Chapter 1 People Get Ready

> So, anyway, dinner. It was a great reminder of the real-world rewards of this new electronic community I've become a part of. Allan and I had a great time talking, laughing, eating, and sharing a bottle of wine. That kind of experience cements a friendship in a way that instant messenger just can't do. I don't use technology for the sake of using technology—at least, I try not to. I use it to enhance the things that I care about in my life—friends, family, my research. Yesterday afternoon I spoke to my kids over iChat audio. I arranged to meet Allan using email and IM. And I participated in great discussions about my areas of research interest during presentations. But all of those spill over into the real world, and I use them to enhance the real world, not replace it.
>
> —Elizabeth Lane Lawley, "Step Away from the Laptop"

The phone rang; it was Catherine Saint Louis, who introduced herself as calling from the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* and asked to speak to my partner, Briggs Nisbet. Great, I thought, another solicitation; at least they didn't call her "Mr. Briggs Nisbet." But, no, Catherine told me that she edits the Lives column, that they were doing a special issue on landscaping in two weeks, that she'd been reading Briggs' gardening blog, *True Dirt,* and did I think Briggs would be interested in writing a piece for her column in the magazine?

I nearly passed out from shock and stammered that I suspected that she would indeed be interested and here's her work number, her work email, her personal email, and my email address. Oh, you don't need my address? Of course you don't, sorry about that. No, that's fine, bye.

Over the next five days, Catherine and Briggs collaborated via email and cell phone on three different versions of the column until it was just so.

What does this have to do with the power of many or the living Web? I asked Briggs to ask Catherine how she found *True Dirt*. Catherine had wanted a personal insight for the Lives column. She thought that searching the Internet for weblogs on gardening might help her find a suitable columnist.

She googled for something like "gardening blogs" to find a writer for the Sunday ever-lovin' *New York Times Magazine*? She trusted the Internet to help her find a suitable writer? Interestingly, the chain that led to the call went through a web-archived article from the *Boston Globe* (owned by the same company that owns the *Times*) on garden blogs that listed *True Dirt* in its short list of recommended sites at the end of the article.

How did that author find *True Dirt*? Perhaps because of some of the other people who publish their thoughts about gardening or nature or food or related topics on the Web, some of whom sometimes link to *True Dirt*. How did *they* find it? Because of promotional efforts online and word of mouth from *True Dirt*'s publisher: a tiny web operation that consists mainly of me and whoever else is helping out with the current front-burner projects. Which means mostly me.

True Dirt, written by Briggs and Richard Frankel, is part of a network of sites presented as a group site at Telegraph.nu. It is an example of niche journalism in the old-fashioned sense of journal writing and an example of what is sometimes semi-facetiously called "nanopublishing." Nanopublishing is niche publishing managed with lightweight content-handling systems that users like using, including blogs and wikis, but usually at the moment blogs.

The quality of the writing at our sites and the pertinence of the material to its subject matter is apt enough to attract the sort of people who notice stuff on the Web, link to it, and keep running logs (or blogs) of links, insights, interesting thoughts, and notes—that is, people who take note of their surroundings

and sometimes remark on it soon after making observations, usually in the form of a sequential log. Those people have at least occasionally linked to us, and we point to each other, and we are thus in some ways like the bogus "link farms" used to try to game Google's page rank system. But in our case, the sites are real, the domains are distinct, and the authors are many.

By hosting *True Dirt* on Mediajunkie, I helped ensure that Briggs' writing would have a better chance of being noticed by the larger network through which certain bridge nodes connect my various small cliques to the wider Internet culture of early adopters. It also helps connect to what are sometimes called the influentials, the people whose sites offer trend-tracking clues to mainstream media (and other sales, advertising, marketing, publicity, and communications professionals), the freelance meme watchers of the living Web: the independent bloggers.

