

wikinomics

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Thursday, 01 May 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 22 May 2008

I was given the book Wikinomics for Christmas and have been enjoying the good practical concepts spelled out within its pages over the past few months. This inspired me to create a new category for this blog: "emergent paradigms". Here is the first installment...

Well its about time to start up a wiki project on the Global ICT Systems web site. I don't mean a test wiki to evaluate whether a particular piece of software would be good for a client, but rather jump right in and launch a grass roots egalitarian wiki project and let it go to see what happens... I have contributed bits and pieces to other wikis around the net over the years, but have not actually taken on the task of starting one on my own turf, and also basing it on a category that is very dear to my heart. (more about that in another article)

This year is the year to unwrap and launch many creative ideas that have been on the back burner for way too long! BTW, if you are not familiar with the book Wikinomics, which deals with a much broader subject than wikis alone... you need to get it now and do some serious catch up! Wikis are only part and symptom of a much larger social economic paradigm that has been going on for quite many years already but beginning to shift well into high gear in the current season... and as you too will discover while you read that book and start fitting concepts and terms to what you see happening all around you!

The authors, Don Tapscott, and Anthony D. Williams, (kudos to you guys!) have actually put their money where their mouth is (ha ha thats a funny concept in light of what the book is all about) and created a wiki themselves... here is a link to their wiki or as they call it: "the unwritten chapter of their book" where we are all the authors. As I add more installments to this blog I will summarize some so the key things I have learned from the book.

Before I do that, a personal historical prologue is needed to add to the perspective... I would like to state today for the record however that for the first time in my life, I have finally found within the pages of one book, a place where real concrete terms

have been defined for something I have been dreaming about since I was a child! These are no longer fuzzy concepts that are hard to explain in a world where everything seems backwards to what I and many of my peers from the 60's generation have dreamed about... Its like Alice coming out of the looking glass, rubbing her eyes and seeing that the rest of the world is finally getting it without all the stereotypical clichés and misused concepts in the way to hide the real truth!

Back in the mid 70's after doing time in the Navy as an electronics technician, I studied music composition formally, at the New England Conservatory in Boston, not computer science, as you would probably guess here... I was very attracted to a buzz going on across the river and ended up spending a whole lot of my college years hanging around Kendal Square, Cambridge Massachusetts, both on line, in the basements of old dusty MIT buildings, (now, sadly torn down, sniff sniff) and occasionally in the physical at local Chinese Restaurants with folks like Richard Stallman, Linus Torvalds and other long haired dudes hailing from Berkeley California who had radically different dreams about our future than folks like Bill Gates, (a Harvard dropout at the time) did.

Back then we used a very asynchronous communications system called BITNET, cause many of us could not afford expensive networks at home and only used the expensive ones while at work (for work only)... Later however the USENET (the early discussion forum system from which all others have been patterned after) had become so popular that our bosses began allowing us to communicate on it during working hours, since it could possibly help us with our jobs :)

Around that time, (mid 80's) I was working at MIT Lincoln Labs, and we had the largest Vax cluster on the east cost at the time! Although it was locked in a vault so it was completely useless for communicating with the outside world. So to communicate with the rest of the world I went down stairs and hung out on unix based Apollo machines (clumsy but early graphical based workstations that we geeks of the day thought were pretty cool)

These machines were connected to the ARPANET, that double edged sword specified by our own US Defense system and built by long haired dudes, (us) to become today's Internet, the beginning of the end of corporate America as we know it today...

Anyway back to the subject... At the time our humble text based communications systems were connecting intelligent minds at

universities all around the globe and a fury of highly creative grass roots dialog slowly began to take shape... All of the initial baby step text based communication applications eventually evolved into more versatile applications like PLATO Notes, DEC Notes (developed for the VAX/VMS networks) and finally the famous Lotus Notes, developed by Ray Ozzy at Lotus Corp (soon to be bought by the giant IBM because of it) Lotus developed Notes into a fantastic programmable communications environment (coined groupware) which ran on generic desktop windows based PCs or Macintosh computers and used other generic PC based servers capable of replicating everything you had on your local machine so that it could be synchronized, duplicated, and shared over vast networks around the world over the Internet!

Around that same time the World Wide Web came along and also the Internet, (our dear brain child), became "commercialized" and many of my peers became very alarmed, heart broken, and disillusioned at the thought of loosing our FREE (as in freedom, not as in free beer) communications network!!! The emergence of the WWW firestorm popularity eclipsed the way cool many to many collaboration capabilities that Lotus Notes initially promised. IBM was smart however and saw the potential of Notes. That's why they bought Lotus. Unfortunately, the emergence of the web and its later adolescent bubble burst close to its 10 year birthday messed up IBM's ability to cash in on the Lotus promise.

All of the above events seemed initially sad but they were all most likely blessings in disguise for the following reasons:

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The commercialization of the Internet seemed like a really bad idea to us university folks, who had enjoyed previous years of commercial free communications and sharing of knowledge and data. However we were living in ivory towers. This great medium needed to be shared with the masses. And now BIG corporations have actually helped to make that possible! The only way to stop it now is to shut it all down which now will never happen since it would be like a person trying to stop his own blood circulation system, he would die as a result! Just like our circulatory system, every single tiny individual or "cell" connected on the internet has the ability to connect, communicate, and access information provided by any other connected "cell". Whether any given bit of information is true or not does not matter, because when its all on the table, and access is virtually instantaneous, (thanks to Google) the truth eventually becomes apparent within the system for every connected cell to see. The emergence of wikis and their success actually proves this concept. That alone is eventually going to insure liberty and freedom to every living being around the globe in a way that our Country's forefathers never dreamed possible! My father, (a very forward thinking theologian of his day) predicted this age we now live in and called it the "Age Of Truth"

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Since all the Notes technology was highly proprietary and the web comprises open standards shared by millions of programmers around the world! It is a good thing that Notes is seeing its sunset, and is quickly becoming replaced by other even better applications based on open source and open Internet standards. BTW, I tried to get them to open source the C++ interface to Lotus notes back when I was working on the team at Lotus but they all looked at me like I was crazy... At the time IBM was doing all kinds of similar things, and it was all so cool, I can not understand why my idea was deemed to be so strange... Go figure :)

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The web itself was never intentioned to be simply a one way static system, as it was presented in the beginning years. Its original creators wanted it to be a way for them to share complex scientific graphical data between universities and research centers around the world. But in the beginning, I believe the initial commercialization movement and main money behind its development had very limited views of its possibilities. It was our children who eventually showed us what it was really capable of! Our children, who we now call the "net generation", cut their teeth on the fruits of all our early labors which we had limited vision about due to our blinders and constant focus on the bottom line ROI...

In the next blog: wkinomics II, I will talk about key points learned from the Book Wkinomics... - dbs