to provide a soapbox alliance to take your opinion and then set the right measures and policies.

Let's start with the city itself. At the highest level, a city has to have the right combination of:

- Community
- Environment
- Industry/Governance

To make it a fertile environment for technology and creativity to prosper.

WHAT MAKES PORTLAND UNIQUE: COMMUNITY

There are two facts that contributes to this:

- It's a relatively small city
- People who are "in the know" (for example: develop-ers of certain language, interaction designers, art directors) naturally gravitate toward each other

If you're an event organizer, there are two actions that can be derived from these facts:

- Find a niche and start a new community (ie. a mix of designer and developer who thirst for no-holds-barred feedbacks on multi disciplinary projects founded PDX Critique)
- Linking disparate communities together (ie. Legion of Tech organizes event that brings all technologists and technology groups from all platform.)

Very often, the existence of these two kinds of communities is closely tied to a citywide movement toward learning and creativity. In other words: you are not alone. There are others like you, in different fields

of study who are trying to reach the same goal. We are all just heading toward it a little bit differently.

Also, note that this city is home to more:

- Freelance/independent workers
- Bike commuters
- Farmer's markets
- District-wide art events
- Artists
- Professional service industries workers (think advertising, marketing, PR and design)
- Technology workers (this goes without saying)
- Open source practitioners and developers (from Linux to Android)
- Small and micro businesses and startups, like Shizzow and Cubespace
- Awareness for ecology and sustainability
- Breweries (see the Portland Beer Wiki Project for list-ing)
- Park areas
- LGBTQ population

Per square inch than most other cities in the West Coast and even the US. (Greenlight Greater Portland, 2008)

On the contrary, we have less cost of:

- Housing
- Living
- Office space
- Flex working space

Than many other cities (Greenlight Greater Portland, 2008)

WHAT MAKES PORTLAND UNIQUE: ENVIRONMENT

Many anecdotes have mentioned the fact that Portland's technology community is tighter knit and more supportive than many other cities, even those that are made up of primarily technological industries, like The Silicon Valley.

There are many reasons for this:

- People play in sandboxes that are different enough, so they don't directly compete with each other.
- People appreciate the benefit of "staying small" and growing by bootstrapping as a business model, rather than "going big" and growing by venture capitals
- Many are freelancers, which means that they have to rely on each other for help and support, both in their work and day-to-day life
- Community members share a natural affinity for technology, not just because it's their day job. This is evident in many events that are not centered around a specific language or platform, but rather, social activities like breakfast, lunch or afterwork drinks
- The city is small enough, so that community that are established online can often meet in real life. Real life interaction plays a big (but often overlooked) role in growing a community.
- Meeting members of other communities, or those that belong in a web service like Twitter, is made much easier. In Portland, it is possible to step into a room and

see 100 people that you knew from Twitter, routinely every month (it's called "Lunch 2.o.") This may not be as easy to achieve in other locales. Meeting people that one interacts with online *in real life* is an activity that is both addictive and can benefit the community-at-large

This isn't to say that Portland is the only city that experiences this phenomenon. Other cities like San Francisco, Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. have been, and still continue to lead the way in technology, creativity and innovation development in years. It's just that the same energy that they all had in the 80's and 90's, that bloomed this movement, now migrates to Portland, if for no other factor, then for likeminded individuals who chose to move here in recent years.

(There are warnings and caveats about this, and we'll come back to it much later.)

WHAT MAKES PORTLAND UNIQUE: INDUSTRY/GOVERNANCE

We know that a thriving community is good for its own sake, but do you know that it can also benefit local companies, industry sectors that the companies are in, and the city-at-large?

1. For companies, more developers and users they can rally under their wings mean that they can greatly simplify the feedback process, which in turn will speed up the development cycle and deliver products that are tailored, hyperlocally, toward its audience,

which will generate more profit in the end. Jive Software, Vidoop and Intrigo are just three of many technology companies who relocated to Portland and, in many levels, succeeded

2. For the industry and the city, the more they can demonstrate the uniqueness and vibrancy of their creative and technology communities (and its fundamental differences from other places), the more it can attract out of state talents and companies.
- For the industry, this means a much easier time to scout and hire talents.
 - For the city, this means more jobs available, higher GDP and stronger economy

YOU HAVE A UNIQUE CITY: WHAT'S MISSING?

We know that organizing events is one of the most effective way to create stronger community. But we still have to properly quantify and qualify its success/failure, then demonstrate its values to our sponsors.

So I posit that we as community managers and members develop a *framework* to gauge just how successful we are, and how can we be more successful at increasing sustainable prosperity for our company, industry and city. Later, I will attempt to quantify these factors in terms of *planning*, *management* and *measuring*.

I don't think there is ever going to be a hard number. But we can begin to look at it from two areas:

1. HARD MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Why? In a shrinking market, where there are less money available, you have to justify doing everything, if only because you could be doing everything else that may be more useful.

I ask myself this:

How do I know that I organized great events, and that they're worth my time?