In My Day, We Shared Music via Snail

When I first got on the Internet more than a decade ago, I did so by using my modem to dial up to a service called Netcom. Once connected, I found myself at a command line. A few geeky friends taught me how to use the mail programs ("elm" and "Pine" were my options, or the even more bare-bones "mail") and how to use the "man" command to read manuals and learn about other command-line options.

This was before the Web had a graphically driven interface available (Mosaic and later Netscape were still more than a year away). Somehow I managed to stumble onto Usenet, a worldwide distributed network of networks hosting discussions on any topic imaginable. I was a fan of the Grateful Dead but had few nearby friends with whom I could discuss the band, so I quickly discovered the rec.music.gdead newsgroup, which became my first online community "hangout."

It was great to be able to connect to people all over the world who shared my interests and to ask questions and share information that otherwise would have maundered unaired in the back of our minds or on someone's shelves. But what truly amazed me was the first time I opened my mailbox to find a package containing cassette tapes. The tapes featured a recording of my first

Dead concert—a show in Saratoga, New York in 1984. As I stood there with a physical artifact in my hand, it dawned on me that throughout this Internet cloud—sitting in front of their own computers and typing messages to the same forums—were in fact real flesh-and-blood people. It took something happening in the real world, an actual object being sent through the so-called snail mail, and my chance to hear once again music that I'd heard for the first time twenty years ago to bring this point home to me. I immediately got online and posted something silly to the effect of "Wow, I just found out you all are real!"

Over time, I started running into people at Dead concerts in the Bay Area, whom I knew only from being online and that was another revelation. Some people were *exactly* like they seemed online. Others were very different from the personas they projected. In each case, I had to expand my mental file to add new information about these people: what their faces looked like, how they stood, what they did with their hands while talking, and the timbre of their voices. In each case, a virtual person became a real person.

These were my first clues that the true power of the Internet would be unleashed only when online interaction crossed over into the so-called real world.

By the way, I realize it doesn't help my credibility much to talk about this love of Grateful Dead music, but I'm told by researchers such as danah boyd that the online world frequently caters to otherwise marginalized parts of one's public identity. When I interviewed boyd, I told her about my involvement in the DeadHead Usenet group when I would ordinarily not mention that aspect of my online experience around hip younger Bay Area folks, for fear of being stereotyped as dope-smoking hippie with flowery aesthetics and half-assed politics. I think I did this deliberately to expose my own vulnerability, my own marginalized identity, even as I risked a stereotype of me clicking into shape in her mind.

The other reason I mentioned it was because I had just been through the second meaningful online community experience of my life—this time with the Dean campaign—and I wasn't the only person to remark on the Dead-show atmosphere at some of the big Dean rallies and events in California last year.

Who Was Howard Dean and How Did He Go So Far?

Before I get too far into this, I should probably get my biases out on the table. This book isn't about my political opinions or my ideology. The lessons I am discovering about how the living Web works, how it's changing group behavior and organizing techniques and politics, have nothing to do with the political spectrum of left to right (and perhaps a bit to do with the spectrum of decentralization vs. hierarchy). Nonetheless, my own experience is relevant both because it informs my ideas about what is changing, and because it will enable readers who don't share my political leanings to factor out any bias that I am unable to eliminate from my point-of-view.

I volunteered for the local grassroots group working to support Howard Dean in the Democratic primary in 2003 and early 2004. (I live in Oakland, California, so for me that meant East Bay for Dean.) Through the course of my involvement, I performed a wide range of political organizing and activism roles and ended up on the local organizing committee. After Dean lost the nomination, the group that I belong to changed its name to East Bay for Democracy, and its work continues with goals that still include electoral activities but will continue beyond the upcoming November election.

One of the hats I wore in the thick of the campaign was "giver of the fundraising pitch" at houseparties. (Because of a loophole in FEC regulations, it's easier to host a fundraiser in a person's house than it is in a public accommodation, so houseparties proliferated to raise the insane amount of money required to keep a national campaign in the game.) This involved attending houseparties, answering guests' questions about the Dean candidacy, and giving a speech making the case for supporting Dean financially and evangelizing the idea of a $100 revolution (more about that in Chapter 2, "All Politics Is Personal").

