Chapter 4.7

Creative Waves:
Exploring Emerging Online Cultures, Social Networking and Creative Collaboration through e-Learning to Offer Visual Campaigns for Local Kenyan Health Needs

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ABSTRACT

The past few years have seen the promise of online collaboration vastly augmented by developments in online technologies and emerging creative practices. Through our work with the Omnium Research Group, the authors argue that design should never be a solitary activity and benefits from many levels of collaboration - never more so than when dealing with complex issues facing today's world. The highly connected global society in which many of us now live frequently uses web-technologies to enhance nearly every facet of day-to-day life. The authors strongly believe that design education should not isolate itself from such communal and collaborative potential. This chapter explores what happens when online creative collaboration is applied to a real-world design project tackling critical health issues affecting local communities in Africa. It offers an account of the most recent, fully-online Creative Waves project - Visualising Issues in Pharmacy (VIP) that saw over 100 graphic designers join forces with a similar number of pharmacists from over 40 countries worldwide to produce graphic proposals for public awareness campaigns about six health issues seriously affecting the people of a village community in Kenya. The three-month VIP project is explained in relation to its aims, objectives and graphic outcomes, as well as the online environment in which it took place. Creative Waves is a concept created in 2005 by the Omnium Research Group, based at The University of New South Wales in Australia, to form online communities of design students from many institutions around the globe. Consisting an array of enthusiastic students, teaching staff, professional practitioners and luminaries invited as special guests, these online creative communities have proved that amazing results can

be produced through careful facilitation between distanced individuals who will most likely never meet. The Creative Waves concept has to date been offered twice in collaboration with Icograda and the Icograda Education Network.

INTRODUCTION: EMERGING ONLINE CULTURES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Before we examine the role of online communities and global creative collaboration within the most recent *Creative Waves '07* project, offered by the *Omnium Research Group* (Australia) in collaboration with Icograda and its education network (IEN), it is important to take account of vast social and cultural changes emerging online over the last few years. As we will see, the philosophy of online creativity and collaboration from which Omnium was borne a decade ago has since become part of the fabric of many online cultures. Such change poses great impact in academic settings because students today are some of the most 'savvy' users of ever-evolving digital and web-based technologies. For the current generation these technologies, that have been the subject of so much academic research and speculation, are now so everyday that we need to take account of new ways of working, socialising and collaborating that have subsequently emerged. As we have argued elsewhere (Bennett, Chan, & Polaine, 2004), we are beyond asking "should we use these technologies within education?" and now have much to learn from a generation that have already been using them for most of their lifetime.

Quite apart from their use in educational settings, the impact of the kinds of collaborative processes we will outline below are affecting the world of professional practice and wider society in extraordinary ways. The Internet has clearly changed the nature of communications and communities in the last decade and this has led to new ways of living and working (Castells, 2000;

Johnson, 2001; Rheingold, 2003; Leadbeater, 2008; Weinberger, 2007).

Blogs and blogging are possibly the most well known explosion in this area. Blogging has grown so fast that statistics are continually out of date (and thus hard to measure), but at in late 2007 the blog tracking service, Technorati, was tracking over 72 Million blogs and the 'blogosphere' was over 100 times bigger than it was just three years before (Sifry, 2007). YouTube, another famous online success story, was already serving 100 million videos per day and received over 65,000 video uploads daily back in 2006 (YouTube, 2006). These successes are not just digital – the Jubilee Debt campaign started with one person in a shed in London and gathered enough momentum and 24 million signatures which helped force Western governments to cancel US$36 billion of debt owed by Third World countries and developing nations (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004, p. 54).

There are three emerging and overlapping areas to examine in the context of the *Creative Waves* projects:

- Social networks and communities
- Collaboration, open-source and the rise of the pro-ams
- Organisational change

Social Networks and Communities

In recent years the rise of portable or time-shifted media (such as podcasts, the iTunes Music Store and the video equivalents), blogs and social networks have created enormous shifts in traditional relationships to everything from media, to education, to consumer and political behaviour. Collectively, web applications such as YouTube, Flickr, GoogleMaps, Digg, Facebook, MySpace, Last.FM and WIkipedia are known (and hyped) as Web 2.0 applications (O'Reilly, 2005); a term that describes some of the technical approaches to their creation, but generally describes the idea that users and their audience create the content and

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