

Jason Mogus' Speaking Notes for
Canadian Council on Social Development
Keynote, AGM, October 26, 2007

Audience: social leaders, researchers, policy: passion for social change; overworked, caught in system in massive transition.

Intent: Share what you know. Web tools, how they help and how they work. And what you've learned about Innovation and change itself.

I'm happy to be here today, thanks for Gail Dugas, who came to my Web of Change conference last month. Certainly, speaking in the shadow of Roy Romamow was a bit intimidating! I haven't been an elected official since university, and have not yet been asked to head a national think tank on a massive social problem. I am from Saskatchewan so at least we share that in common.

I was asked to speak here because of the work I've learned how to do, after over a decade in the trenches of supporting social change organizations with the web – and changing along with the web - and the little things and big things I've learned along the way.

My firm started in 1993 to help environmental orgs take advantage of new media tools. We built Greenpeace's first website, did a bunch of work for Environment Canada. Most were small, innovative orgs and companies you've never heard of. We survived the .com boom and survived the bust. We build a lot of websites! It was pretty fun at the beginning – no one knew what this was, no one knew how to have success, and, for a while anyway, no one knew how to do it, so we got lots of work!

But it was really hard to make a business supporting social change work. We've had to re-invent ourselves as a business oh, maybe 4 times now. And I as a leader too. It hasn't been easy, but it has been richly rewarding, and I've learned so much along the way. I used to think I was different from my clients – that they were the true social entrepreneurs – but what I learned through my own experience may have a lot to do with how change is now known to happen.

But first I want to start with what I learned about the social change sector through a daily practice of building, say 400 websites. And why we've moved out of building websites, which I'll get into. Social Sector:

- Data wasn't going to save the world. Non-profits publish a LOT of data!!!
- A lot of orgs don't know who their audiences are. They don't know what they want, what they think, and what they need
- A lot of orgs were trying to do a lot of different things. I know this because I design IA's for their product and service mix, and get to find out what actual programs, services, and staffing are behind each "idea" of what the org does. Funding models force orgs to creating or running programs, that may not even fit into what they actually have the functional capability to do, or provide leverage or benefits to the whole org. A corporation would never survive with half a dozen products, all different, with little in common on a functional level, and half of them flailing
- There aren't a lot of feedback loops helping us know anyone was using what we were building, or if we were having any impact
- The people in non-profits were amazing: passionate, caring, visionary...but they were also often inefficient, missed deadlines, poorly trained or experience for their level of responsibility, and had too many jobs to do to do most of them well. They were busy, overworked, dramatically underpaid and under-recognized for their contribution, under-supported with training and growth
- As a company, our work suffered also. We weren't investing in our own innovation, or in developing our staff; we were doing things the way we had always done them. And the end results we were producing weren't having the impact we had once seen earlier in our history.

This all came to the fore about 2 years ago. It was killing me to build another website. "The world did not need another website". I felt like a failure, I was ashamed to think about it. Here I was a supposed social

innovator, committed to the core to changing the world, taking scarce money out of the social change sector, and producing work that was only decent. And I wasn't sure it was even making an impact.

It was a dark time for me, but I couldn't help but face it. I had to realign myself with my own personal mission, and look at potentially even killing off my company and my identity as a CEO and social change leader. It required a lot of inquiry, time, asking questions of everyone I knew, asking for help. I let it all go.

And it came back! At the same time as Web 2.0 has re-invigorated the web sector, I've emerged re-energized and re-inspired, doing work in a new way. My practice is now mostly strategy – helping organizations plan and own websites, tools, and campaigns that serve their mission and are sustainable, and have a chance for success.

To make impact, people have to ground first. Probably in everything but definitely with the web. Are they clear on who they are. Their purpose, impact, and stories. Who they serve. What they do better than anyone else (and prove it). How they can involve others, in meaningful ways, in their work, breaking down traditional barriers. And how can they work within an ecosystem of other orgs to achieve success that serves the whole.

