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## Conclusion: Creating Zing!

EVEN THOUGH I noted at the outset that this short book would not teach you the latest social networking tools, you may feel just a little at sea, wondering, "What exactly should I do now?" Although my intent lay in changing engineers' viewpoint about media, you deserve a more concrete, less elusive answer.

As with any outreach to the public, we want to both raise awareness and increase engagement, but new media offers us an additional distinction: The ability to create a social movement and to effect social change. The snappy word "zing" captures it all. It is a notion that marries the oldest concept of outreach - of engaging intellectually and emotionally – to social media's ability to involve and engage the public by creating direct collaborations with them. With new media, we no longer measure engagement simply by audience numbers, but by creating "deep use" among those we want to reach. We want them to create media "as contributors, amplifiers, sharers, raters, commentators, distributors, re-mixers -- forming their own organic network."55

Thus the engineering profession needs to create new

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup>Clark, Jessica and Sue Schardt, Spreading the Zing: Reimagining Public Media through the Makers Quest 2.0 (AIR Perspective 2010).

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media projects that become "loved" by their users, loyal users who sustain, nurture, and guide them. Clay Shirky once argued that Wikipedia thrives and survives because of . . . love! Indeed, create an irrelevant page on Wikipedia – perhaps a PR piece about your firm – and "MrOllie" and his gang will quickly delete it and send you a curt note on "Conflicts of Interest." By some estimates, if MrOllie and gang stopped their work, Wikipedia would end within a month. Unpaid, they do this work because of their admiration for the concept of Wikipedia.

My hope is that this book lays down a foundation for engineers to create a grand new media project that becomes a powerful method for public outreach. I hope they use this book to design such a project so that it has a chance of working from day one. I do not know the form this should take, I have not the wit to design such a thing alone; but in this interconnected, wiki-based age, many minds should be able to create it. I do know the elements of what we want this entity to do and how it should work:

Catalyze user participation. It must focus on some kind of "how" question; something that users can judge and comment on. If the project becomes simply a repository, then it will fail. It must create love and in turn have utility.

Create the right kind of engineer and foster in the public the proper notion of engineering. This means that the project must reflect the complexity of engineering, rather than the reductive approach commonly used in our engineering schools. By complexity I mean that an engineering solution reflects an interdisciplinary approach that uses both technical depth and non-technical breadth. As one commentator put it, our goal should be "to be able to adapt and apply

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technology that is human-centered, desirable, feasible, viable, sustainable, usable and manageable."56

Use the low cost of failure to succeed. Creating such a new media project will take enormous creativity, great skill, and a large amount of luck. The latter implies that it will come about because many projects are tried, and only a few succeed. Recall that a hallmark of new media is the low cost of failure.

Embed the notion of outreach in the "DNA" of every new engineer. In the day and age where the line between personal and public communication has blurred, and where citizen journalism might well dominate, we need to have every engineering graduate versed in new media, and in love with the idea of reaching the public.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup>Craig, Kevin, "Complexity Demands a New Engineering Mindset," *Design News*, June 22, 2010.