At one such party, my host told me how he got involved in volunteering in the primary. He attended a meetup in San Francisco to learn more about the candidate in March 2003, twenty months before the election and a full year before the California primary. He noted that by the next meetup he attended, a month later, twice as many people were present, and that the growth continued exponentially all that summer.

Once the meeting had been called to order, the attendees were given a chance to introduce themselves and discuss the political issues that most affected them. (This was something called "The Great American Conversation," because a large part of the effort involved getting people to meet in person in coffeehouses and living rooms, meet their neighbors, and start rebuilding the American community one block at a time.) After the introductions, though, came the most striking activity of the event, from my host's point-of-view. The meeting organizers—who had obtained their materials to run the meeting by downloading position papers from the DeanforAmerica.com website, by participating in a conference call, and by signing up and receiving packages in the mail—handed out packages to each of the attendees who were willing. Each package contained the names and addresses of two undecided Democratic voters in Iowa who were eligible to participate in the January 2004 Iowa caucuses. Also in the packages were stationery, envelopes, and stamps.

Participants were asked to write personal letters to their two assigned recipients, telling them in their own words why they supported Howard Dean for president and why they hoped that the Iowan would brave the cold and snow, attend the caucus, and stand for Dean. My host was impressed not merely that the campaign wasn't scripting or controlling or reviewing the contents of these letters before they were sealed and sent. (Yes, they provided some suggested "talking points," but each participant was free to send whatever message they deemed worthy of committing to paper.) What blew him away was that the campaign had leveraged the Internet—that famous disembodied tool of virtual connections and anonymous interaction—to get a group of local people together in the same room and to motivate them to hand-write *snail mail* to send to people in another state, one with a much more crucial early nominating event than California's March primary.

"My hand was cramping up," he told me. "I can't remember the last time I wrote one letter, let alone two. Plus, I was sort of worried about what the other people were writing. There was this one guy next to me who looked horrendous. I couldn't imagine he was going to convince an Iowa farmer to support Dean, but I was struck by the *trust* the campaign was showing in us volunteers."

The Internet is finally starting to become an integrated tool for face-to-face communication and directed, intentional, "real-world" actions. That combination of virtual organizing and physical activity, of structured top-down direction and

fringe-driven, self-organized, spontaneous organization, that marriage of order and chaos, began to be recognized as Dean rocketed from an obscure dark horse insurgent to the presumptive frontrunner before a single primary vote had been cast. His was a revolutionary new story about how people could use these technologies to connect to each other, take action, and effect change in these media-driven, TV-anesthetized times.

This book, then, is an examination of the lessons that can be learned from what has worked and what has not worked. It's an attempt to tease out the intertwining sinews of networked telecommunications with real minds and bodies, and an attempt to look ahead at how these enabling technologies might be leveraged most effectively as they become ever more embedded in our day-to-day lives.

Usenet traditionally scheduled "burgermunches" as a way for their participants to meet in person; the pioneering online service The Well learned that its community coalesced best after parties where people had a chance to meet face to face. This lesson continues to trickle out to others trying to take advantage of the unprecedented reach of the Internet. Without embodied action, without face-to-face interaction, and without people meeting up together in place and time, the Internet might as well be a dream world. As the interconnectedness of the Web reaches into the mundane details of ordinary reality and causes actual bodies to share space, real conversations to take place using lips and tongues, heard by ears and processed by auditory apparatus in brains—that's when the magic starts to happen.

The Dean nomination run failed in its principal goal—but, as craigslist founder Craig Newmark said at a recent conference, "We're still talking about it." In the aftermath of that campaign, a thousand flowers are blooming or dying back in the form of new organizations—from skeletal websites to large functioning networks of people—that have emerged in the wake of the Dean for America (DFA) project to emulate those parts that worked so well to get people up off their couches and out into the streets.

