

### **Give more to the commons than you take**

Conventional wisdom in the marketplace dictates that people should try to extract as much money as possible from resources. This is essentially what defines so much of the so-called sharing economy. In an article on the *Harvard Business Review* website called “The Sharing Economy Isn’t about Sharing at All,” authors Giana Eckhardt and Fleura Bardhi explained how the anonymous market-driven transactions in most sharing-economy businesses are purely about monetizing access.<sup>63</sup> As Lisa Gansky put it in her book *The Mesh*, the primary strategy of the sharing economy is to sell the same product multiple times, by selling access rather than ownership.<sup>64</sup> That is not sharing.

Sharing requires adding as much or more value to the ecosystem than you take. You can’t simply treat open content as a free pool of resources from which to extract value. Part of giving back to the ecosystem is contributing content back to the public under CC licenses. But it doesn’t have to just be about creating content; it can be about adding value in other ways. The social blogging platform *Medium* provides value to its community by incentivizing good behavior, and the result is an online space with remarkably high-quality user-generated content and limited trolling.<sup>65</sup> Opendesk contributes to its community by committing to help its designers make money, in part by actively curating and displaying their work on its platform effectively.

In all cases, it is important to openly acknowledge the amount of value you add versus that which you draw on that was created by others. Being transparent about this builds credibility and shows you are a contributing player in the commons. When your endeavor is making money, that also means apportioning financial compensation in a way that reflects the value contributed by others, providing more to contributors when the value they add outweighs the value provided by you.

### **Involve people in what you do**

Thanks to the Internet, we can tap into the talents and expertise of people around the

globe. Chris Anderson calls it the Long Tail of talent.<sup>66</sup> But to make collaboration work, the group has to be effective at what it is doing, and the people within the group have to find satisfaction from being involved.<sup>67</sup> This is easier to facilitate for some types of creative work than it is for others. Groups tied together online collaborate best when people can work independently and asynchronously, and particularly for larger groups with loose ties, when contributors can make simple improvements without a particularly heavy time commitment.<sup>68</sup>

As the success of Wikipedia demonstrates, editing an online encyclopedia is exactly the sort of activity that is perfect for massive cocreation because small, incremental edits made by a diverse range of people acting on their own are immensely valuable in the aggregate. Those same sorts of small contributions would be less useful for many other types of creative work, and people are inherently less motivated to contribute when it doesn’t appear that their efforts will make much of a difference.<sup>69</sup>

It is easy to romanticize the opportunities for global cocreation made possible by the Internet, and, indeed, the successful examples of it are truly incredible and inspiring. But in a wide range of circumstances—perhaps more often than not—community cocreation is not part of the equation, even within endeavors built on CC content. Shirky wrote, “Sometimes the value of professional work trumps the value of amateur sharing or a feeling of belonging.”<sup>70</sup> The textbook publisher OpenStax, which distributes all of its material for free under CC licensing, is an example of this dynamic. Rather than tapping the community to help cocreate their college textbooks, they invest a significant amount of time and money to develop professional content. For individual creators, where the creative work *is* the basis for what they do, community cocreation is only rarely a part of the picture. Even musician Amanda Palmer, who is famous for her openness and involvement with her fans, said, “The only department where I wasn’t