- Should I still look at number of attendance? Or should I look at the number of people who develops anything of equal value from things they learn from the presentation (side projects, implementations, change of attitudes toward an idea?)
- The events are non-profit, so who are sponsoring? Who should be? Why should my events get sponsored? Do I really have a good reason?
- What's the value of coverage? Sure, more coverage is always good, but is there a specific one that I need to target? And does one place of coverage means more than the other?

Asking questions like these will help you figure out the value of the events you plan, and demonstrate to the sponsors that those events are worth their time and money.

Remember: sponsorships mean more events, but it also means that the *quality* of those events must also be higher.

2. UNDERSTANDING OF OBJECTIVES

Why? We must remember that with width, there must also be depth. Anecdote: on the last web bubble, it was enough to pre-sent 10-15 slides of PowerPoint to get a funding. After it bursts, people actually went back to writing the classic 10-15 pages business plan.

In light of the current situation, we, like them, must also demonstrate understanding and extensive depth of knowledge behind your decision to plan.

In other words, while it's good to have a strong manifesto when you start to organize events and foster communities, it must be backed up with a sound plan to grow. I still believe that a good plan, no matter how dull and uninteresting, is a key to success. Have the enthusiasm and vision, but be able to back it up and link it to something bigger than yourself.

In the end, allowing your events and communities to grow organically is good, but growing with noticeable, measurable improvements that generate values for everyone (attendees, organizers, sponsors) is better.

This framework will be organized in three parts:

1. **PLAN:** write a goal statement that demonstrates depth and details
2. **MANAGE:** help your sponsors use their time wisely
3. **MEASURE:** continue to engage after and throughout the event's lifecycle by using a social intelligence dashboard

PLAN

Write a goal statement that demonstrates depth and details

Unless you decide to host an event because you have nothing else to do that month, every event you plan should have a goal and objective in mind.

For example: I like planning events that share the same spirit with Legion of Tech's: free, volunteer run and community oriented. But I also know that my time and resource is limited. My partner's, sponsor's and attendee's time and resource also are.

To respect them, I must make sure that the event have clear enough of a value proposition so everyone knows if it is right to help out with, give money to, or spend time with, respectively. This is where the importance of a clear goal statement becomes clear.

A goal statement is exactly what the name implies: a short document contains the things you want to see happen with your event. It can be general or detailed (the latter is generally better, though not always.)

For example, here is a short, informal goal statement from Refreshing Cities:

Refresh is a community of designers and developers working to refresh the creative, technical, and professional culture of New Media endeavors in their areas. Promoting design, technology, usability, and standards.

THE REFRESH MANIFESTO

- Let's Gather Great Minds
- Let's Share All Of Our Knowledge
- Let's All Grow And Learn
- Let's Promote Local Talent
- Let's Be More Than We Think We Can Be
- Let's Make Our Cities Better

(Source: <http://refreshingcities.org>)

This statement is succinct, memorable, and provides an idea of the people behind and attending the event, but does not answer the question that should come before all else: what is the event about? With this said, this statement is vague for a reason. 'Refreshing Cities' is a name that can be used anywhere freely to indicate the organizer's participation in the loosely connected collective.

A more specific goal statement may look like this:

We are advocates, developers, and Portlanders making the world better with open source technology.

Open Source Bridge will bring together the diverse tech communities of the greater Portland area and showcase our unique and thriving open source environment. We will show how well Portland does open source and share our best practices for development, community and connectedness with the rest of the world.

We're setting out to change the structure of conference planning: asking interested people to come together at a Town Hall meeting, and share their collective experience and wisdom. Following the lead of the Linux Plumbers Conference, we're enlisting curators for our conference sessions, planning mini-confs for critical topics and including unconference sessions. The focus will always be on increasing interaction between participants and engaging everyone in the content.

(Source: <http://bridgepdx.org/about>)

Note how this statement explains exactly the nature of the event itself as well as its planning process. It identifies not only the planners, but also their goal for planning. These things will help potential sponsors and volunteers identify whether the event is right for them.

The answer to the question "what is the event about" is implied because the idea, while minted carefully, is still open to interpretation at the

micro level (ie. The conference name and intent were established, but the timeline and details were not.)

BarCamp, an 'unconference' concept that had been adopted internationally many times, took an even more detailed approach:

BarCamp: What's this all about?

COMMUNITY AND INFORMATION

BarCamp is an ad-hoc unconference born from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment. It is an intense event with discussions, demos and interaction from attendees.

Anyone with something to contribute or with the desire to learn is welcome and invited to join. When you come, be prepared to share with barcampers. When you leave, be prepared to share it with the world.

NO SPECTATORS, ONLY PARTICIPANTS

Attendees must give a demo, a session, or help with one, or otherwise volunteer/contribute in some way to support the event. All presentations are scheduled the day they happen. Prepare in advance, but come early to get a slot on the wall. The people present at the event will select the demos or presentations they want to see.

