JOSH KLEIN

JOSH KLEIN'S CROW BOX HAS BEEN GETTING A LOT OF PLAY LATELY. He figured out how to train a bunch of annoying crows to drop stray coins into a "vending machine" designed specifically for them in exchange for peanuts. If the idea takes off, he'll get a piece of the $216 million in loose change that is lost every year in the U.S. and the crows get a meal without bothering anyone. But those are just the practical benefits. What impressed Klein most about the project is that it illustrates a principle he's been experimenting with that's been delivering surprisingly good results.

The challenge, Klein says, is in creating spaces where those ideas can find expression – where, ideally, other minds can apply what they know and realize some useful variant of the original concept. He sees the Internet as creating whole new worlds of collaboration across disciplines – where information is exchanged generously and without cost, and people are ultimately compensated for their ingenuity through their participation in "communities of interest."

For instance, Klein advocates the use of Internet platforms like Skydeck and Mint.com that track

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As a principal technologist for the international consulting firm Frog Design, Klein tries to make seamless connections between "bleeding edge" technology and the people it is intended to benefit. He is working on an endless and diverse list of projects, many of which, he admits, will fail. "Linus Pauling said, 'The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas'" he explains. "Believe me, I've had lots of bad ideas. But so far the maxim has held true."

user phone calling, expensing or banking habits and then offer information about available products or services that are most suited to those habits. "These are services that abstract from the specific to the general, which preserves privacy but produces value," says Klein. Providers of products or services ultimately benefit from this cyber word-of-mouth communication. Information is shared for free, and when consumer and producer match up, everyone benefits.

A case in point is Klein's sci-fi novel *Roo'd*, which he placed on Creative Commons, a website that allows readers to do what they want with his work – edit, revise, add or cut. He also made the novel available on iPhone, where it garnered 12,000 downloads a month – a situation that generated substantial fan mail and a print-on-demand deal with Amazon. He put his work out there, shared it with like-minded people and is now reaping the benefits. Simple – and it didn't cost him a dime. (The project has spun off a related Creative Commons effort, this one even broader in scope, due for release soon.)

Everything Klein does – designing, researching, writing, blogging, hacking or studying crows – comes down to passion and the ability to recognize or communicate ideas. He says, "You have to find those interstitial spaces between what you know and what you're excited about. Start learning and eventually you'll find something that sticks – that manifests your ideas. Doing something really unique, that you're really passionate about – that's how you get your absolutely best result."

Klein knows that the greatest innovations come from rethinking ordinary situations. Some people call it hacking, a term that used to have semi-malicious connotations. But Klein insists that hacking is productive – a do-it-yourself movement with roots inside the engineering community. "A hacker is someone who is willing to take

a system apart to create new opportunities, to figure out how to improve it." he says.

Hacking (in the most positive sense) applies to people as well. Klein pays deep attention to the thoughts that randomly emerge in the most casual conversations. He calls it "that what you just said moment." This aspect of his work is less about technology and more about understanding the person in front of you and believing that even the smallest problem deserves a solution.

"If you have someone who's an expert in quantum physics and someone else who loves to knit, then maybe they each know something that can help the other," Klein suggests. "Maybe there's some physics principle you can apply to knitting or a knitting method that could provide a new perspective on a physics problem." He considers this concept for a moment and adds, "Quantum knitting."

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