

# MAPPING THE 'VERSE: THREE CASES STUDIES IDENTIFYING EMERGING MODELS OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT

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Much has been said about Gen X and Gen Y but perhaps it is User-Gen that is a better measure of the changes in our times. As with a discussion about the particle versus wave models of light, User-Gen is not easily quantified as a demographic or phenomenon. It is not necessarily a subculture or subgroup or readily definable form. It does not fit in market share and target audience suppositions and, increasingly, it is not entirely a matter of give or receive but the reciprocity inherent in both. For many of those shaped by the forces of previous media metrics and norms this is either an exciting opportunity, a threat, a challenge or simply deeply annoying.

A question that arises in discussions about User-Gen is: what motivates people to make this stuff? Often followed by its companion question: where do they find the time to make this stuff? For those still bound by former media structures there is a concern that the time found for making/participating in User-Gen is being taken from the highly marketable viewing time of the couch potato demographic and this is threatening the world as we knew it.

Generally, these discussions move on to whether User-Gen is simply the digital equivalent of the hula hoop and a hope that by biding time this fad will pass. Others, perhaps trying to keep the newly perceived enemy closer, wonder if there might be a way to monetize the whole thing and incorporate it within the foundations of the established structures for media.

These are all interesting considerations but from a content creation point of view 'the why' of User-Gen is a crucial factor as it should be an important determiner of form and approach to content. Two further aspects arise from contemplating 'the why': 1) is it working? and 2) is it working for them (the content makers)? There are distinctions here. Both of these questions try to fasten on to matters of utility either in broad terms in the first instance or in terms of personal return for the participants, in the latter.

Utility is a controversial issue, especially when so much of the discussion of user-generated content is focusing on how to find *the* business model that will make sense of what is happening. While business models are not the principal interest of this paper, certainly the money side of user-generated content is one of the things that presents as an answer to 'the why'.

Of necessity, this paper is only going to look at what might be viewed as the 'open mic night' content that circulates the net rather than the full scope of what is happening across web culture as a whole. Social networking, website embedded material posted by corporate/media/governmental bodies and so on offer boundless opportunities for discussion yet it is the YouTube *et al* content that captures the focus here with its ease of access, option for relative anonymity, invitation-free democracy and free-for-all (in so many senses) qualities that provide such a wealth of samples for scrutiny.

What is 'the why' of piano cat? What is 'the why' of FatRant? What is 'the why' of that guy who performs the *The Simpson vs. Star Trek* theme song? Is it money? Somehow the business model for piano cat escapes me. Is it fame? Certainly much of what rates on YouTube used to be called 'attention-seeking behaviour'. Or is it the love of making stuff that motivates the User-Gen?

In considering motivating factors for User-Gen fame, love and money seem like good places to start in order to come to terms with 'the why'. Accordingly, starting with 'the why' of The Lonely and a confrontation of the fame factor, discussion will then move on to One Man/One Webcam and why love means ze frank is not lonely, ending with consideration of why homestarrunner is rich. This will provide ample material then for a brief discussion of business models and what 'works' on the Internet.

## Only The Lonely: lonelygirl15

Fame is often the coin in the information-age economy. Box office ratings, audience share, and polling results are all used to measure the value of products and people who are products and internet fame has claimed its place at the front of the pack. Internet fame can be the fastest ticket to celebrity or global humiliation, (as Ms. South Carolina discovered in recent months), and in the rules-still-being-worked out etiquette of the web-wide world finding definitions for 'community' and 'interaction' vie with issues of factual correctness, credibility, truth and integrity of materials as commentators and regulators try to come to terms with the changes underway and already falling into place.

In his novel *A Long Way Down* one of Nick Hornby's characters asks, "How can you be famous if nobody likes you?" [Hornby, 2005] When lonelygirl15 became a sensation in 2006, the uproar that ensued when it was discovered that 'Bree' was 'really' an actress called Jessica Lee Rose proved that one man's hoax is another man's clever strategy and who says your YouTube video can't be serial narrative drama? There was an outpouring of anger that the filmmakers behind the videos were just trying to use the internet to become famous! How dare they!