Presenters are responsible for making sure that notes/slides/audio/video of their presentations are published on the web for the benefit of all and those who can't be present.

BARCAMP FOR EVERYONE

Contact us if you have any questions or want to participate. Let us know if

you're hosting your own. BarCamp is about support as much as it is about information.

(Source: <http://barcamp.org/TheRulesOfBarCamp>)

Note how the BarCamp goal statement:

- Answers the question *what is the event about* right away (*BarCamp is an ad-hoc unconference*) then move to the ground rules (*All presentations are scheduled the day they happen*)
- Explains in specific terms what will happen in the event (*discussions, demos and interaction*)
- Identifies the audience (*anyone with something to contribute*), then establishes a social contract by asking them to contribute something (*Attendees must give a demo*)
- Lays out the benefits of the event, rather than the features (*share and learn in an open environment*)

Two subjects missing from the statement are information about the planners and their intents. This is understandable, since, much like Refreshing Cities, BarCamp is a name that one can take, modify, and establish a chapter of anywhere for free, as long as the structure remain the same.

Let's sum up. A good goal statement:

- IS SPECIFIC. It says what exactly will happen in the event and leaves no room for guesswork. For example, if you're planning a networking lunch for interactive designers from advertising

agencies and software development studio around Portland, so they can plan on working on a collaborative project together, don't skim and say "let's get together and code something." Be specific, so you know that the people who are going to be there are the right people (otherwise, they will save their time by not attending in the first place.)

- ESTABLISHES SOCIAL CONTRACT. In addition to laying out details, you must also ask your attendee to bring something to the table, and promise to provide something back. For example, they may bring current projects they worked on, questions they may have, curiosities, commitment to learn from each others, food, an open mind, anything. You may provide the space, food, centralized work table, wireless network, speakers, and so on. The kinds of things you expect and commit does not matter. What matters is that you set an agreement and clearly say *if we'll have this, you'll bring those*. A social contract, even an informal one, helps set everyone's expectation to the same level and could save you the trouble of dealing with group loafers.

- LAYS OUT BENEFITS. It is very easy for an organizer to write out all the features of her event. For instance:
 1. World renowned speakers
 2. Invite to beta applications
 3. Strong wifi signals.

The problem is, any event you plan will only matter if it benefits you, your audience and the sponsors.

Switching gears from describing features to describing benefits can help. Think in terms of their needs. Change your language from saying *here's what we have* to *here's what you'll get out of this*; then start writing. For example:

1. Learn the principles of identity design from Jeff Fisher, a longtime, award-winning Portland who has been recognized by StartupNation as one of the nation's top businesses in its annual Home-Based 100 competition in the category of Most Slacker-Friendly
2. Make your software work faster
3. Broadcast fearlessly with a high bandwidth wireless connectivity

A clear goal statement will not only provide a good base for your entire planning process, it will also help you manage your sponsors wisely and measure your event engagement online.

MANAGE

Help your sponsors use their time wisely

Most often, even the most generous and perceptive sponsors are dumbfounded when faced with the prospect of speaking to the event's audience. What, for instance, should they talk about in what little airtime they have?

In this section, I'm going to switch my gears and speak from a sponsor's point of view.

The answer is threefold. You, the sponsor, should know your:

- Sponsorship objective
- Company's background, and
- Event expectation

Before you start, it helps to think of this speaking engagement as a *pitch*. Remember: your company has paid for this, so it is your responsibility to make your money's worth.

The first step to building a successful pitch is to know why you or your company, sponsor this event. My personal experience, unfortunately, says otherwise. More often than not, a speaker would say something along the lines of:

Hi. My name is Bram. I'm a brand developer at Ascentium. We're a

full-service advertising agency with a strong PR front. And we're trying to, you know, engage in this 'PR 2.0' movement. So talk to me if you're interested. Thanks.

This is fine if you're a big company with a nearly limitless budget that is able to sponsor any event without breaking the bank. But you're not them, and this event may be your only chance to get the words out this month.

What should you do? **FIRST**, know your sponsorship objective.

For instance:

- If your company is seeking to be the next Facebook, then your objective for sponsoring an event like Lunch 2.0, a monthly informal lunch for tech professionals, is probably to recruit developers and talents for your next big feature release
- If your company is a design agency that wants to expand into the interactive and social media area, you probably want to discover talents and talk to as many people as possible. Maybe not necessarily to recruit them, but to see which one has the best fit.

Knowing, for example, that your objective is to recruit, the speech now could say:

Hi. My name is Bram, a brand developer at Ascentium. We're a full-service advertising agency with a strong PR front, who is looking to expand into web application development. And we need talent. If you're a Ruby on Rails, Java or PHP developers, we want to hire you. Talk to me at lunch.

Better.

The **SECOND** step is to know your company's background.

Mind you, aside from the fact that you'll be asked questions relating to this when you talk to people individually, everyone will say that her company is, in fact, unique, and occupies the number 1 spot in its category.

So you need to change your angle.

