

Citizen Hackers: Their Disappearing Role in the Community Wireless Movement.

Michael Lenczner, Anthony Townsend, Francois Proulx, Jon “Maddog” Hall, Aaron Kaplan

Where is the cypherpunk ethos?

Where is the open network?

When did wonder & enthusiasm transformed into cynicism? Did it?

How do we create hacker-friendly spaces and technologies?

Is there a problem? People talk about digital inclusion & universal access – what happened to innovation, hacking, anonymity and other hacker ideals? What are the roles of hackers in this new era?

Anthony: Co-founder of NYCwireless. Huge problems exist. Hackers originally played with technologies and set the stage for what came afterwards. What has developed (the business models, the hotspot model, etc.) is a lack of thinking about what the future would look like. What is “municipal wireless” and what does it mean? Increasingly it's being used as shorthand for any sort of wireless. “Community wireless” assumes a bottom-up approach. What hackers show us is that cheap turn-key solutions exist and hackers have been leaders in innovation and finding new uses for connectivity. The excitement of pushing the next application is missing – possibly because people “evolved out of it” [community wireless hacking].

Francois: Has been with Ile Sans Fil since 2004. As a geek, wanted to hack on stuff and play with new technology. Worked a lot on the WiFiDog software. Loved hacking into the night – but once technology was written was not as exciting. Then worked for MIT “geek playground.” There is less and less hacker-friendly hardware coming out.

Jon: Hasn't been a hacker since 1969. There are many different types of hackers (e.g., software, hardware, policy). Early radio was amateur-led – ARRL created. During the era of CB, the mystique of radio lessened. Open software development done for peer recognition, for your community, & for fun. We need to get beyond ideas of amateur vs. professional. Hackers should write articles for magazines and other media outlets. Hacking should be fun. Creating a hacker environment is vital – systems/software/hardware that allow people to go as far and as fast as they want.

Aaron: Disagrees with the lessening of the hacker spirit. Feels that it'll be funneled into different devices. Things happen so quickly in technology, yet we're getting older at the same rate. Started in community wireless in 2002-3. In Europe, the EU is the main regulatory body – there isn't the same lobbying mentality as in the States. At the local level, a lot is happening. In Berlin, the Czech republic, etc. hacking is alive and well. VoIP via wireless – free outgoing calls to most European countries and free calls to US (both landlines and mobile).

Question about how to create a global community wireless hacker community. For many, the links

between community wireless and open source communities weren't explicit.

Anthony: lots of innovation that impacts only a small community.

Sascha: Humility & interconnecting & the ultimate community wireless hack is still out there – the lowcost, turnkey, wireless, multimedia technology.

Benoit: We need to shift to integrating the interests/desires of users/participants/communities, not just focus on what's cool to us personally.

Matt: wireless hackers don't often view their wider local communities as a part of their community wireless community. The best thing we can do is meet face-to-face and visit with other groups.

Michael: Likes the idea of having and creating spaces for hacking.

Anthony: We have a responsibility to build networks that we want to use – we need to be involved in policy-making and creating municipal networks we want to see.

Rich: Feels that hackers are best at heading into “untamed” territory; once those spaces are tamed, hackers move on.

Sascha: How do we get the fun & excitement back?

Alison: It important to find the synergies and supportive facets of working together.

Aaron: Invites folks to join on his hacking efforts.

Jerry: The main question is how to propagate hackerism.