The premise of the drama was that 16 year-old Bree (19 year old Jessica Rose) was pouring her heart out to her webcam and posting her story on YouTube in the hope of finding support from kindred spirits. Although many viewers believed Bree was indeed a teenage videoblogger talking about the real circumstances of her life, discrepancies and media interest quickly revealed that the participants were using the format to develop their showreels and demonstrate their talents as content makers.

The success of lonelygirl15 lies in its source: the wellspring of kids with webcams for whom talking to the computer is the 'dear diary' of its generation. This should not be a surprising phenomenon, after all this is a generation that has been on-camera since its infancy and whose formative years have been shaped by toy karaoke machines and reality TV. Ultimately, lonelygirl15 became famous not so much for its soap opera storylines or exciting strategic take on how to make online content but for the controversy over its genuineness.

In today's media the lines that separate hoax, viral marketing campaign, serial online narrative drama, delusional-but-sincere personal content, and real story are not only unclear but in some circumstances, irrelevant. Yet, as the shamed publishers of Norma Khoury's *Forbidden Love* discovered, there is a portion of any audience that will take such fictions very badly unless they are told beforehand that what they are about to see/read is a work of imagination. Further, even then, when a work is labelled as fiction, as the makers of *300* and many other films based in historical times have discovered, there is always someone who will take issue

with how ‘the facts’ have been mishandled. These issues plague art (is it really a Van Gogh?), photography (at what point does a digital re-grade become an altered image?), journalism (such as when an editor is forced to ask of the day’s headline: you mean he just made this up?) and so on and so forth for the *ad infinitum* of human creative output.

There appears to be an unwritten but tightly held view that ‘If I’m going to like you, you had better be who and what you say you are’. Yet the controversies about professional versus amateur works and how they are being privileged and mediated on the Net leads to greatly unresolved confusion about what is right and what is wrong, what is legitimate and what is a lie. For some these issues are trivial but for others a matter of great consequence.

lonelygirl15 still draws viewers who enjoy it as an online serial narrative. Comments on piano cat range from gushing delight to accusations about improper use of catnip. FatRant has inspired a flock of imitators and millions of parents are not waiting for twenty-first parties to post videos of their children undertaking all manner of precocity and potential shame. In the fame that ensues (or not), the matter of genuineness appears to be a factor of influence and, in part, an answer to Hornby’s question.

To some degree, whether content will be liked (or not) depends on whether the content is considered to be intended as a desire to participate in the online global-urban open mic opportunity or whether a posting is perceived as using the community forum to advance commercial or hidden interests. If content is deemed to fall into the latter category, odds are that debate will ensue as to whether this is a transgression or clever use of the medium.

This is an area of great complexity. For example, does using DIY media tools to post content you invent to entertain people mean that you are amateur if you don’t get paid? But what if this content is of an extremely high standard and production value that enjoys wide and critical reception? If that is the case, does that make you ‘professional’? And if it leads to commercial recognition are you finding success, selling out or transgressing an unwritten code? And if something professionally made by traditional media formats obtains currency and popularity is it still ‘good’ if it is posted and hyped as User-Gen with the intention of promoting it for commercial gain?

In *Sock Puppets Keep It Shill on YouTube*, Momus (aka Nick Currie) says, “the more vocational the self-employed person is, the less division they’re going to want to maintain between work and life. What you do is who you truly are.” [Momus, 2007] For those whose vocation lies in making creative content or one that can be advanced by online presence this is a matter of absolute importance. It should also be borne in mind that as online culture, services and engagement grows, there will be fewer and fewer areas of endeavour that do not call for bespoke online presence. As the internet becomes the standard platform for all kinds of content these questions are only going to become more complex with only reception being the ultimate judgement on the merits of the content and in that instance there will be few absolutes or unanimously held views.