If your target is a talented group of developers, you must convince them as to the reason why they should work at your company. Why is your company unique? What would compel them to work there? Is it about the perks? The work environment? The in-house beer tap in the breakroom? The answer can differ wildly, but it must be there. It's simply not enough to say that you're "the market leader."

Knowing this, the speech now could say:

Hi. My name is Bram, a brand developer at Ascentium. You may know us from our work with Microsoft Silverlight and Nintendo Big Brain

Academy. We're a digital agency that are looking to expand into web application development. We're searching for people who "get it," and can get us up to speed in this wild frontier: developers, designers, researchers and anthropologists. We like to surround ourselves with smart, rock star developers. If you're not getting proper recognition, talk to me during lunch. Thanks!

Again, better.

The **THIRD** step is to know the event expectation.

Is it big or small, formal or informal? Where is the venue? Is it standing room only, sit-down, or a mix of both? Who will be there? Designers, developers, PR people, a mix of any of the above?

My experience: standing room facilitates more rapid interactions (on a Lunch 2.0 session at Vidoop, I talked to about 20 people over the course of two hours) but is also more chaotic. Conversely, a sit-down venue means slower pace, but is in danger of getting stagnant quicker.

Your speech should consider all these factors. In smaller venue, you could afford being more intimate and allow some interaction. In larger ones, you must be dynamic and move through quickly.

Here is an example of speech for a smaller venue:

Hi. My name is Bram. I'm a brand developer at Ascentium, an agency who works with Microsoft Silverlight and Nintendo Big Brain Academy, but serve beer at the end of every week and

provide endless bowl of M&M's. How many of you would consider yourself rock star developers? We're a digital ad agency who wants you to get us smart and up to speed on web application development. And we're hiring. So come talk to me at lunch if you're a developer, designer, researcher or anthropologist. Thanks."

And a speech for bigger venue:

Hi. I'm Bram. I'm a brand developer for a digital agency in town called Ascentum. We usually do traditional interactive works around the web, like the ones for Microsoft Silverlight and Nintendo Big Brain Academy, but we decided to come here because we hear that all of you are smart about web application developments. We want you to get us up to speed on that. We're hiring developers, designers, researchers and anthropologist. Like you, we like to be surrounded by the very smartest people. Talk to me if this sounds like you. Thanks!"

Much better.

Remember, the three rules for creating a better sponsor speech are to know your:

1. Sponsorship objective
2. Company's background, and
3. Event expectation

With some planning and knowledge beforehand, both the attendees and your company will benefit from it. Now if only there is a way to track all the information surrounding the event...

MEASURE

Continue engaging your audience by using a social intelligence dashboard

The *social intelligence dashboard* is a combination of methods learned from these thought leaders:

- Marshall Kirkpatrick's Content Aggregation and Competitive Intelligence (Kirkpatrick, 2007)
- Dawn Foster's Monitoring Dashboard (Foster, 2008)
- Justin Kistner's Intelligence Dashboard (Kistner, 2008)
- Real-Time Competitive Market Intelligence (Weiss & Verma, 2002)

In her book *Internet Marketing*, Carolyn Siegel wrote that on-line analysis will "lead to predictive accuracy in spotting gaps in a market, product usage trends and commercial opportunities." In fact, "Content analysis software is already used online to analyze word bursts, words or phrases that appear frequently in online communications."

Today, these services are available as integrated packages like Radian6, Social Radar, SM2, Brandwatch, mediasphere360, Trucast, Cymfony, Umbria and Nielsen BuzzMetrics.

These packages are recommended if you're going to work with a medium to large-sized client.

But what if your client isn't as large as you hope they could be, or what if the client is, in fact, you, and you just want to see how conversations can be analyzed online, in real-time, or to simply see what the internet has been talking about you, that you might not know before? You may be surprised with the result.

It turned out that with a combination of various technology already available today, you can build an environment that's nearly as good as paid system—for free. Sure, it's going to take a lot of research, but you're going to learn it in small steps, from scratch. And, if you ask me, small steps are the best way to do it. For simplicity's sake, I'm going to name this tool like Marshall, Dawn and Justin called it: *Social Intelligence Dashboard*, and I'm going to use a *brand* (rather than an event) as a case study.

ESTABLISH OUR CASE

Let's say that I have a bottled water that I want to launch a web-site for. Let's call it *Steamboat Springwater*. Steamboat Springwater is different from every bottled water product out there, because it's going to be sold in recyclable Tetra Pak packages, and because it's going to emphasize the fact that it comes from a single spring source in Springwater, Oregon.

DETERMINE WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

If I'm going to assemble a social intelligence dashboard for this product, then where should I start? From formulating questions about the brand and the environment that surround it, we know what information we need:

- What is our industry? What is the sandbox that we choose to play in?
- What are trends that has been happening in this industry?
- Who are our competitors?
- What are they doing: in the news, on the conversation streams, and at events around the world?
- Who are the influentials and opinion leaders in our field?
- What do they have to say about the industry, the competitor, and us?
- Where do our audience live, work and play online?
- What are they saying about us?

