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Service For The 21st Century

by Paul Hansen

As we, at Project Headquarters, were developing our new mascot (right), I came up with the tag line "Service for the 21st Century." At the time I simply thought that it "worked" with the robot and some other marketing materials that we were putting together for our June round of recruiting; but when I attended the Freedom to Connect Conference, I started thinking more about what it really meant.

...As a VISTA program, we are charged with addressing the complicated situation of poverty. It's a fuzzy issue, and yet there is a tradition of thinking about this work simply as either addressing disparities or providing opportunities for participation and advancement. These are fine goals but they represent a patchwork approach that does not capture what is possible in a time of paradigm shifting change. Right now we have reason to believe that more is possible.

We should expect more specifically because creation, collaboration and communication have always been central to the fight for economic and social justice, and these are the very points on which the economy is now pivoting. We have an incredible opportunity to upgrade our traditional means of engagement while connecting many more people with the new tools and knowledge that can result in meaningful, substantial, and profitable participation in the economy and society. This is what VISTA service in the 21st century should be. It is what CTC VISTAs do everyday. The world needs more of it.

[Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest](http://www.ctcvista.org/digest)



Copyright: Is It Still About The Content?

by Reebee Garofalo

...We are currently engaged in righteous battles to "save access" and "save the internet" which seek to protect such hard won principles as local self-determination in the franchising process and the preservation of network neutrality for all public communication.

I want to suggest that if we look farther into the future and view these struggles as broadly cultural rather than narrowly technological, the biggest challenges facing the community media and technology movements are not going to be about funding, technical development, or infrastructure; they are going to be about access and use — and I am not talking here about access to the network itself, I'm talking about access to and use of the resources and products that comprise our culture. We are in a period of unprecedented privatization of knowledge and information and systematic restrictions on access and use. Battles of this nature get waged on the terrain of that oxymoron called "intellectual property," and more specifically, copyright law.

[Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest](http://www.ctcvista.org/digest)

Come visit us at the Non-Profit Technology Conference:

Science Fair Table - Wednesday, April 4, from 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Affinity Group Meetings - Wednesday, April 4 at 1:00 pm or
Thursday, April 5 at 3:30 pm

Online - Visit www.ctcvista.org for more information on the CTC VISTA Project and continue reading the CTC VISTA Project *Digest*.



Recent Grants and Awards

1. The CTC VISTA Project was one of six organizations to win the Techie Award for great web applications, granted by Grassroots.org. The Techie Award was given to the CTC VISTA Project for its online application (as in the form used to apply) that NPOs fill out in order to recruit a CTC VISTA. The winning application was created by CTC VISTA alumnus Saul Baizman.

2. Technology For All, located in Houston, TX, won one of the C4All AccessNow Awards. These \$1000 grants were awarded by CTCNet, who teamed up with the Alliance for Technology Access on the C4All program, with the purpose of promoting access to technology for people of all abilities. The C4All Program was funded by AT&T, and the grants were designed to help recipients implement simple and cost-effective ways to improve their programs and facilities, making them more inviting and accessible to people with a broad range of abilities.

3. The Media Aid Center in Los Angeles, CA was recently given the opportunity to create and improve programs in a local high school with a grant provided by the state of California. The grant was for \$1 million.

Introducing the COMMONS Project

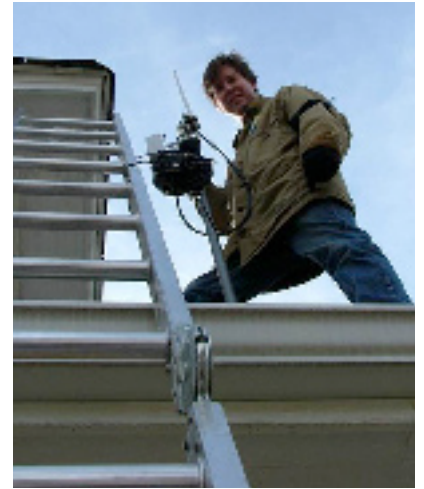
by Sascha Meinrath

The United States is facing a worsening broadband crisis -- over the past half-decade, the US has fallen behind a growing list of industrialized nations in delivery speeds, price per megabit, broadband penetration rates, and other facets of broadband service provision. Rural and poor communities are being doubly discriminated against -- often receiving little or no broadband access and being forced to pay higher service rates when they do have access.