When Did Everyone Get a Blog?

So why has it taken so long for these lessons to be applied in the real worlds of politics, civic communities, activism, and other forms of real-world organizing?

For one thing, in the long scheme of things, the Internet is still young, still new. In time, a generation will grow up for whom the Internet has always been there. These people will be natives of the Internet, and they will be intimate with its folkways and fluent in its protocols. For now, many of us are still grasping at these new models of interaction and still trying to draw analogies from our earlier lives and imagine and invent ways to connect up the virtual world with the real world.

And to be perfectly honest, the Internet and computers are still too difficult for many people to use. There are still multiple, overlapping digital divides. There's the matter of generation, as well as economic class and other factors as well. My parents are still not sure what they're looking at when they're looking at the monitor of their Apple Macintosh. What to me is naturally a modal dialog box is to them just another rectangle among many on a screenful of confusing metaphors.

So we still have a long way to go just to make the basic tools of online interaction accessible to everyone. A perfect case in point is blogging. Blogging has been around in one form or another as long as the Web has been around (and the Web was invented in 1991). But the strange new word "blog" wasn't coined until 1999, the buzz didn't start till 2000, and the first big wave of political bloggers didn't get traction until late 2001 in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Blogging didn't come into its own as a political communications tool until 2003 with the run-up to the 2004 presidential election. The hype continues to expand outward concentrically, yet blogging still isn't easy or intuitive enough for everyone's grandmother to do (or to care about or want to get involved with).

Rebecca Blood, who writes a long-running weblog called Rebecca's Pocket and published a guide to blogging called *The Weblog Handbook,* coined a "law" to describe the way the blog "revolution" perpetually seems to have just hit the mainstream to whomever has just discovered it:

> Blood's Law of Weblog History: The year you discovered weblogs and/or started your own is 'The Year Blogs Exploded.' Corollary: The year after you started your blog is the beginning of 'Weblog Permanent September.'
>
> Anil's Corollary: The first weblog you read is the one that invented the medium.

But the power of blogging lies in its ease. Since the Web arrived, it was theoretically possible for just about anybody to create their own website and publish their own writing freely online. The Web has been heralded as a potential communications revolution, possibly unequaled since Gutenberg and the movable type printing press. But the promise of online self-publishing has fallen short of the hype, because of the technical barriers. I had to learn Unix command-line hieroglyphics to send my first email messages. Email didn't catch on in a big way until there were nice graphical point-and-click interfaces and seamless Internet connections backing everything up. In the same way, personal online self-publishing didn't reach its full potential until the advent of easy, forms-driven, push-button publishing interfaces and, perhaps more importantly, easy automatic publish-and-subscribe syndication formats that enable a global conversation to emerge.

The presidential election of 2004 will be the first in which every major candidate's website had a weblog and in which bloggers played the traditional Washington-based pundit driving the debate and determined what topics of discussion were on the table.

Perhaps more importantly, the next presidency, regardless of who wins this November, will be the first to be blogged by thousands of ordinary people from Day One. Bloggers will scrutinize cabinet choices and transition-team appointments and start organizing to support or oppose the president's policies even before the inauguration.

By themselves, blogs don't create communities any more than Usenet did or email would. They represent, however, a great leap forward in the ease of people expressing themselves, communicating, and meeting each other online. As a result, they are a critical enabling technology for the kind of real-world impact that concerns me in this book.

In fact, blogs are just the best current tool that supports freer personal expression. "Disintermediating" the mass-broadcast middleman that has dominated global communication in the previous century and supplementing (if not replacing) it with people-to-people communications channels that will eventually yield their own media forms, perhaps more collaborative or more granularly nuanced.

This new form already does a better job of incorporating multiple viewpoints than one-size-fits-all broadcast media, and blogging also favors participatory reading and writing of news and analysis instead of passive reception of information monopolized by experts, pundits, and people who can afford to make a career or a hobby of covering one particular beat in endless detail. Many-to-many communication on the living Web is a moving target if there ever was one. More and more, books and even weblog entries begin to look like snapshots of waterfalls. Frozen for an instant, the picture gives much valuable insight into the dynamics of that moment, but it's the unending flow of water that conveys the full story.