Conversations about these subject can happen in many places:

- Blogs
- Forums
- Social media channels (Twitter, Facebook and FriendFeed, just to name a very few)
- Chat rooms, which probably couldn't be monitored easily

GET TO KNOW THE PROCESS AND TECHNOLOGIES

Our information analysis process will go through this flow:

1. GET
2. FILTER
3. ACCESS

To GET this information, we're going to use several tools:

- Search engines, like BlogCatalog, Technorati, Google Blog Search, Mashable, Icerocket, and many more
- Link-sharing social networks, like Digg, StumbleUpon, Delicious, Ma.gnolia and Reddit
- Social media search engines, like Twitter search
- Google alerts

To FILTER, we're going to use:

- Yahoo!Pipes
- Dapper (optional)
- AideRSS (optional)

And to ACCESS, we're going to use an RSS reader like Netvibes, Pageflakes, Google Reader, Newsfire, NetNewsWire or FeedDemon. Generally, I try to use online, Dashboard-style newsreaders so I'm not tied to a computer, and I have a Bird's eye view of the information.



In summary, we're going to research the industry, competitor and opinion leaders for our Steamboat Springwater product.

GET

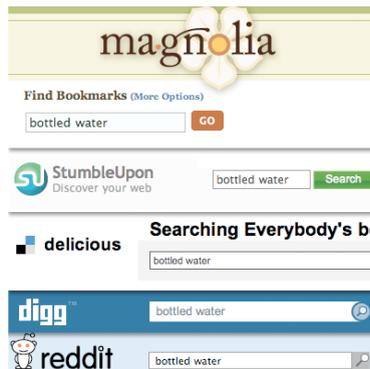
STEP 1: GATHER

Begin your information gathering process by punching in industry and product related terms through various search engines to look for information sources (news sites and blogs) that we can subscribe to. In the example below, I use a very general term, "bottled water." The more specific/niche you can make them, the better.

Search BlogCatalog



Also search for the same terms on social bookmarking sites.



Finally, don't forget to track conversation on social media channels like Twitter, by punching the same terms on search engines like Twitter Search.

STEP 2: ANALYZE

This is the analytical part of the job. Find as many blogs and news sites that has high credibility (ie. often mentioned, cited and linked by other sites) as you can, and collect their RSS Feed.

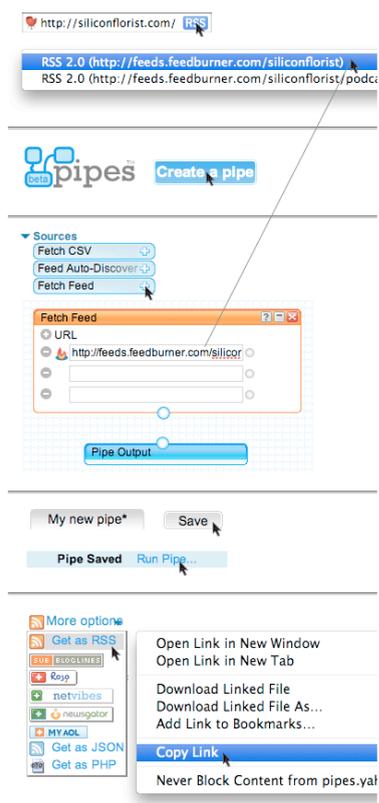
There are many nuances in this step. For instance, these are the steps I learned from Marshall Kirkpatrick in his presentation at WordCamp Portland:

1. Search for relevant blogs and news sites
2. Collect their RSS feeds
3. Aggregate them with Yahoo!Pipes
4. Filter them through AiderSS
5. Let AiderSS go for a period of time and see blogs that are ranked higher
6. Pick the higher ranking ones
7. Repeat step 3 through 7

FILTER

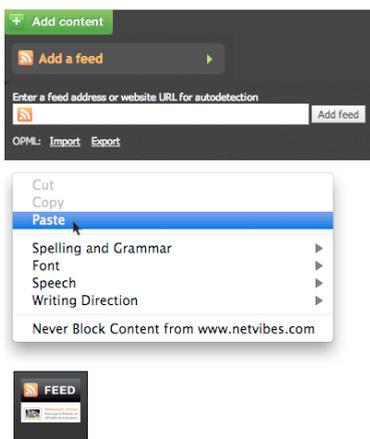
STEP 3: AGGREGATE

Grab the RSS feeds of these relevant blogs and news sites. Copy-Paste their URLs to Yahoo!Pipes, then generate a new Pipe and grab its RSS feeds. These are my steps:



STEP 4: DASHBOARD

After that, we'll Paste the RSS feeds to Netvibes 'Add Content' field, and drag the resulting Feed into an open area in Netvibes to create a Widget.



STEP 5: REPEAT

Collect more blogs, filter more things and add more widgets to your dashboard. Don't forget to categorize the blog feeds as you collect them into several categories, then generate Yahoo! Pipes and Netvibes widget thusly.

