

GRASSROOTS WIKIS & CLOUD ACTIVISM

By now everyone knows I'm a bit of a geek. Before I came to Surfrider Foundation, I had been steeped in software and the Web. Now I'm hip-deep in coastal activism.

Technology and activism not only intersect, they share DNA.

In this post I want to talk about two concepts that keep swirling around in my head; grassroots wikis and cloud activism.

Grassroots adj. [gras-roots] Involving the common people (rather than an exclusive group)

Wiki n. [wik-ee]. Collaborative effort edited by anyone who has access to it.

The word "grassroots" might make you think of a political campaign or an environmental movement, etc. That makes sense. What is a bit different is when it's mixed with the somewhat new phenom of wikis. Wikis make many people think of Wikipedia, but Linux and other entities really paved the way for a collective, group effort ... and an effort that answers to a larger mission rather than a company's next quarter earnings. For a better understanding of the power of wikis, read *Wikinomics*.

Surfrider Foundation, in my mind, is a mix of these two concepts. It involves all people along coastlines. And it involves people from all over the planet. I have seen this first hand. I saw it a few nights ago at the San Diego Chapter meeting ... in fact I see it at every Chapter meeting I've ever been to. We are "of the people." We are a grassroots entity through and through. But we are more than that as we—the 80 entities around the world that operate under our flag—are in the process of creating and refining a very serious collaborative effort, a wiki.

Am I just merging trendy jargon? I don't think so. If you study what is working in today's flat world it is open, transparent efforts that intersect and are accessible to all people.

This is important because we are well positioned for global trends. It also helps us better understand how to nurture growth, but not smother it.

Another concept is cloud computing. The layman's translation of what that means is that there is a massive amount of computing power now tied together via the largest network ever built (the 'net). Those clusters or grids of computers are enabling a different kind of processing to happen. This was previously only available to a few fat-brained PhDs with access to supercomputers. This evolution of computer processing

power, combined with the interconnectivity via the Internet ... will herald in a myriad of new era applications and potential.

Consider the following equation:

Large number of people
+ Common mission to frame collaboration
+ Connectedness via networks and toolsets

This equals a potentially potent force, applied directly at the protection and enjoyment of oceans, waves and beaches.

I see a network of Surfrider Foundation entities and activists all over this planet, tied together by not only a common mission, but a common set of tools. Any pulp mill, anywhere on the globe, can be fought by connecting local activists to established singular groups of three pulp mills that are loosely collaborating and sharing resources ... fighting gross pollution in Chile, Oregon and Tasmania. The "Hold Onto Your Butt" campaign, which was conceived by a Chapter, now is a global campaign ... routinely sharing videos, press clippings, strategies via listserves, regional conferences and e-mail. Jack Johnson's upcoming tour will be a platform for a global campaign around plastic awareness and single-use plastic reduction.

The Surfrider Foundation has a mission that scales elegantly. We hardly ever have to correct a Chapter or an affiliate by telling them they are off mission. It seems to self-police (much like Wikipedia).

The reason this all matters is crystal clear to me. Our oceans are in crisis mode. Our beaches are being taken away. The number of breaks is finite, and decreasing. Fisheries are collapsing.

We need to understand how we can employ every possible tool on the face of this earth to point towards our mission. If we're really going to make a difference then we need to live at the cutting edge of policy advancement, grassroots organizing and toolset activation. This has absolutely nothing to do with technology. I'm talking about harnessing toolsets' maximum potential and pointing that power at accomplishing real, understandable victories according to our mission.

—Jim Moriarty
CEO Surfrider Foundation

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