On December 12-13, 2006, the Cooperative Association for Internet Data Analysis (CAIDA) held a workshop to discuss and ultimately propose a collaboration among researchers and networks to simultaneously solve three growing problems facing the Internet:

- A self-reported financial crisis in the Internet infrastructure provider industry that poses a severe threat to broadband growth and U.S. competitiveness
- A data acquisition crisis, which has deeply stunted the field of network science
- A dilemma within emerging community, municipal, regional, and state networks, who need (additional) broadband connectivity but face severely limited provider, service level, and usage options

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Media Literacy And Teaching High School Students

by Lauren Bratslavsky

...Six months into my year of service, and here I am teaching a class of high school students about media literacy. I was anticipating an interesting and eye-opening class for these teens, full of experiential learning and thought provoking questions. I've realized, however, there is a disconnect between the program I had envisioned and the program that teens are able to connect with. My knowledge and background was from a purely academic standpoint, but I needed to translate the information I had learned to a room full of teenagers who are admittedly influenced by television but not sure how, or even if they want, to affect the social influence of media.

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Open Source Development and "Barrier To Entry"

by Cheryl Jerozal

Last week I had the opportunity to participate in my first "sprint". In a sprint, a group of people gets together and works on an open source project for a few days. In my two days (and one night) of sprinting, I learned a lot, met some awesome people, and contributed to the start of a project. I highly recommend sprinting to anyone who gets a chance to do it.

One thing I noticed, however, was the difficulty of getting to a point in the project where real progress could be made. For example, before my group was able to work on our project, we had to download and install particular versions of six different tools. And then we had to configure our systems properly (set environment variables and run scripts and such).

...What can we do to make it easier to contribute? Produce better documentation? (Lack of documentation is already a big problem in the open source world.) Set up more ways for programmers to connect to one another in person? Make better operating systems so tool setup goes more smoothly?

[Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest](http://www.ctcvista.org/digest)

Free As In Speech: Tools For The Next Revolution

by Felicia Sullivan

When talking about free software, a long-time colleague of mine always says, "You know, free as in speech not free as in beer." That is to say that free software is about liberty not price. And when speaking about open source software, he refers to transparency and accessibility of the code that allows anyone to create and be involved. He marvels that both free and open source software (F/OSS) share the common dependency upon communities of developers and users to thrive - the ultimate "gift culture" in his estimation.



These concepts of freedom, transparency, accessibility, creativity, and inclusion should sound familiar to those of us working in communities. They are the foundations of much of the work involved in social change. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves and to our communities to explore and be open to free and open source software. These applications may benefit our organizations and our citizens not because they cost so little, but because they provide us ultimate autonomy over our own futures in the realm of communications. They ensure that the workings of the system remain knowable and accountable. They prevent us from being dependent on outside forces and put us in the driver seat. Controlling the code is the contemporary equivalent of controlling the core processes of democratic participation.

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Xen: Creating Virtual Computers

from the blog of John Miller

Imagine that you could run Windows XP, Mac OS X, and multiple versions of Linux on the same computer. That's already a reality--you just have to reboot to switch between them. Now imagine that you could run all these operating systems at the same time on the same computer. You could run MS Word 2003 at the same time you're running Safari, all while programming in Eclipse. It's possible. The technology that makes it possible: Xen.

Xen is a virtualization technology that's based on Linux. It lets you run multiple virtual computers ("guest" operating systems) on top of one master operating system (called the "host" OS). In other words, you can run Windows and Linux on the same PC at the same time.

That's the sexy use, anyhow. Xen is already in use by hosting companies to give customers their own computer. Instead of having to give customers a physical PC, Xen allows the hosting companies to fit many virtual computers onto one PC. This is ideal for customers that don't need much computing power.

