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## **Trend Six – Power to the People**

We continue our Ten Trends series with a look at a monumental shift in the very fabric of our lives – a change in the distribution model of knowledge and information. This is an exciting and unnerving trend to study, as well as a moving target, constantly evolving in the rapidly changing environment in which we operate. We believe that this shift has and will continue to shape the offerings and programs of our industry, and therefore it is an important reason to name it as the sixth in Ten Trends that shape our non-profit world.

The thesis of our white paper here is simple. There has been a shift in how information – and knowledge - is gathered and distributed. The advent of the Internet, high speed connections worldwide, and mobile technology have surely exacerbated this shift, and it only looks to grow in the future. We live in a very connected world where knowledge and information is shared ubiquitously.

So, I really have to consider the issue of how schools and colleges view this shift. How will the academy (educational institutions) respond? And, will there be limits or boundaries in this new distribution model in the future? These are all good questions that we need to be considering for the future.

### **Who Owns Knowledge?**

It seems to me that the most monumental question facing educational institutions is simply to ask who is the owner of knowledge and information. Until very recently – over the last five years – the primary owner of knowledge was the academy. Universities, colleges, and schools have historically been the primary distributor or provider of information and knowledge, and, in order to acquire this knowledge, users (students) had to pay a fee (tuition) for the acquisition of it.

Then came the game changer. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) placed their entire curriculum as open source and online through iTunes. It is now possible to take any class at MIT online and move through the content, though one cannot obtain a degree unless they pay for the service. But, the knowledge transfer itself is free and the distribution model is ubiquitous. Many schools and colleges have followed their lead and continue to invest heavily in open source curriculum, though most are working hard at creating a revenue stream to augment their bricks and mortar campuses, which are

generally expensive to operate.

This all leaves me with the curious question. In the future, who will own knowledge and will we have to pay to acquire it? This may sound a bit far-fetched, but I really don't think it is. And, if you follow this question to some of the potential outcomes, you have to wonder about the role of schools and colleges in this new world. I don't believe that colleges and schools will go away, but I do wonder if their role will change as a result.

### **The Google Effect**

I have often used Google as an excellent example of how to craft an inspiring vision statement and use it to propel an organization. During strategic planning efforts with clients, I like to cite Google's vision for two reasons: it is both audaciously ambitious and, at the same time, relatively realistic. In the event that you don't know it, the following is their vision statement:

“To organize all of the world's information and do no harm in the process.”

Yes, this is a very bold statement. And, yes, Google appears to be at least well on their way of accomplishing this vision. They have been very strategic in creating tools that organize information and knowledge. In their ideal world, Google hosts your email, calendar, social media, documents, searches, and even financial transactions. Google is far more than a search engine. And, they are far smarter than I am at creating a truly visionary business model, and I humbly recognize that anticipating their next great idea is very difficult.

Last week I opened my front door at my house and found a newly delivered Yellow Pages book at my doorstep. I had to laugh for a moment, as it seemed nearly absurd to open a four-inch thick book of paper in order to find the right category of a business to call for some special need. I politely took it out of its wrapper and carried it to our recycle bin for paper. Most people today simply go directly online, often to Google, when they are seeking something, anything, as it relates to vendor searches. Both of my daughters – in sixth and ninth grade – spend a great deal of time completing their research online with Google, as well as a host of other online portals. Google has been another game changer in this brave new world as they have created the platform for organizing all of the information that we might need.

### **User-Generated**

Internet enthusiasts like to talk about the web from a chapter-based approach. In the first generation of the web – which they call Web 1.0 - users generally utilized the Internet to download and gather information. Then came the advent of Web 2.0, where users not only went to the web for information, but they often used the Internet either to collaborate or create new content. Examples of the new Web 2.0 are all around us but they include YouTube, Wikipedia, and Facebook, all highly mainstream information portals that allow us to connect with people and generate new content.

### **Knowledge, Discernment, or Practical Training?**

There are three main points we want to make about these difference makers in our world today. They are going green, going global, and just simply going.

rture, and help develop their abilities to make positive change in the world?