There's Something Happening Here— What It Is Ain't Exactly Clear

We shouldn't overlook the importance of music and other media and fileshare-ing. They have proven the concept for the emergent, cellular ways that people are organizing themselves. Back in my online Deadhead days, when we wanted to exchange music, we posted offers or requests to newsgroups, we exchanged email messages agreeing on trades, and we sent each other tapes filled with music. That way the concentric circles expanded.

Even then, we had some inkling that this was going to change. Digital audio tapes (DATs) were already popular and the prospect of recordable CDs was known to be in the offing. To anyone who thought hard about it for a little while, it was clear that some combination of fatter pipes (more bandwidth) and better compression formats was eventually going to create a circumstance where it would be possible to send or distribute music directly online, without the intervening analog media of tape cassettes, stamped mailers, and U.S. Postal Service employees.

If anything, that day came sooner than we expected, with MP3 as a "good enough" digital format, and the advent of broadband Internet connections. By now, anyone plugged into the Net is aware of how Napster revolutionized music distribution, not simply because of the digital media technologies (there had already been websites like mp3.com and etree.com where the music was downloaded from centralized repositories), but because

of the revolutionary peer-to-peer model by which people could find each other's music and share it freely without any intervening authority. Yes, Napster was stopped by the record companies, who, like the film companies today, saw a serious threat to their copyrights and their monopoly on distribution. But the filesharing model has continued in the form of endless variations such as Gnutella, KaZaA, and many others. And now an application called BitTorrent has taken the shared-download phenomenon a step further. There will be no stopping this revolution.

Mary Hodder writes a weblog and maintains a website called The Napsterization of Everything, in which she argues that this peer-to-peer revolution will extend far beyond music and other media sharing, and that it actually represents a new paradigm of person-to-person communication and networking. This is yet another of the ingredients in this ongoing revolution in self-organizing human communities.

Television Not Meeting Our Needs

> "Television…Teacher, mother…secret lover."
>
> —Homer Simpson, *The Simpsons*

So there is starting to be a critical mass of people online, and the tools are gradually becoming human-friendly enough to make it easy for people to join groups, write their thoughts, and connect to virtual communities. The question is, what needs are these new resources meeting?

We are leaving behind a century of mass media for which Americans (and, slowly, the rest of the world) have been trained to sit passively and consume entertainment as an audience. The fundamental difference between the Internet and older media networks is that the Internet is interactive. Everyone can be a producer just as everyone can be a consumer. This is not some utopian ideal that posits that everyone will become famous or make a living in entertainment or art or media, or that everyone's soapbox or megaphone is just as big and loud and effective as everybody else's. We will not see inequality erased in our lifetimes, if ever. There will always be people of differing means and abilities, those

who see and grasp and manipulate the possibilities offered by new technologies and those who are alienated by them and shun them.

The point is not that everyone gets to be famous so much as everyone is permitted a voice, can talk back, and speak truth to power.

In the last century, participation in public life in the United States has withered. There are fewer common spaces, fewer public areas, fewer town halls. Outside of intentional communities, it has become harder and harder for people to find each other as we lock ourselves away in our homes and turn on our television sets.

Internet analyst Clay Shirky wrote about the unmet promise of the Dean campaign in a seminal essay called "Exiting Deanspace." In it, he noted that voting remains one of the human activities that is still explicitly tied to geography. In most other realms of human behavior, "culture matters, and since the 1970s, anyone who has looked at the cultural effects of the Internet has picked the same key element: the victory of affinity over geography. The like-minded can now gather from all corners and bask in the warmth of knowing you are not alone."