Fame takes many forms. As argued in *Children of the e•volution*, “the vast majority of the content being generated by users is not aimed primarily at making money; for these auteurs and artistes the chance to contribute to the conversation, to make themselves heard, to be noticed and acknowledged is the driving motivation.” [McClellan, 2006] For some, posting and being accepted through positive reception for postings is about engagement, a sense of community, participation and belonging – the fame of being known within your community. For others posting is about trying to obtain prominence, to garner wide attention and personal recognition – the fame of celebrity. For others posting is motivated by a desire for validation in order to lay claim to hipness and ‘getting it’ often associated with an intention to trigger a

specific response such as financial reward, market placement, career advancement, voter support and so on – fame for benefit. The most cynical examples of this kind of content are those placed by marketing teams so they can generate news coverage by issuing take-down notices. [New York Times Editorial, 2006].

When it comes to finding examples of fame-seeking user-generated content, there is a smorgasbord of offerings. There are the bootie shakers, the lonely-alikes, the official offerings from the Ministry of I-wanna-be-hip and the You-can-trust-me-I'm-a-lot-like-you political pixel kissing. The jury is not in on much of this content. However, it seems that commercial product and community participation are not mutually exclusive, as the case studies that follow will examine. Even though there is no certain path to fame on the internet, fame and shame can be swift and certain. The only way to find out how your content will fare is to step up to the mic and find out for yourself. This, of course, is exactly what ze frank did in his 288 episodes of *the show*.

### One Man/One Webcam: ze frank's *the show*

ze is a performer. He is a comedian, a musician, a public speaker and according to that popular source, Wikipedia, the winner of the 2002 Webby Award for Best personal Website and featured in Time Magazine's 2005 *50 Coolest Websites*. [Wikipedia, 2007] On 17 March, 2006 he commenced *the show* – a videoblog created and posted most weekdays. His commitment was to make something everyday for a year.

ze scripted his content and shot visual elements to support his text. He edited it to maximize its presentation and used *the show* as an opportunity to work up material for professional speaking engagements. Which leads to the fairly obvious question: how then does *the show* differ from lonelygirl15 and the lonely-alikes? Why is ze not subject to the same debates about 'fakeness'?

In part ze has escaped this fate because he is open about who he is and his intentions. Further, his videoblog is a perfectly natural step for a performer whose craft development depends upon practice – especially practice to camera – and feedback to improve performance through interaction with viewers posting comments. Many actors and performers consider practice to camera a necessary discipline and so, in a connected world, finding the courage to post performance online and invite participation is a makes-sense move. To do so in a Net-savvy way though is something else again.

The use of the taglines, “good morning, sportracers” and “thinking so you don't have to” established a style for the show and helped frame the seriousness of its content. Although comedic in approach and stylization, ze's commentaries on political and social issues were presented in a genuine even if sometimes mocking and sarcastic manner. These segments fit with the comedic and reportage conventions of the times. For example, ze's remark, 'global warming, like herpes, will go away if you ignore it' is the kind of clever, well-researched sound-bite commentary that would not be out of place on Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* or similar newsmockumentary media. [episode 15; 06 April 2006] Indeed, some of ze's observational editorial segments such as his commentary on civil liberties [episode 71; 26 June 2006] or his discussion on how terrorists work [episode 102; 10 August 2006] provide excellent arguments and observations on matters of very real import.

However, because he is not trying to fit into a traditional network culture or format, the content of the show is refreshingly unrestricted and innovative. By way of example, throughout *the show* ze makes use of and provides valuable commentary on web culture and its impacts. His ugliest myspace competition is hilarious yet points out how ultimately a

democratized online culture will set and create its own standards or, as he says, ugly is the new cool. [episode 83; 14 July 2006] Not only does he say this, the show embodies this in its conception and realization. In episode 114, ze's discussion of digital compression and reduced information is almost poetically insightful. [episode 114; 28 August 2006] His comparison of childhood playgrounds and privacy issues online is designed to provoke thoughtful consideration of how things are developing in this space. [episode 216; 14 December 2006]

