

# 10 Ways Our World is Becoming More Shareable

We're sharing more things, more deeply, with more people. Why sharing is the answer to some of today's biggest questions.

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**6 The Internet.** It's easy to take it for granted, but its potential as a sharing platform has arguably just begun to unfold. The Internet itself would not be possible if people did not share labor, code, and infrastructure. No one owns it or runs it. It's built and it operates on free and open source software and open standards. Data travels over networks and is routed through servers owned by private individuals and corporations who share transport and routing duties.

Generation Y is a hero generation, coming of age in a time of crisis they're already helping to resolve, largely by applying the tools and mindset of sharing.

This global commons enables the creation of tremendous value. Harvard Business School professor John Quelch estimates that the economic impact of the Internet is \$1.4 trillion annually in the U.S. alone. This year, the Computer and Communications Industry Association calculated that companies and nonprofits relying on "fair use" (such as search engines, web hosts, and social media) employ 17 million people and generate \$4.7 trillion a year, one sixth of our Gross Domestic Product.

All of that value is created on top of what is essentially volunteer sharing on a massive scale. As late as 1992, IBM did not think such a network was possible. Through its runaway success, the Internet has become the model for organizing life in the twenty-first century, as well as the essential infrastructure and distribution channel for commerce, ideas, work, and play.

And its influence reaches far beyond the online world. The Internet is reprogramming culture to the degree that society will likely be remade in its image, so that we have a better chance at thriving like it does. As you'll see by the end of this list, this change is already underway.

**7 Free and Open Source Software (FOSS).** FOSS and the Internet have a symbiotic relationship. The Internet would not have been possible without FOSS. And the growth of FOSS relies on the Internet to power its peer production and distribution model. Over 270 million people use the Firefox browser, a shared, freely available tool. Half of the world's Web sites, about 112 million, run on Apache Server, also open source. A quarter of a million websites run on Drupal, a leading open source content management system.

That's just scratching the surface: Today, there are over 200,000 open source projects with nearly 5 billion lines of code that would cost an estimated \$387 billion to reproduce. Check out the Infoworld's Open Source Hall of Fame for more on desktop favorites, like Ubuntu, as well as obscure but vital infrastructure projects like BIND. You might also check out the Open Source Census, which tracks business installations of FOSS.

Today, millions of people and organizations rely on FOSS for their daily work, as do a growing number of governments. It's a pervasive part of life in the developed world—and because of its low cost, open source may become even more important to developing countries.

**8 The Open Way.** Inspired by the success of free and open source software, the values and practices of open source—making information and innovations publicly available—are being applied in a truly dizzying number of ways. In just the last few years, open or peer-to-peer sharing strategies have gained significant traction in science, business, culture, education, and government. Applications of "the open way" range from the obscure, like the open source tractor, to the everyday, like the OpenStreetMaps project. It's a tough trend to quantify because it is so viral and self-organized. To get a sense of the scope of the movement, check out the P2P Foundation blog or opensource.com.

The Obama administration's Open Government Directive is currently one of the most visible of these efforts, at least in the U.S. The directive ordered executive departments and agencies to identify and publish online in an open format at least three high-value data sets; create an open government web page and respond to public input received via that page; and develop and publish an Open Government Plan that will describe how they will improve transparency and integrate public participation and collaboration into its activities.

**9 Social Media.** Sharing is the currency of social media. And as the author of *Socialnomics*, Erik Qualman, says, social media is bigger than you think.



The illustration shows how data flows within the personal media landscape.

Illustration by Anne Helmond

More video was uploaded to YouTube in the last six months than was produced by the three major TV networks in 60 years.

- With over 400 million users, Facebook would be the fourth largest country in the world by population.
- Wikipedia has over 13 million articles, all written by volunteers—and with an accuracy that studies show is comparable to the best commercial encyclopedias.
- In 2008, one in eight newly married couples met through social media.
- Ninety-six percent of Generation Y has joined a social network, where sharing is a way of life.
- Creative Commons has made it easier for creators to share their work. They've licensed over 130 million creative works in 50 countries since 2002.

In these powerful ways, social media has taken sharing mainstream.

## 10

**Generation G.** Now that a Shareable world has a serious foothold, all that's needed is a willing population to scale it up. There's a strong argument that Gen Y is the generation that can bring a shareable world to fruition.



Green Gym volunteers offer their time to work together to install a bench.

Photo by Scottish Government

Roughly 100 million strong in the United States, Gen Y grew up on the Internet and brings its values and practices, including sharing, into the real world. Last year TrendWatching.com called them Generation G (for "generous") and said they are accelerating a cultural shift where "giving is already the new taking." They may not reach their full sharing potential until later in life, but there are promising indicators:

- Sixty-one percent of 13-25 year olds feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world.
- Eighty-three percent will trust a company more if it's socially and environmentally responsible.
- Volunteering by college students increased by 20 percent between 2002 and 2005.
- Eighty-three percent volunteered in 2005.

Gary Hamel believes that this massive generational force, which outnumbers baby boomers, promises to transform our world in the image of

the Internet, a world where sharing and contributing to the common good are integral to the good life. William Strauss and Neil Howe, authors of *Millennials Rising*, believes that Gen Y is a hero generation, coming of age in a time of crisis they're already helping to resolve, largely by applying the tools and mindset of sharing.

Neal Gorenflo and Jeremy Adam Smith wrote this article for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions. Neal is the publisher of Shareable.net, a new online magazine that explores the ways that sharing is transforming life in the twenty-first century. Jeremy is the editor of Shareable.net, author of *The Daddy Shift*, and co-editor of two anthologies, *The Compassionate Instinct* and *Are We Born Racist?*, which Beacon Press will publish in August 2010.

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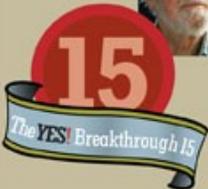
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