But the Internet doesn't destroy geography. There is nothing inherent in the Net's freeing from the details of our physical location that prevents us from organizing along geographical lines as well. Shirky noted to me in a phone conversation that in the earlier days of the Net, when the population was sparser, it was more salient that one could find commonalities with people from farther away. If you were the only ostrich fancier in your small town, good luck finding people to come to your meeting. But get online and you could find a Usenet group, a web page, or a mailing list where you might be able to meet ostrich fanciers from around the globe.

This hasn't changed. What has changed is that now there are large communities of neighbors who are all online. In some neighborhoods, it's not unreasonable to expect many of the people who live up the street from you are also online. It turns out that online organizational tools and behaviors can supplement real-world networking, even when physical proximity is available.

By itself, the Internet doesn't eliminate passivity. It is just as easy to turn on a computer and ignore your neighbor or your loved ones as it is to zone out in front of a TV. The one critical difference, however, is that operating the computer and

connecting to the Internet requires a degree of involvement that goes beyond reaching out with a remote control and changing the volume or the channel.

Furthermore, broadcasting functions on a one-to-many model, in which each individual station sends out a signal and the people within range have only two choices: to tune in or not. However, the Internet fundamentally facilitates an entirely different many-to-many model in which choices multiply and smaller groups of people—even smaller audiences—can coalesce around the performers, the issues, or the topics that interest them. Instead of ever-widening circles emanating from a single point, there are endless interlocking circles of various sizes, some of which connect with other circles and others which float freely.

The human urge to connect and form communities is as strong as ever, even as the public infrastructure that enables it has withered from disuse. All by themselves, Internet groups (mailing lists, Yahoo! Groups, newsgroups, websites, and so on) do not replace real-life community; they merely present what's possible. They enable our minds to connect while our bodies are sedentary and uninvolved.

The online facilitated communities are created only when actions are involved. They are created when people rise up from their easy chairs, leave their homes, inconvenience themselves, discover the church basement or the community center, enter a stranger's living room or fight City Hall.

It's a commonplace online that unbridled arguments (sometimes called *flame wars*) arise more easily than in face-to-face conversation. The semi-anonymity of sitting behind a computer screen makes it easier to post denuded ASCII text calling someone a jerk or an idiot (or an "idiotarian"). It's often said that people will insult each more readily this way, when in person they would be more likely to seek comity and behave like a mature human being. The detachment of a pure online existence permits us to evade the consequences of our bad behavior. It allows us to hit and run, to harm others verbally and then get up from the computer, make a sandwich, turn on the television, and forget what we said and who we hurt. If we know we will be seeing someone at church, on the playing field, or at a face-to-face meeting, we're reminded of what being part of a human community really entails. We're also reminded of the sensible self-imposed limits of free expression in a world, where we are all shoulder to shoulder, breathing the same air and laboring under the same—or equivalent—challenges and difficulties. Compassion is necessary when we are embodied.

Ridiculously Easy Group Formation

The challenge for community leaders, politicians, clueful entrepreneurs, and anyone who seeks to take advantage of the enormous potential of Internet-mediated communities is to harness the spontaneity of emergent organizations. Social software tools must be designed to promote ease of use and to guide people into productive interaction. While the trend we are seeing is that people are spontaneously forming their own communities of self-interest, there is still a role for leaders and for the people who seek to host or provide services to these groupings.

The trick involves

- Balanced order and chaos
- Finding the proper role for direction
- Structure
- Leadership on the one hand and freedom, spontaneity, and emergent self-organization on the other

Nigel Strafford, a trustee of the Chaordic Commons, explained to me that human beings are not entirely comfortable with too much structure or with too much freedom. Both order and chaos in the extreme make us anxious and push us toward the other pole. It is somewhere in the gray area between them that the power of both combine to create something uniquely effective. It is as easy to squelch creativity with a heavy hand as it is to fritter away effective action in undirected spasms of always starting and never following through.