For example, in our Steamboat Springwater online content analysis research, we may have 4 categories that we need to analyze:

1. Industry: *trends, landscape, news*
2. Thought Leader: *opinions*
3. Competitors: *news, press releases*
4. Vanity: *what is our customer saying about us?*

The methods I outlined above only cover searches for the Industry and Thought Leader categories.

TIPS

TO DO A SEARCH ON COMPETITOR

Simply change your search term from "bottled water" to, depending on your market research (you didn't forget to do it, right?), Evian®, Perrier®, Aquafina, and so on. Also, don't forget to subscribe to the RSS of their corporate site. Usually, the feeds are located on their News, Events or Press sections.

TO DO A VANITY SEARCH ON YOURSELF

Change your search terms from "bottled water" on all of those search engines to your own brand (in this case, it's "Steamboat Springwater.") The rest of the steps are identical.

ACCESS

Now that you have all the data that you need in your hand, you need to *monitor and analyze* them for breaking news, and *participate* in conversations that your brand will benefit from.

STEP 6: MONITOR AND ANALYZE

See that the plastic bottles are topping the list of biggest environmental waste on an information site, or a blog somewhere? Post it to your company's blog. Hear that your competitors are launching a new ad campaign touting the taste of their water? Go against the trend and launch something viral.

STEP 7: PARTICIPATE IN CONVERSATIONS

See a blog post that rants about how plastic water bottles are polluting? Post a comment about the fact that Steamboat Springwater is packaged in fully recyclable Tetra Pak. Hear somebody on Twitter say that they're having trouble getting bottled water where they live? Offer your water's affordable delivery program two minutes after they post the message.

RESULT

Since "Steamboat Springwater" is a fictional product, I've created, using a similar method, two dashboards for two events that I'm managing the communities of: Refresh Portland and CyborgCamp.

Refresh Portland's Social Intelligence dashboard can be accessed at <http://netvibes.com/refresh> and CyborgCamp's dashboard at <http://netvibes.com/cyborgcamp>

CONCLUSION

WHY SHOULD I USE SOMETHING ONLINE?

Because you'll get up to the minute data, and thus can respond to them accordingly. The maximum delay of a feed is about an hour, and the minimum is usually several seconds after the article, post or news item is published.

Compare this with your PR or ad agency's reports and news clippings. Sure, they may do something biweekly, or even weekly if you're lucky. But they won't know that Evian is opening up a new company right by where your main natural purifying facility is next Monday, or that everyone in the industry is abandoning the plastic bottled water in favor of ones that are made from corn, starting next month.

Up to the minute competitive informations, assembled through an online content analysis tool like the Social Intelligence Dashboard, will allow your brand and event to gain a competitive advantage with the ability to respond to all situation swiftly. It will also allow you to keep track of your social media presence—and, if you ask me, that's very important.

THE BIG PICTURE

Where does Portland rank in capacity for innovation and creativity?

Where does it succeed, where does it lack?

And how might it be enhanced by grassroots actions?

Landry, Bianchini, Ebert, Gnad, & Kunzmann (1996) proposed fourteen mark of a creative city, all of which play an important role in how successful can a creative, innovative and grassroots initiative survive and prosper. Portland exceeded this metric in several aspects, but fell behind in another.

I chose to use their measures because it focuses on more 'soft' factors (the human-organizations-government connection) rather than 'hard' ones (infrastructure availability, cost.)

1. **HARD FACTORS AND FACILITIES**

The quantity, quality, variety, accessibility of a combination of facilities are important for encouraging creative processes in a city. (p. 10)

Portland has its State University and Health State University research center located right in its heart, a small but burgeoning metro library system and education programs that directly interacts

with the world around it. All of which helps transform information into knowledge. Portland State University's Senior Capstone program, one that gives its students a chance to apply their learning to work on a community project, coveted America's Best Colleges Programs to Look For in both 2005 and 2006 (Portland State University, 2006)

2. **HISTORY**

On the one hand it can inspire. On the other hand it can become a burden, a weight, (Portland State University, 2006) something that holds a city back. (p. 12)

Perhaps more true in reputation and perception than anything else, Portland had been casually called the place with a creative, idiosyncratic mind and soul of its own. The familial and sharing sensibilities left from the 60's are still evident, though the danger of attribution of stereotyping Portland as a "tiny village where everybody loves each other" still remains.