His self-revelatory stories where he talks about his childhood [episode 100; 08 August 2006], or makes gentle mockery of the superbowl in his discussion about how his family doesn't celebrate superbowl [episode 247; 01 February 2007] are humorous yet finely drawn observations on life as are the slightly less personal commentaries on college life [episode 109; 21 August 2006/episode 123; 12 September 2006/episode 125; 14 September 2006], how to piss off art students, [episode 257; 15 February 2007] and the illness communication exaggeration curve [episode 107; 17 August 2006]. Occasionally events coincide with the personal and his 9/11 posting on the shared determination of his community is touchingly sincere. [episode 120; 07 September 2006]. It is this often, (but not always) finely judged balance of newsmockumentary and the personal, of self-driven material and viewer-contributed content that creates something uniquely online, something infinitely more than what ze describes as, 'just like TV, but with pimples'. [episode 2; 20 March 2006]

Throughout *the show* ze opened up his material for participation and worked to establish the community of sportsracers and fabulosos. His use of segments such as: 'something from the comments' and viewer crafted 'good morning sportsracers' intros from around the world promoted a sense of engagement, as did humour segments that were sometimes used to fool new viewers into thinking that *the show* was not quite what the buzz might have suggested. These bland-meets-the-bizarre segments ended with a conspiratorial and intimate whisper to camera, "are the new viewers gone yet?" and played with ideas about 'being in and out in the online' on many levels in addition to cementing viewers' feeling of being part of the show.

In what has moved from *de rigueur* to requisite for online content, ze embraced the interactive opportunities of the medium with tactics such as playing an ongoing chess game with viewers and inviting the submission of *powermove videos* with the creators of those getting playback being rewarded with their own special sportsracer name. New initiatives were introduced as the show progressed. His *let's make an earth sandwich* idea invited teams to put slices of bread on opposite sides of the earth and submit videos of the earth as a sandwich. [episode 43; 16 May 2006] Viewers dressed up their vacuum cleaners, submitted t.shirt designs, logos and animations. They sent in their versions of alternate meanings for public signs and examples of 'worst ever' everythings. They provided a support network for Running Fool and pins for his jacket as he travelled around North America using only the Sportsracer community for accommodation. And then there was the video for Ray which was based on a voice recording that had gained internet prominence and was turned into a special creative project contributed to by several sportsracers and ultimately delivered in person to Ray by ze. [episode 266; 28 February 2007]

It was this underlying generosity of *the show* that mitigated reservations some viewers might have held in general about narcissism and self-promoting vloggers from taking issue with *the show*. Even ze's attempts to monetize *the show* with requests for sponsorship and the sale of t.shirts were incorporated into the content and when advertizers and sponsors did appear, they were handled in an inoffensive manner. Overall, there was an open-handedness about the way these now fairly standard monetizing methods were adopted. At one point, sponsorship was even sought for a commentator from Germany who complained that the t.shirts were too expensive. ze immediately started a 'buy the German kid a t.shirt' fund, design competition

and follow-up snap of the kid wearing the t-shirt. [episode 205; 29 November 2006] As for fame, while the show has undoubtedly helped ze's career, it is a stand alone work of art, a tribute to this time in online culture, and a labour of love.

In real terms *the show* is a prime example of the reciprocity of connected give and take, a subject ze addressed directly in episode 202 with his commentary on the meaning and use of thank you [episode 202; 26 November 2006] and demonstrated in the ongoing video for Ray project and its delivery. the show was not all about ze. As it grew, the show became a visibly shared endeavour. Participants' contributions were crafted in the spirit of loving-to-make that underpinned the project's inception. Clearly it was about doing stuff, making stuff and inspiring each other to participate.

There is more about love below in the business model section of the discussion (believe it or not) but in case study terms, at this point it is sufficient to note that *the show* is presented here as an example of user-generated content that is primarily motivated by the desire to make something. Although fame motivators factor in also, the impetus for *the show* and the contributions by viewers were primarily about making and participating. Certainly, *the show* is not an exemplar of money-making when compared to the model offered by The Brothers Chaps and homestarrunner.com.

### MyTalent/MyMoney: homestarrunner.com

For seven years homestarrunner.com has been working its way from finding fans to achieving financial self-sufficiency. According to a report in *Wired*, "Homestar Runner is so popular now that revenues generated by the site's merchandise sales allow its creators to devote their professional lives to the cartoons." [Lewinski, 2007]

Based on an idea developed during college with a friend, the characters became a practice project for Matt and Mike Chapman as they taught themselves flash animation. Posting the short animations about a character called Strong Bad answering various inane emails with punchy responses, (that were often supported by additional cartoon cutaways), the website's audience draw grew through recommendations by word of, well, email.