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The CTC VISTA Project swore in 20 new CTC VISTA members at our Pre-Service Orientation in January, 2007. The CTC VISTA Project now has over 60 VISTA members serving in 18 states across the country.

Meet Emilio Flores

In the South End of Boston, Emilio Flores believes very strongly in the power of community. He serves as a VISTA at the 10-year-old Castle Square Tenants Organization (CSTO) community technology center. Attracted to AmeriCorps VISTA by the opportunity to get out from behind the office desk and into the community at the ground level, he was looking to put his technology skills to good use.

When CSTO decided to embark on a community wireless internet project to provide FREE high speed internet access throughout the 500-unit Castle Square Apartments, they decided to use innovative, open source Roofnet mesh networking software (developed at MIT), to be installed on more than 100 refurbished routers.

Emilio's participation as a VISTA became essential when the budget granted to the project left little room to pay for a qualified tech support employee. Emilio, a former research assistant at an educational development center, was perfect for the job. His first weeks of service not only included physically setting up the wireless routers and antennae on the roofs of the apartment buildings, but also building a support network of youth residents, staff, and Ben Franklin Institute of Technology work study students.

Emilio says of his CTC VISTA experience: "Learning about the wireless technology, getting to be in a management position - I had this one year to figure out if I'm good at this. I was lucky to connect with people that were willing to support me as I learned."

Reaching Out To Under-Served Community Members

by Meredith Aalto

If technology centers want to reach out to become more accessible to people with disabilities they should consider these questions when conducting outreach and recruitment in traditionally underserved communities

- Is the technology center recognizable in the neighborhood? For example, does the signage display a name, and a picture with a computer on it? Is the text written in languages that most people in the neighborhood would understand? Is the technology center near transportation? Does the phone number include a TTY (Teletypewriter) number? I know of a deaf person who wanted to contact a technology center and did not know how to use email. There was no TTY number listed for the center, so she never went in to check it out.

- Is there information about the technology center disseminated in public places such as local grocery stores, beauty shops, barbershops, laundromats, doctors' offices, employment offices and local disability providers, for example, assisted living centers? Are program flyers going home through the local schools? Do local radio stations and newspapers advertise the technology center? Are people with disabilities being represented in marketing materials?

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Musings On The Digital Divide

from the blog of Kevin Bulger

...What does the Digital Divide mean? Why does it matter? To whom or what does it refer to? How does the divide close? How would you know when it's closed? What does the solution(s) look like? How can you tell if a solution is appropriate for a specific geographic area? How do you measure the successes or failures of a solution? Does the Digital Divide only apply to people or to organizations as well? What kind of people does the Digital Divide target? What kind of organizations?

...The Digital Divide does matter, but I feel there needs to be a consensus as to what exactly the Digital Divide refers to and how to best solve it. As I stand right now, the Digital Divide refers to the difference in communication-technology skill sets that exist between the most adept users and all the rest. The name Digital Divide implies 'haves' and 'have nots', but in reality the Digital Divide is more like a pyramid.

[Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest](http://www.ctcvista.org/digest)

Integrating New Technology Tools Into Non-Profits

by Jessica Rothschuh

I haven't always been a techie. Maybe I'm not really a techie now, but as a CTC VISTA, I felt I had a responsibility to *know* technology.

Fresh from journalism school, I was a Google whiz but had never learned HTML or Web design — two skills I found tucked inside my job description. I'd like to say I made a valiant effort; I read Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, set up a MySpace account, started a blog, created a Second Life avatar, began paying attention to Technorati (the blog search engine), and even taught myself HTML.

After becoming familiar with some of the more popular open-source technology tools available, I began working them into my organization's operations. The Children's Partnership staff adopted some tools more easily than others. Even though I saw the utility of each new technology I chose, learning to use another tool or add an extra step to a process daunted some of my coworkers.

[Read more online at www.ctcvista.org/digest](http://www.ctcvista.org/digest)

The CTC VISTA Project has new promotional posters. Designs by Paul Hansen, Executive Director.