3. **INDIVIDUALS AND OPEN COMMUNICATIONS**

Innovative and creative projects are generally driven by committed, even obsessed, original and sometimes eccentric individuals. (p. 13)

Portland positively sanctioned creative and innovative deviance of its citizens. Not only is this evident in the wealth of fringe events that many such individuals participate outside of their workdays (the naked bike ride, Pedal The Bridge, etc.) Portland Development Commission specifically dedicated the Design and Creative Services as one of its target industry (Portland Development Commission, 2002)

4. **NETWORKING**

The network between composers, artists, art galleries, collectors has created not only benefits for the participants, but also for the city which now has an important percentage of jobs in the cultural industries as well as image advantages from the 'public good' that this grouping has created. (p. 15)

For a city of a relatively small size and close acquaintances, its design and technology sector had surprisingly wide arrays of associations and alliances, old and new alike, from PADA (Portland Art Dealers Association) and SAO (Software Association of Oregon), to POSSE (Portland Open Source Software Entrepreneurs,) The Linux Foundation and Legion of Tech.

5. **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

[...] elements of creativity and innovation need to run throughout the city's decision making processes be that public, private or voluntary institutions or be they actors in the economic, social, cultural or environmental field. (p. 16)

Unfortunately, what Portland has in networking and open communication, it somewhat lacks in this factor. Case in point: Portland Development Commission's Creative Services Center.

6. **THE RECOGNITION OF A CRISIS OR CHALLENGE TO BE SOLVED**

It is thus more difficult to generate innovation in situations that are perceived to be satisfactory. (p. 17)

Many small creative and technology communities in Portland started with relatively little influence and power, and thus became innovative in their initiatives. In growing over the months with a more steady base of participants, they quickly becomes comfortable and, often, complacent. This is often evident in the fact that many groups are "clique"-y.

7. CATALYST EVENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Catalyst events and catalyst organizations are one way of creating opportunities for people with different perspectives to come together and to share ideas. (p. 17)

The mark represents one of the key pillars of this project: *the bridge between the creative and the technology communities*. Currently, some events of this nature are present (and more is needed.) But this brings a clear need for the establishment of an organization that specifically addresses this issue, either from within the city (working with PDC, for instance) or independently. This organization will serve as a voicebox for opinions and ideas from grassroots initiatives and individuals.

8. CREATIVE SPACES

A creative city requires land and buildings at affordable prices [...] Cheap spaces reduce financial risk and therefore encourage experiment... (p. 18)

Compared to nine other creative cities around the US, like San Francisco, Austin and Denver, the Greater Portland area consistently ranks low in cost of apartment rent, Class A office space, total industrial space cost and median housing price (Greenlight Greater Portland, 2008, p. 25)

One other factor that's equally as, if not more, important, is the availability of coworking space: a community-managed collaborative work spaces for independent knowledge workers, who often needs non-traditional office space away from their homes. This can not only resolve their basic need for space for less money than a traditional office space, but also create a new work style more conducive to creativity and innovation called "coworking." These are evident in Japan and Europe in the form of Art and Design Centers.

Old warehouse and textile factory that are no longer used were utilized to create the Kanazawa Citizen's Art Center [...] these facilities are designed to be used freely "24 hours a day, 365 days a year" [...] The buildings were remodeled to serve as space for performance as well as practice, and directors of these facilities were chosen from ordinary citizens. (Sasaki, 2005)

While a *center* in the true sense of the word is currently lacking, Portland possesses many coworking spaces for its size, whether they're open/rent-anytime like Cubespace, Souk, Portland Innovation Center and ActivSpace, or closed/reservation-only, like LessDistracted and TenPod.

9. **BREAKING THE RULES**

[...] a more radical democratic approach to [incorporating creativity into city management] could turn this potential liability into an asset by creating new channels for a flow of creative ideas from the grassroots to city government. (p. 19)

Innovation means nothing if the desire to adopt it doesn't come from the top-down. Mayor Sam Adams' dedication to supporting the creative, artistic and cultural initiatives are evident in his appointing of representative to chair a Coordinating Committee in the Regional Creative Capacity Strategy Project (<http://creativecapacity.org>). The project aims to "build and support a sustainable creative community through prioritized strategies with clear costs and achievable ways to fund them" and ultimately make "creativity and innovation a regional value." It serves to address three issues: expansion/extension of access to creative tools across the state, support of existing organizations and growth/advocacy of the creative community in general. Perhaps most importantly, the Creative Capacity Strategy team is composed of nonpartisan citizens.

By interacting directly with community members, the government unclogs the flow of creative ideas from the grassroots by removing bureaucracy. Unfortunately, there is no research-based evidence from this factor.

10. **BRINGING IN OUTSIDER OPINION**

[...] immigrants, if their contribution is seen positively and is allowed to flourish rather than engendering a xenophobic response [can bring in outside opinion and influence] (p. 20)

Portland has seen increased influx of immigrants from across the US who seek to escape from rising cost as well as environment detriment to creativity. Citizens are usually more than happy to welcome them, and in this sense, Portland fits the definition well. But anecdotal evidences indicate that many moves here for similar reasons. This means that Portland attract likeminded individuals, with relatively few difference in mindsets, opinions and backgrounds. This means that a wide diversity necessary for any creative city to flourish in long term may be reduced.

In addition to this, Portland's predominantly white demographic presents another challenge to overcome.