The 'check this out' factor established a core group of supporters who willingly put their cash behind homestar's creators by buying merchandising that ranged through t.shirts, hoodies, messenger bags, character figurines and soft toys. Eventually, as the content catalogue grew DVDs of the episodes became available for sale also and currently the site offers access to 'toons, games, characters, downloads, and shopping.

Inside the store there are categories for clothing, accessories, CD/DVDs, and 2-dimensional stuff such as posters, patches, static clings and bumper stickers. The merchandise changes so that early and regular adopters are rewarded by having their purchases become collectable. The site's downloads include sounds, icons, graphics and songs. Games include versions for the Wii but there is lots of free fun for visitors too.

The content itself is free, with a new cartoon every week. The humour is fresh, clever and full of insider-making self-references and running gags. Collaboration with other creatives (for example the *They Might Be Giants* music video) has ensured cross-referencing in other media and courting from the networks as well. Both Cartoon Network and Comedy Central have offered the Chapman Brothers the chance to move to that other small screen –TV, but with financial self-sufficiency and complete creative control as cards in hand, the Brothers Chaps have opted to stay online.

For many User-Gen creators, the offer from TV or Hollywood is the end goal of the project. While many fame-seekers believe the model involves building enough audience draw or, if really lucky, just enough hype to get noticed, others live in hope that if they do what they love well enough, the offers and the money to do it full-time for old media will come in. In contrast to this approach, the homestarrunner model follows the fame model only in order to build the audience and the do-what-you-love model absolutely in order to build the content. When it comes to the monetizing model, they are sticking to the principal of keeping ownership of the content in order to keep making the money.

In the recent discussions about their ground-breaking deal to share online ad revenues for *South Park*, Matt Stone is quoted as follows: “Mr. Stone ... added that he and Mr. Parker were particularly glad to be taking an ownership stake in their main life’s work.” [Halbfinger, 2007] Content makers who dream of ‘getting the offer’ often do not think past the point of how good it will feel when they finally get some cash for all the hard work and years of building a name for themselves. The problem is, quite often they are working hard to build a name for someone else. As Matt Stone is quoted saying, ‘People always ask us, “You own it, right? No? Why’d you sign that deal?” And I have to say, “Because I was sleeping on my friend’s couch.”’ [Halbfinger]

Having a business model for a creative endeavour is sometimes considered uncool, a kind of jinxing approach that might possibly undermine the integrity of the creative process. Yet, at the Australian Film Television & Radio School seminar *The Digital Factor*, Didier Elzinga, the CEO of Rising Sun Pictures described his digital visual effects studio’s business model as:

1. We want to do what we love,
2. We want to be known for doing it really well, and
3. We want someone to pay us for doing it. [Elzinga, 2007]

He related this model back to Jim Collins’ Hedgehog Concept as described in *Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t*. [Collins, 2001] While the Collins model is somewhat more complex, based as it is on five years of in-depth research of Fortune 500 companies and the subject of an entire book, the business sense described in these three steps while deceptively simple is profoundly important.

These three steps can be related to the fame, money and love motivating factors but the difference is that where the lonelies may be hoping that fame will lead to financial success and ze frank has focussed for the most part on doing great work, homestar and the artists at Rising Sun have moved from the impetus of a single motivating factor to a process.

While the fame-seekers are often hoping for money, their primary strategy for achieving this is by first obtaining fame. Ironically, many pursuing the fame model find themselves following something akin to South Park’s famous Underpants Gnomes model: 1. Steal underpants. 3. Profit, a plan that overlooks the important middle stage of ‘how’. Similarly, many pursuing the money-first model find that it is hard to come up with content that other people love enough to part with cash, perhaps proving the truism that if you don’t love it, no one else will either. In some ways, those making content for the love of it are best situated for success because they are always positioned to take it to another level.

The three motivating factors can be looked at as a triangle of qualities that lean somewhere between location at one point or along one axis.