On the one hand, we're seeing leaderless group formation; on the other hand, we're really seeing a new form of leadership. These new kinds of leaders have to find the right balance between giving direction and giving up control. Joe Trippi, Howard Dean's original campaign manager, had to unlearn all of his past campaign experience, with its military model of command-and-control. He realized, partly because he had spent some time in Silicon Valley consulting with Internet businesses during and after the dotcom boom, that the only way to unleash the creativity at the fringes was to permit the grassroots to set their own agendas and to take actions without explicit direction or even permission from the center.

The risks involved in this are huge and in fact, are terrifying to traditional organizers. What if someone out there on the fringes says or does something stupid? How will that reflect back on the center? It's not an easy question, and there isn't a simple answer. Somehow, though, Trippi understood that the risk was worth it, that the reward of unleashing spontaneous creative energy would outweigh the potential harm of an operative doing something that would harm the campaign or reflect badly on the candidate. Not only that, Trippi understood that this emergent form of community organization was in fact *the only way* that an insurgent presidential candidate from a small state would have any chance at all to challenge the Washington-based presumptive frontrunners for his party's nomination.

So we are seeing the emergence of new forms of laterally organized, network-driven groups that represent a challenge to the hierarchical, corporate-style organizations that we are all familiar with. Mind you, there is nothing inherently positive or progressive about this structure. Just as order and chaos do not equate to good and evil, this new cellular form of structure does not map up to any kind of inherent good or evil. Al-Qaida uses the Internet. Terrorists can create their own chaordic entities.

If anything, the challenge to people who wish to create a better world, whether their vision is informed by traditionally left- or right-wing politics, is to adopt and embrace these tactics and technologies now, and master them quickly. Those who do not have our best interests at hearts will surely do so, and we can't let them win.

The Smart Mob

Although I'm most interested in the people in the trenches and in examining efforts that have succeeded or are succeeding and those that have failed, in an attempt to tease out the secrets of leveraging online technology to create effective action in the real world, I do not wish to ignore the enormous amount of theoretical thinking that informs the activities we're seeing sprout up around us.

Yes, theories go only so far, and actual real-world empirical examples are always more informative, but a lot of very smart people have put some real effort into understanding, analyzing, and predicting how these things can and do

work. You will see quotations from some of these people as well as excerpts from interviews, commentaries, and essays throughout this book. Some names may pop up just once in context, and others will appear throughout the book. These include people such as

- Knowledge management expert David Pollard, who writes a weblog called How to Change the World
- Howard Rheingold, who has been examining virtual communities since his early days on the Well and recently wrote the bestselling book *Smart Mobs*
- Jim Moore, whose essay "The Second Superpower Rears Its Beautiful Head" brought the idea of semi-coordinated, online-mediated political action to wide attention
- danah boyd, a researcher at University of California at Berkeley, a consultant to social software companies, and a hands-on participant in the online communities she studies

Throughout the book, as is appropriate, I credit insights to the people who identified them or supplied them to me. As I told more than one participant, there's a reason this book isn't called *Christian Crumlish Is a Guru Who Knows Everything*. Any insight or skill that I bring to this project has to do with asking the right questions and getting hold of the people who can supply the answers. My approach in this book is to live out the credo within it: If I work with many people, I produce much more powerful effective work than if I limit myself to only what I can do alone.

We have new tools for working together and collaborating to create communities that are infinitely more than the sum of their disconnected parts.

The Web Comes Alive

This is not a book about technology and not a how-to book, but many Internet and web-related technologies figure into the story. In an influential essay titled "Ten Tips for Writing the Living Web," literary hypertext publisher and

software entrepreneur Mark Bernstein provides a good working definition of the living Web:

> Some parts of the Web are finished, unchanging creations—as polished and as fixed as books or posters. But many parts change all the time:
>
> - news sites bring up-to-the-minute developments, ranging from breaking news and sports scores to reports on specific industries, markets, and technical fields
> - weblogs, journals, and other personal sites provide a window on the interests and opinions of their creators
> - corporate weblogs, wikis, knowledge banks, community sites, and workgroup journals provide share news and knowledge among co-workers and supply-chain stakeholders
>
> Some of these sites change every week; many change every day; a few change every few minutes. Daypop's Dan Chan calls this the Living Web, the part of the Web that is always changing.