Everything grows from that solid core. If it isn't there, I can't get involved. It's just another website.

So let's put all this back into context. We live in a time of great change, great crisis, and great opportunity. We all feel these changes, yet surprisingly the traditional leaders in our society don't talk about them much. For the record, I'm an optimist on where this is all going. Many of my colleagues in the environmental movement are not, and certainly, pick up any newspaper; it can be hard to stay positive.

More here...massive forces restricting change. Massive vested interests in keeping the status quo. We're not taught to be innovators. We're not shown how systems work, only separate parts.

First the good news: social change has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Yunis winning nobel prize. Major companies like Nike using their powers for good. Every magazine promoting environmentalism. Focus on social innovation as a legitimate activity to promote, just like innovation in the business and especially tech sector.

There is so much new energy, new ideas, and new thinking going on!!! Which is good, because change is an all hands on deck thing, and let's face it, the way we've been doing it is NOT WORKING.

- Professionalizing the social services, so average people don't think of themselves as responsible for their community's health and well being. They want to make a difference but don't know how, and many of our organizations don't have ways of integrating their energy and ideas.
 - Web 2.0 engages people who are looking for meaning
- Funding models are broken, reactive; Short term focus and short term support. Funders don't get true market feedback (because no one tells them truth), so they are slow to learn and adapt. Charity is great but it's expensive to find money.
 - Examples. Writing proposals, lying to funders about results, having to stay rigidly on course. Van Jones. Taking too much money on evaluation. Building f'raising program to maybe make \$0.08 on the dollar...
- Citizens are over-marketed to, and there is too much choice for everything (products to charities). They don't believe anymore. And they don't listen because they are tired of being spun and interrupted to hear messages.
- Our sectors are too rigid and separate in how we approach problems. And we're not just not collaborating, but turf wars, winning at the expense of others. People are seeing interconnections and global nature of problems but few of us are responding with new models, new collaborations, true cross-sectoral approaches.
- Many people in the social change sector are tired. They've been underpaid and under-loved for too long. There is a culture of critique, and disempowerment. No one wants to join the army

of the glum. And when you are the one who is constantly saying what's not working, the world tunes you out.

- We aren't creating enough new models approaching problems in new ways. There isn't a culture of innovation, risk taking, and accepting failure. How can you be creative when you're burned out? And how can you address systems conditions when the vested interests are so entrenched?

It all looks pretty bleak. But there is hope on the horizon. I'll get to that. But because I'm a web guy I'll start with how web tools – and web thinking – fits into my optimism.

So why care about the web, much less “the new web?” Basically every organization I worked with wanted some flavour of the same things:

- Reach more people
- Engage them in new ways
- Raise more funds
- Have impact on their mission

In the case of CCSD and some of the member agencies in the room, who aren't doing constituency building or fundraising, from what I gather you are looking to:

- Disseminate ideas and information better; getting them into the hands of those who can use them to produce better social outcomes
- Collaborate and share knowledge with peers more effectively
- Understand the changing world around you better and receive feedback on how you are doing
- Impact your social mission

What I've found is that, web tools can help organizations and the people inside and outside them become more connected, collaborative, innovative, and ultimately more effective. Allow me to show you how.

Web 1.0 is publishing. Web 2.0 is a conversation. At the core, this is the way that the average person can be reconnected into the work of improving our world.

Quick overview of Web 2.0 Tools

- Blogs: expressing and engaging
- Rich Media: compelling storytelling
- Social Networking / Facebook: building relationships and making connections
- Social Bookmarks and Wikis – knowledge sharing and collaborating
- RSS Feeds: staying connected
- Online Communities: tying it all together

There are some amazing stories of innovation and success. New models. New ideas. New people.