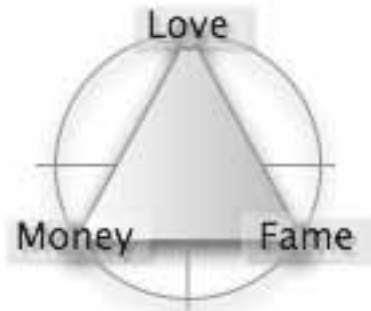


Fig.1

Clearly the lonelygirl15 team were hoping that fame would lead to money and eventually, they would be working at something they love to do. ze frank, working at something he loved, found fame and this has opened doors to paid gigs. Yet only homestarrunner worked the three points to make a full-time living from the content posted, or rather, the merchandising associated with the content posted.

The Elzinga/Collins business plan process can also be framed as a triangle:



Fig.2

If these two triangles are set up as two opposing sides of a pyramid, the alternate sides offer us an insight into another two models that are well-known but not usually held up as exemplars.



Fig.3

This one could be called the ‘arts’ model, where one pursues something well-loved and fulfilling but success is in being famous for one’s art but never remunerated.

The other model –

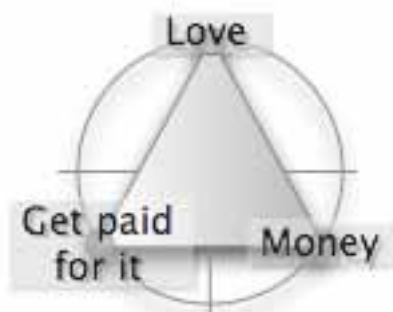


Fig.4

This could be called the in-it-for-the-money model or, in online terms, the Buy Viagra/Nigerian letter/Lose Weight Miraculously model.

As Jim Collins says, “To have a fully developed Hedgehog Concept, you need all three circles [what you are deeply passionate about – love; what you can be best at in the world – fame; and what drives your economic engine –money]. If you make a lot of money doing things at which you could never be the best, you’ll only build a successful company, not a great one. If you become best at something, you’ll never remain on top if you don’t have intrinsic passion for what you are doing. Finally, you can be passionate all you want, but if you can’t be the best at it or it doesn’t make economic sense, then you might have a lot of fun, but you won’t produce great results.” [Collins] By ‘great results’ he is speaking in the context of building a great company as determined in the study described in his text. The fascinating point is that passion for what one does is crucial to success, whatever the model.

There are many who have turned their love for money into financial success. There are many who have turned their love for fame into celebrity. Yet it is those who manage to strike that balance of finding a way to stay true to what they love to do, to become known for their excellence at what they love to do and then finding a way to be remunerated for it that stand as inspirations. This is especially the case if, by the standards of homestarrunner.com, they have the will to hold onto the creative control even if it means sacrificing some financial gain in the short-term perhaps even in the long-term. The concern here, of course, is that by trading creative control for more money, there is a substantial risk that the sacrifice will lead to having to make content that is no longer of a standard that you love.

In language not commonly found in a business text, Collins concludes his study by stating that, “the real question is not, ‘Why greatness?’ but ‘What work makes you feel compelled to try to create greatness?’ If you have to ask the question, ‘Why should we try to make it great? Isn’t success enough?’ then you’re probably engaged in the wrong line of work.” [Collins]

In looking at user-generated content, the most compelling content is made by people who are passionate about what they are making. Passionate about making a political statement (although these are rarely found in politicians’ YouTube offerings). Passionate about their performances or the stories they are telling. Passionate about their hobbies, their projects, the very stuff of their lives. Some content makers become internet people because of the benefits that flow by taking their subject online. For example, a person passionate about dulcimer

making and playing may not be especially engaged by online culture but may happily access it to advance their passion about dulcimers and because of the long-tail qualities of the Net, build the community and commercial model they need to keep going.

Many musicians are finding financially sound business models by exploiting the creative and participative approach of ze frank and melding it with the shopfront model of homestarrunner. In May 2007, Clive Thompson reported on the success of musician Jonathan Coulton who, like ze, had decided to establish himself as a performer by going online. [Thompson, 2007] He committed to writing and recording a song each week and posted it to his website, building a following of fans who bought his music online and gave him metrics that let him plan tours. Ultimately, if his success is sufficient, he might find himself forced to choose between holding onto his creative control or trading it in for a deal with a record company. Between now and that point, the means of production and success are entirely in his own and his audience's hands.

