

Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

REVIEWED BY MARJANNE PEARSON

For the last 20 years, we have been experiencing what Clay Shirky calls “epochal change” not just because of new technologies but because of the way we use them.

I can remember a time in the early 1990s when a friend suggested that I use “e-mail,” and I couldn’t understand why I would want to send an electronic message to someone when I could call them on the phone. However, at the same time, I was spending \$1,000 per month on long-distance charges for my small consulting practice.

Less than a year later, I was an AOL subscriber using dial-up, cheerfully waiting for the “You’ve Got Mail” recording. Today, I use Gmail, and I have an active Twitter account, using desktop and iPhone apps to communicate with friends all over the world. I use Vonage (VOIP2) for my business phone line, Skype for international calls, FreeConferenceCall for regular conference calls, and iChat for video conferencing and podcasts—and my monthly phone bill is less than \$150. But that’s only a small part of the way that my everyday life has changed.

One might expect Shirky’s book to be a potentially dry, technical treatise, but in *Here Comes Everybody*, he weaves together a fascinating series of stories about people like ourselves who have found opportunities “to share, cooperate, and act together” using new social tools. Along the way, Shirky teaches us not how to use the tools but why these stories and experiences are important.

In “It Takes a Village to Find a Phone” (Chapter 1), the lesson incorporates what Shirky calls “ridiculously easy group-forming” enabled by new technology. In 2006, a woman leaves her cell phone in a taxi in NYC. But it’s not just a cell phone, it’s a multifunction Sidekick, and she has used it as the “sole repository of much of the information for her upcoming wedding....” He chronicles her attempts to get it back as her friends spread information about the new phone “owner” via the Internet. I won’t ruin the story for you, but “it demonstrates how connected we’ve become to one another.”



Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

By Clay Shirky

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“Technology is the campfire around which we tell our stories.”

—Laurie Anderson

Unfortunately, “the new technologies create freedoms, but they also create social loss.” The business model for publishing books, magazines, and newspapers is experiencing a seismic shift. On Twitter, there is a lot of chatter about the use of crowdsourcing to solicit from amateurs what have traditionally been discrete professional services, like copywriting and graphic design. We all know that today “Everyone Is a Media Outlet” (Chapter 3) and can publish via weblog, SlideShare, Vimeo, YouTube, and a variety of other distribution channels. But when “Personal Motivation Meets Collaborative Production” (Chapter 5), “the results can be more profound.”

One of the most interesting lessons for marketers in professional services firms comes from “Failure for Free” (Chapter 10). Even in the search to become more innovative, a firm will often make safe choices, green-lighting potential failures and passing on potential successes. The lesson that Shirky draws is that “the open source ecosystem...is remarkably tolerant of failure.” He uses examples like Linux and Wikipedia to illustrate “the right kinds of collaborative tools and the right sort of bargain with users.”

letter to the editor

These projects “lower the cost of failure, they do not create biases in favor of predictable but substandard outcomes, and they make it simpler to integrate the contributions of people who contribute only a single idea” (which includes most of us). He believes, “As the rest of the world gets access to the tools once reserved for the technies, the pattern [of the open source movement] is appearing everywhere, and it is changing society as it does.”

In the Epilogue to *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky tells us about Aldus Manutius, a Venetian printer, who in 1501 created what was essentially the Renaissance Kindle. Manutius published a translation of Virgil’s works as an octavo, “designed to be small enough to fit in a gentleman’s saddlebags, so as to make important parts of his library transportable.” This innovation shrank the book in size and cost and was a revolution. Books became more desirable, more copies were produced, and more experiments with printing were undertaken, including another of Manutius’s volumes, *Hypnerotomachia*—a contemporary novel with erotic passages—“creating a market for new fiction.” Shirky says, “The lesson from Manutius’s life is that the future belongs to those who take the present for granted.”

Those of us born before 1980 spend “more energy trying to forget the irrelevant than learning about the new.” Today, our ability to share, cooperate, and act together using our social tools is a momentous opportunity, and if you want the future to belong to you, this book is a good place to begin. **m**

About the Reviewer



Contributing Editor Marjanne Pearson is an inveterate networker who became intrigued with the power of social media to build constituencies. She is the founder of Marjanne Pearson Associates—a consulting practice that focuses on strategies for organizational resiliency and success. Her clients are a remarkable constellation of design firms that include signature architects, emergent practices, regional powerhouses, and corporate giants. Her published articles and podcasts are available at www.nextmoon.com/research.html, and you can follow her on Twitter as @nextmoon.

Regarding your February 2010 *Marketer* editorial, I take issue with your “we should stay lean until ’13” statement in one respect. Marketing should remain consistently strong so that a business appears strong, reliable, and credible. As a Pacific Northwest native, being extremely frugal is as inherent a characteristic as one could get. In Los Angeles where I started my business, it taught me that my business could get along without everything but marketing.

The same issue’s outstanding “Points & Pixels” by Josh Krayger illustrates my belief most persuasively that photography, too, should be utilized wisely, i.e., not every project needs the high-price shooter; nevertheless, consistent use of photography in a company’s marketing package should be a mainstay. The use of only high-quality professional photography is an axiom in marketing efforts for A/E/C professionals. Each and every individual who evaluates a company in this industry is drawn ever more strongly to work with and/or hire us if the visual representation of our work is distinctly high caliber.

I want to thank you for the article by Josh Krayger and your, as usual, very astute editorial. Save staying lean for your ground beef patties.

Dione Benson

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