The Internet: Data with a Purpose

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Adam and Eve ate the apple. Babies grow up. Frankenstein’s monster ended up with a mind of his own. Great literature, and great life, is made by people and things that rebel against their maker’s wishes and evolve into something more.

This century’s greatest invention, the Internet, is evolving, too. Or should we say that the uses for the Internet are changing and growing? Or is it the users? Yes, yes, and yes!

When the Internet was first being dreamt up, more than 20 years ago, it was data for data’s sake, a way for scientists to access what others were discovering. It was only a matter of time before a comprehensive, evolving encyclopedia was created. Even e-mail might have seemed like an afterthought.

But as soon as you let humans start using the Internet, things start taking an unpredictable turn.

Connecting with people you already knew was expected, like an updated telephone. Researchers finding other researchers wouldn’t have been out of the question, connecting with questions about data. But meeting others online? Growing relationships when your only contact is through a computer connection? Collaborating and trusting one another sight unseen? Inspiring one another? Somehow all of these bits of data flying around have turned into something more.

**Inspiration**

Of course, self-help books existed long before the Internet did – and some gems contain good advice that has withstood the test of time. But as people began connecting online, the blind could truly lead the blind – and grow together, instead of waiting for an “expert” to take them under their wing. Countless well-known and established blogs were founded when their creators decided to use accountability to a group of strangers to propel them to living out their dreams. And now their stories of success have already spawned other lives to follow suit.
People who never would have met now have a chance to see others living however they want to, inspiring a new round of crazy ideas... and somehow I doubt that it will ever stop.

Here are a few of the goals that people are helping each other achieve on blogs and forums. Many of them are concrete lifestyle changes – totally separate from the worldwide nature of the Internet – but they all boil down to people being able to live their dreams and change their lives. Online, there are always people who are embarking on similar journeys and who are excited to watch you become you, whatever it takes. Plus, there are always those who are ahead of you and can spur you on, and those behind you that you can be a role model for.

**Live or travel anywhere**

The first users of the Internet probably marveled at the fact that, since computers were connected to the network, one computer could do the same things as another. I’m sure they thought about logging onto computers in other locations and being able to continue their work with the data they stored online.

But now, the theory has been put into practice – people are moving their important data to the cloud so they can access it anywhere, and many people make their livings without always working in the same location. Whether it’s working from your laptop at Starbucks across the street or across the world, more people are location independent than realize it.

Bloggers encouraging people to travel include Karol Gajda of Ridiculously Extraordinary¹ and Chris Guillebeau of The Art of Non-Conformity². Chris Guillebeau is even popularizing the concept of travel-hacking – traveling cheaply, especially using frequent flyer miles – and just completed his own book tour through all 50 U.S. states and 13 Canadian provinces.

**Make money online**

Scams are not the only way to make money online – in fact, there are as many models of selling digital products and services as there are people using the Internet as their marketplace. Digital products include ebooks, videos, and audio that people pay to download and use; services range from being a virtual assistant to a designer to a consultant.

Of course, learning how to earn income online becomes circular quickly: many experts make money online while (or by!) teaching others to do so as well. Good

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¹ Ridiculously Extraordinary: [http://www.ridiculouslyextraordinary.com/](http://www.ridiculouslyextraordinary.com/)
² The Art of Non-Conformity: [http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/](http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/)
sources of information include Pat Flynn’s The Smart Passive Income Blog\(^3\) and Darren Rowse’s ProBlogger\(^4\). Advertising allows both men to offer their advice for free while still making money from it.

**Speak another language**

Even online, there are pretty dramatic divisions between people along language barriers. However, the interconnectivity of the Internet also gives us ways to seek out and learn other languages. Benny Lewis writes a blog called Fluent in 3 Months\(^5\) describing his life as a “language hacker” who takes advantage of being location independent to learn languages quickly and well: he has learned 8 languages in 7 years! He says the Internet is an integral part of being able to maintain all those languages.

**Live more intentionally**

This category could (and probably should) be an article unto itself. In a world where we are sometimes too accustomed to taking orders, doing homework, and being influenced by advertisements, it’s really hard to sort through the influences to decide what to do or who to be.

Fortunately, the Internet supplies people who have become more intentional in many areas of their lives, and who are readily supplying encouragement and guidance.

Unfortunately, if you overwhelm yourself with the encouragements to change so many different elements of yourself, it can be hard to change anything. Suddenly, those personal, encouraging influences begin to become background noise like all the other orders that exist in our lives. Before choosing what to change, we need to choose what to consume.

**Out there**

The real story isn’t here – it’s in the endnotes, it’s out there. Blogs are a great way to get to know and connect with people you can identify with online and all over the world. And they’re not part of a textbook, they’re a conversation, an edge of the iceberg.

Check out one of these blogs and join the conversation! Or leave a comment below with another inspiring blog!

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\(^4\) ProBlogger: [http://www.problogger.net/](http://www.problogger.net/)

\(^5\) Fluent in 3 Months: [http://www.fluentin3months.com/](http://www.fluentin3months.com/)