Beyond the now-familiar websites and mailing lists, the living Web is fed by a host of new specific web services and applications, forms of collaborative software such as

- Blogs
- Wikis
- Discussion boards
- P2P filesharing tools like Napster
- Chat tools such as IRC
- Shared workspaces for virtual collaboration
- Commercial and noncommercial web-driven service sites like Meetup and upcoming.org

I use the term "living Web" to also refer to things that aren't really part of the World Wide Web (such as unlogged instant-message chats) or that aren't even on the Internet per se (such as the proliferation of cell phones and other tools for enabling remote presence) and yet are similar in their networks of communication. The living Web is built on standards and protocols that continue to evolve such as

- FOAF (friend-of-a-friend) and tools built on it such as People-Aggregrator
- Dead-easy services such as Yahoo! Groups
- Whimsical attempts to harness the gift economy, such as Lazyweb.org

Besides specific technologies, we can see new guiding technological principles that are enabling these new applications—chiefly the open-source movement—but others as well. In all cases, what is exciting and intriguing are not the technical specifications but rather how it can be possible to have the technology serve the people instead of the other way around.

The glossary itemizes some of the various technologies and technical philosophies discussed in the book, for those who like their lists and references well organized.

It's the People, Stupid

The heart of this book is organized around case studies that examine what methods, technologies, and processes have worked (and which ones have not), and what lessons we can derive from these pioneers and their experiences. The next chapter discusses political organizing and takes a closer look at the 2004 presidential election and the impact of the losing primary campaign of Howard Dean to which I have been alluding throughout this chapter. In the rest of this book, I examine other areas of civic life, from community organizing to business networking to dating, but I return from time to time to this example of this long-shot presidential campaign that nearly shot the moon, because there are still many lessons to be derived from it, whatever the outcome in November 2004.

Sources and Further Reading

Read these web pages for more detail on the ideas in this chapter:

Elizabeth Lane Lawley, "Step Away from the Laptop," *mamamusings,* February 12, 2004:
http://mamamusings.net/archives/2004/02/12/step_away_from_the_laptop.php

Briggs Nesbit's gardening blog, *True Dirt*; and her article in *The New York Times Magazine*, "A Tree Grows in Oakland," May 16, 2004:
http://godetia.com/dirt/

http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/16/magazine/16LIVES.html

Many-to-Many, an ongoing group weblog discussion of the new model of communication fostered by the Internet; and specifically, Clay Shirky's "Exiting Deanspace" (February 3, 2004):
http://corante.com/many/

http://www.corante.com/many/archives/2004/02/03/exiting_deanspace.php

For why Clay Shirky is seen as an expert on the subject of the living Web, see the interview with him in *Gothamist* (April 9, 2004):
http://www.gothamist.com/interview/archives/2004/04/09/clay_shirky_internet_technologist.php

Mary Hodder, *The Napsterization of Everything*; and specifically, "The Practice and/or The Tool: Journalism and Blogging" (April 16, 2004) on the tools of disintermediation:
http://napsterization.org/

http://napsterization.org/stories/archives/000227.html

Rebecca Blood's laws of blogging, January 2004:
http://www.rebeccablood.net/archive/2004/01.html#06weblogs

Mark Bernstein, "Ten Tips for Writing the Living Web," *A List Apart*:
http://www.alistapart.com/articles/writeliving/

Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, "The Limits of Networking: A Reply to Lovink and Schneider's 'Notes on the State of Networking'"; a post to the nettime-l mailing list, March 15, 2004, on the organizational principles that bind human networks:
http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0403/msg00090.html

danah boyd, presentation at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference 2004 on the interaction between human behavior and social-software technology:
http://conferences.oreillynet.com/presentations/et2004/boyd_danah.txt