



***Beyond the rosy-picture:  
How to improve Mass-Media***

***Written by: Reynaldo Rivera ([reynaldo.rivera@intermediaconsulting.org](mailto:reynaldo.rivera@intermediaconsulting.org))***

*“Of all the frictional resistance, the one that most retards human movement is ignorance” – Nikola Tesla <sup>1</sup>*

Who was Nikola Tesla? He was one of history’s most prodigious inventors (in foundational technologies for wireless communications, X rays, solar cells and power grid). But despite his extraordinary invention, he remains a minor figure – in particular when compared with Edison, a man who Tesla worked for. In fact, for most of his life Tesla struggled to support his research. Why? He was an extraordinary entrepreneur, and had great and useful ideas. Then, what happened?

This is the main question which justifies a presentation about effective social entrepreneurship and why whoever wants to do something socially important needs media, specially the new ones (social networks, wikies, etc.).

In 2005, with other people coming mainly from finance world, we founded InterMedia, an Italian Consulting company which works to answer a pack of interesting questions: After a social entrepreneur (who usually is an idealist trying to change the world) has an idea, WHAT DOES HE DO? HOW CAN HE GO BEYOND ROSY-PLANS? And even more important, WHY DO SOME IDEAS SUCCEED, WHILE OTHERS NOT?. Believe me, after 3 years, we do not have the final answer.

At this point, you could tell me: OK Reynaldo, if you have not found it, what is the reason of this workshop? And I should answer: we have found some clues.

**FIRST CLUE: DO GOOD, DO IT WELL, and please EARN MONEY.**

A successful and socially effective idea, always is translated with passion in a particular service or product that because solve a necessity the users look and pay for.

First, a good idea.

Then, passion.

After all, money.

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS want to WIN.**

---

<sup>1</sup> John Battelle - *The Search: How Google and Its Rivals Rewrote the Rules of Business and Transformed Our Culture*. Page 65. <http://battellemedia.com/thesearch/>



*“Winning in business is great... Winning lifts everyone it touches – it just makes the world a better place” – Jack Welch*

Why? Very simple: if anybody does not want to pay for your service, it means that it does not add value, but destroys it. The real question is not why but how and when. Obviously, to find money, you need more than an idea and passion for it. You have to invest money and in order to find it you need:

- a) an idea concept paper (which translates idea into a service or product definition)
- b) a 2 pages business plan (with the strategy)
- c) a budget
- d) a communication plan and many friends in media

A successful initiative works as a company, searching a market, publicizing its services, creating clients, serving them, and earning money.

Let me draw your attention to the following slides:

*Tesla “... had all these problems commercializing his work. It’s a very sad story. I realized Tesla was the greatest inventor, but he didn’t accomplish as much as he should have. I realized I wanted to invent things, but I also wanted to change the world. I wanted to get them out there, get them into people’s hands so they can use them, because that’s what really matters” – Larry Page.*

That’s the beginning of Google’s story.

Obsessed with efficiency and mathematics, Larry Page and Sergey Brin went to Stanford University for an undergraduate program, and not just for training.

*“They come for the dream: to start a company, grow rich, make their mark on the history of technology, and maybe change the world. This is the university, after all, that spawned Hewlett-Packard, Silicon Graphics, Yahoo, and Excite, to name just a few” – John Battelle.*

Figuring the Web as the largest network graph ever created, in March 1996 Page discovered the importance of ranking links for web-based search.

*“My goals were to work on something that would be academically real and interesting. But there is no reason if you are doing academic work to work on things that are impractical”*

I shall say: there is no reason if you are doing a work for doing good to work on things that are impractical. Or have useless costs. To save an Euro is as good as to earn it. That policy is known as a budget-oriented management.

*“There are plenty of interesting problems that are also practical. I wanted both, and I didn’t think there was much of a trade-off to be made. I figured if I ended up building something that was going to potentially benefit a lot of people...then I would be open to commercializing it – so I wouldn’t be like Tesla” – Larry Page.*

To conclude with the first point we need to know that Google became profitable in 2004.



## **SECOND CLUE: BEGIN SMALL.**

A good idea must be cluster-oriented.

Small markets are ideal to try a business model.

Therefore, if you want to launch a project, minimize initial purchases, especially those that are not closely related with operations and revenues.

For example: you could begin with a free website, in a small garage, or as Google, in the University's offices using its web technical support.

**THIRD CLUE: USUALLY, SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE NOT INVENTORS. THEY ARE COMMUNICATORS. THEY DISCOVER OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKE THINGS WORKING and CHANGES HAPPEN.**

Sometimes, we believe our ideas are unique. The reality shows that there are narrow margins for creativity in social start ups.

Actually, the real originality of a successful company remains in its management and people. Only with an effective manager a company could succeed markets sneers.

And those are who search if somebody else applied the same idea before, look for benchmarks, try to use successful methodologies, copy best practices, talk to everybody about their project and LISTEN.

That's the reason because it is very difficult to work alone. Networking is vital.

For a social change to start, some people are actually going to have to be persuaded to do something. A good product is not enough. To provide the message to the possible market, either. A social project needs COMMUNICATORS, people with the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing, and they are critical to the tipping of any marketing campaign.

*“When we are trying to make an idea or attitude or product tip, we’re trying to change our audience in some small yet critical respect: we’re trying to infect them [as viruses do], sweep them up in our epidemic [social cause], convert them from hostility to acceptance. That can be done through the influence of special kinds of people, people of extraordinary personal connection. [...]. It can be done by changing the content of communication, by making a message so memorable that it sticks in someone’s mind and compels them to action. I think that both of those laws make intuitive sense. But we need to remember that small changes in context can be just as important in tipping [social initiatives] epidemics...” – Malcolm Gladwell (The tipping point, p.166).*

Social revolutions do not happen without using media, which are the responsible for those little context changes. Any project tips without effective and continuous communication.

And that is an ability that has to be learnt.



Finally, let me summarize the main ideas:

- 1- if you want to change something in your local environment, you need passion, a realistic plan, and a communication strategy;
- 2- try to start making small steps, towards your goal;
- 3- if you do not have management capabilities, hire a manager.

Before concluding, the InterMedia team wants to offer all of you our assistance for management, communication and fundraising issues. We will be glad to contribute to make your dream a reality.

Now, it's your turn. What do I mean? Simple, is there somebody who tried to launch a social project? What were the success or failure reasons?

If nobody did the experience, do you have a social project in mind? How do you plan to manage and promote it?

Rome, 17 – 23 March 2008