11. **ATTITUDES TOWARD RISK AND FAILURE**

[...] failure may contain the seeds of future success if it is analysed and not automatically punished [...] Success, on the other hand, can lead to complacency. (p. 21)

One of the ways to encourage experimentation (and thus innovation) and better attitude towards risk is through the

planning, development and launching of city and statewide pilot projects. Portland, like many other cities, has numerous. To encourage developments of projects, it will be critical to built a convincing, evidence-based argument to stakeholders, using tools like the Toolkit Citizen Participation (<http://www.toolkitparticipation.nl>)

12. **APPROVAL AND RECOGNITION**

Innovation is risky and can be scary, as there are few guidelines to assess whether projects are being successful. For this reason, mechanisms to show approval and recognition are essential. (p. 22)

These mechanisms can best be demonstrated by citywide design, architecture and art competitions. Currently, not many of these exist locally. The only notable example is the Portland Courtyard Housing Design Competition (<http://www.courtyardhousing.org>)

13. **SELF-RELIANCE**

[...] it is important to encourage internally generated ideas, in order to motivate people as well as a degree of local self-reliance and independence. (p. 23)

A report from groups conducted in Portland in February 23 and 24, 2004 by Impresa Inc. and Coletta & Company stated that “coupled with the creative climate is Portland’s

independent, entrepreneurial climate. ‘People here are independent mavericks, not part of the machine.’” and ECONorthwest’s research for PDC showed that 41% of the city’s creative services industry workers do so in non-employee firms, most of them as self-employed freelancers (Portland Development Commission, 2002). In addition to this, Portland also has the highest percentage of small businesses per capita (Impresa, Inc., 2004)

14. **PARADIGM SHIFTS**

Taken seriously, the holistic, overarching concept of sustainability has implications for every aspect of urban life – [providing a] historic break at every level. (p. 24)

Much like what the concept of sustainability has brought to the consumer society, the ultimate goal of this project is for creativity and innovation to influence every area of urban life it touches. The challenge is to improve factors that the city lacks (diversity of internal and external opinions, recognition of problem among citizens, organization capacity) and ultimately use what it already possess to its advantage (forming alliances between disparate groups of creatives through formalized organizations or informal events.)

RISKS

It is critical to keep in mind that while the creative industries and the “Café Latte” urban development approach provide an important new economic development tool they are but one part of the equation and must not be seen as the panacea of a city’s viability problems.” (Brecknock, 2004, p. 7)

Places with dense ties and high levels of traditional social capital provide advantages to insiders and thus promote stability, while places with loosed networks and weaker ties are more open to newcomers and thus promote novel combinations of resources and ideas.” (Florida, 2003, p. 6)

Keep in mind that there is a clear inherent risk with having a community that leans toward

- 1) likemindedness. and
- 2) agglomeration. We see this with events that has regular attendance, whose members are accustomed to visiting the venue and meeting up with the same people regularly. This results in the exchange of relatively homogenous pieces of information repeatedly. The stagnancy can not only discourage new attendees, but also diminish innovation. This is a hard problem to solve for a relatively small city like Portland, where communities often gets ‘incestuous’ to one another.

The end note is that every event, however tightly organized, must always be designed to be flexible and embracing of new ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More researches and studies need to be conducted on the *direct link between citizen participation at the grassroots level and the impact it brings to the government*. Many findings already suggested that top-down initiatives are critical to encourage community movement; but few, if any, proposed a reverse-direction. This is part of the intent of the paper: to make an argument that fairly significant economic and social benefits could be felt on higher levels if bottom-line community movements are planned with the right goals, organized with the right alliances and measured with the right tools.

With that said, government should play no lesser role in encouraging growth of creativity and innovation through putting out the right measures and policies. Earlier in the section, I proposed the pressing need to set up a citywide alliance whose function is to provide a forum for citizens to voice their opinion directly to the top. There are no better organizations that could set up this far-reaching structure than PDC and The City of Portland.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bram Pitoyo is an independent brand developer, typography/readability consultant and online communication strategist who aims to unite the creative and technology communities in Portland, Oregon, and around the world.

He has helped founded and organized citywide events like:

- Cre8Camp
<http://cre8camp.org>
- Refresh Portland
<http://refreshportland.org>
- CyborgCamp
<http://cyborgcamp.com>

And organized community projects like:

- Portland Tech Twitter wiki
<http://aboutus.org/PortlandTechTwitter>
- Portland Coffee Shop wiki
http://aboutus.org/PDX_Coffee_Shops

Online, he covers, tweets and livestreams local events, identifies typefaces, writes about design, marketing and innovation, and bootstraps systems at:

- Link En Fuego
<http://linkenfuego.wordpress.com>
- Portland Creative/Tech Event Review uStream channel
<http://tr.im/pcter>
- Designer Daily
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By day, he is an account planner who works with agencies like Wild Alchemy and CoatesKokes to help companies tell their stories, and help brands like DoveLewis, Ski Washington, Cycle Oregon and E. & J. Gallo Winery sing killer choruses with an equally beautiful opus.

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