Response by the online community shapes the success of user-generated content as it does in the offline community. That said, there are unique qualities offered by online distribution and culture that factor into the success model for User-Gen.

## Qualities for Quality Results

The motivating factors of fame, love and money are not necessarily bound to user-generated content or online delivery and as Collins' book makes clear, the Hedgehog Concept is fundamental to success across many, if not all, forms of enterprise. However, there are qualities that are of particular importance in online culture at this time. Those qualities have been documented by Tim O'Reilly in describing the specific features of Web 2.0. [O'Reilly, 2005]

While O'Reilly's *What is Web 2.0* focuses on the functionality and structure of the Web, the qualities he has identified have resonance with the creation of content also and should be taken into account by those seeking to build content of substance and value for the online communities.

O'Reilly talks about 'the architecture of participation' and how 'the service gets better the more people use it'. As he says, "amazon made a science of user engagement" as did ze in the way he engaged with his viewers and used feedback and iteration to keep developing the quality of *the show*.

O'Reilly also observes that, "the race is on to own certain classes of data". As User-Gen builds its content archives and relationships through links and wikis, the value add of participation becomes one of quality-building. Once again, this is a situation where the reciprocity of give and take does not leave me richer and you poorer or vice versa but all parties are enriched by the exchange.

O'Reilly talks about the benefits of software no longer limited by platform, of being above the level of a single device. This highlights the importance of flexibility in a Web 2.0 environment and in terms of content speaks to the need to create, evolve, design and distribute content with intention for multiple deliverability. By this I mean content deliverable:

- by/buy songs;
- by/buy t.shirt;
- by/buy ringtone;
- by/buy 2D things;
- by/buy toy.

Delivery has to offer open access:

- buy from me;
- buy from iTunes;
- get through RSS;
- buy hard - DVD/CD;
- buy soft - download;
- watch free - stream.

A walled garden, by definition, is a bounded entity.

Creators succeed most when they are open to the idea of ‘you design a toy for me to make for you and I acknowledge you and the role you played in making this happen’. One of O’Reilly’s main points is The Perpetual Beta, or in content terms (as we say it here in Australia) the equivalent might be called The Perpetual Betta (that is: better, for those outside the loop on that accent-oriented reference). As Collins has argued, greatness is achieved by aiming, with unswerving diligence, to be the best at what you love - the perpetual betta.

Content is not static. It is iterative. As O’Reilly says, “design for ‘hackability’ and remixability.” ze would not have been so great without Ray. Ray would not be so greatly known without ze and all the sportsracers. What I write here references a wealth off online and offline time. The papers created for this conference are full of original thoughts and new creativity, much of which is inspired by the footnoted and bibliographed greatness of others. In writing we have agreed conventions, our versions of links and wikis to those who inspire us. Online we are building these tags of reciprocity, too. No idea is immutable – the better is in the Beta-ness of making.

If Rupert Murdoch is bankrolling *Quarterlife* (a professionally crafted emo kid drama to be broadcast online) it is a testament to the passion of the emo kids with their webcams and a sign that the unique qualities of User-Gen are about to come into their own. [Quarterlife, 2007]

The lesson for content makers is that whether you simply are seeking respect or recognition for yourTalent, or are trying to obtain fame for career or commercial gain, or are looking for a sense of participation with others, the online community and the long tail of affinity offers a space where you no longer need to be just like your physical neighbours to obtain a sense of belonging. There is no requirement that you monetize what you are doing, but there are ways to do so if that is part of the ‘greatness’ you are seeking to achieve. Ultimately, what works best is starting from ‘the why’ of what-it-is-you-care-to-do. In answer to those questions: Is it working? Yes, it is. Of particular note, the service gets better the more people use it. Is it working for them (the content makers)? Yes it is, because for the *greater* part, User-Gen is about finding time to do what we love. We’re even getting famous for it.

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