- UN Foundation's Nothing But Nets: \$14M, participative site, storytelling, re-framed a whole issue. Huge risk for UNF, and they are learning.
- Nabur: putting info and impact in the hands of the people. Turns Int'l Devt paradigm on its head.
- Salvation Army: real time info, stories. Makes their work engaging and accessible.
- To be honest, I had trouble finding stories of innovation and success online in this community. I'm not sure if it's because the stories are there but they aren't being told, or are there not any good stories. I hope we can discuss this later.

You can't get these results with tools alone. I can't stress this enough. You need to change your CULTURE and the way you are thinking, in order to be successful in this new world. And while you can't do this alone (you'll likely need some younger people in key roles to help you) they can't do what they want to do without your support.

Here's my best take on "Web Thinking":

- Collaboration – inside orgs, among orgs, across sectors
- Transparency – being authentic, be real, by timely
- Participation – engaging people (and not just the usual suspects) meaningfully in your work
- Listening – being open, soliciting feedback, and being ready to hear what comes back

If you are not this, you can have all the systems in the world and they won't be successful. What I have found is that what works well on the web, is what works well in the living systems around us. The behaviours, techniques, and mindset behind the web is exactly the same as the mindset of successful social change.

What can CCSD do? Well, I don't know much about the social development sector, and I have a lot of admiration for the work you do keeping our social safety net in tact. What I can see from my time preparing for this talk is:

- Speak passionately about the things that matter to you. Give voice to those you serve. Tell your stories better, and, if you can't, partner with people who can.
 - Balance data with story. Bioneers and new brain science.
 - Get creative! Podcasts, videos, flash movies. People pay attention to new
 - Tell stories about solutions and impacts, not issues or your campaigns
- Get your research into the hands of social innovators. There are many making change happen that don't have time to look up and see the bigger picture
- Create spaces for innovators to interact, network, and collaborate to exchange info. Connections create potentials that didn't exist before. Build social capital.
- Try new things. Radical ones. We need you to. Embrace failure, and learn. Be flexible, and be easy on yourself and others. Don't expect perfection.

- Kill off programs that are dying. This releases creative energy and resources that are locked up.
- Support visionary, passionate people who are moving from a deep yearning to follow their calling.
 - Getting to Maybe: big transformation tends to move through people who were called: Yunis, Al Etmanski, Stephen Lewis
- Get out of your sector: Invite and work with new people / sectors / organizations. Find a way to integrate the new energy coming from the corporate sector, youth. Invite people who don't agree with you or don't get you. Their feedback is important information on how you can make your programs more relevant to their worlds.
- Support new voices inside your orgs. Give them power and let them fail and learn. Let go of control.
 - "This is not a good time for control freaks" – Eric Young
- Don't ignore small successes, programs, and organizations. In times of great systems change and creative destruction, small roots become the next tall institutions.
 - Yunis was one guy, ignored. Now 1700 branches, Nobel.
- Be the change. Get your hands dirty. The only way to truly learn is to do. Don't get stuck in one role, or be "separate".
 - My story: I needed to know, really know how our work was landing in the sectors I was serving. It scared me to death, but it's how I learned I needed to change. And in the scary feedback, lay the seeds of our new form.
- Trust that new sources of funding and support will emerge. Capital follows ideas, success, and results.

Finally, and this may be the most important one of all – be easy on yourself, and others. Allow for imperfections and mistakes. You won't succeed at the web without experimenting and the same goes for social innovation as a whole.

The web won't solve any of your problems on its own. But innovation, human ingenuity, collaborations, learning from failures, and encouraging visionary leadership at all levels will.

I believe we're in the midst of a massive systems change, and we're at the early part of it still. Doing things the way they have been done is not an option anymore, because we may literally not have a world to hand down to our grandchildren. But sitting still is also not an option.

I salute you and your commitment and passion for this work, and wish you the best of luck on your failures and your successes. No less than the weight of our communities – indeed the very soul of this fine country – is riding on your part in us figuring this out.

Have a wonderful journey. Thank you.

I am very open to feedback, challenges, and questions of these ideas, as I'm still very much learning.
