

*We say
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DENNIS CROWLEY

Next Gen Innovators

Meet five thought leaders whose world has been fundamentally shaped by the digital revolution. Wired, ambitious and truly global, they are breaking down old barriers and reshaping the worlds of business, media, art and activism with their passion and creative innovation.

INTERVIEWS BY *Matt Bochenski, Andrea Kurland*
ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Steve Wilson*



Roman Beranek

PROJEKTIL

Thirty-two-year-old Roman Beranek studied Interaction Design at Zurich's University of the Arts before founding Projekttil, a dynamic visual arts collective in which design, technology and communication effortlessly coalesce into something both mind-bending and beautiful. Whether they're draping Eindhoven's Saint Catherine's Cathedral in a psychedelic kaleidoscope of colors, or turning Beesenstedt Castle in Germany into a live, 3D concert with mobile interaction, Projekttil is responsible for some of the world's most innovative projection mapping events and has helped to define a uniquely twenty-first-century digital art form.

What does innovation mean to you? Innovation is the freedom of creativity. It's about understanding the actual possibilities of what you're able to do.

How has growing up in a digital world affected your approach to innovation? I'm very interested in creating innovation with technology. We innovate with pre-existing systems by figuring out how to stretch the limits of what's possible and make it experiential. New technology gives you new possibilities.

What defines a twenty-first-century entrepreneur? They see the possibilities of their time. They realize that it's moving really fast and they understand what is possible or not. Most of all, they adapt very fast. They have to, because the state we're in now with technology is just the beginning – that rate of change is only going to get faster and faster.

How do you demonstrate innovation on a day-to-day basis? You can create something exciting when you combine old stuff and new stuff in the right way, but we're trying to work with new technologies. We're doing stuff that hasn't been seen before.

Is there a technology, trend or idea that's driving the most exciting innovation in projection mapping? I think it's the melting together of technologies, like you see in the mobile industry, where mobiles are connected to real places and it's fading together with reality. That's why Projekttil's designs are increasingly integrated with the real world.

What does the future hold for you? People are going to get used to mapping—it's like 3D technology in cinemas – but it will develop. Interaction is going to become more important, as is storytelling. And the way in which you integrate media mapping will be crucial. That's what we're thinking about now. ➔

url_projekttil.ch

Dennis Crowley

FOURSQUARE

New Yorker Dennis Crowley is the co-founder and CEO of Foursquare, a location-based mobile service that uses game mechanics to encourage users to explore cities and neighborhoods, sharing their favorite places and insider tips with the community.

What does innovation mean to you? I think it's taking the ideas that you have in your head and finding a way to make it reality. I spent a big part of my career with people telling me, 'The stuff that you're thinking about is never going to work.' At some point you have to be just try it. I feel like having an idea and running into a wall, reinventing it and running into a wall, then reinventing it again, is what innovation is.



How has growing up in a digital world affected your approach to innovation? Cycles of innovation are much faster and everyone merges off everyone else. When our company runs into a problem, we show everyone our solution. There's a different mindset for a lot of people now that's, like, 'If you know something other people don't, it's your job to teach people and give back to the community.'

How do you demonstrate innovation on a day-to-day basis? We say internally that we're inventing the future. The hardest part of this is balancing how the company gets invented at the same time the product gets invented. We get 52 people sitting around a desk to figure out what we do, not two people behind a closed door. I've been taught that's a bad idea, but it makes people feel excited and gets them involved. It's like you're on a roller coaster and you go down the big dip and put your hands in the air. At a certain point, you just have to let go.

Is there a technology, trend or idea that's driving the most exciting innovation in social apps? The iPhone. I've been doing mobile stuff for a long time and it's been difficult because there are so many different platforms, so many different screen sizes, carriers controlled everything. Just like that, the iPhone has reset that whole industry. It's enabled us to do the things we wanted to do.

What does the future hold for you? Five years ago there was no such thing as an iPhone – if back then you tried to guess the future, you would have been totally wrong. I think there's some productive value in not looking too far ahead because if you look too far ahead, you're going to miss what's right in front of you. ➡

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Quantify: Innovation

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*Half of firm founders
in Silicon Valley are
foreign-born.*³
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Sara Öhrvall

BONNIER R&D

Swedish-born Sara Öhrvall heads up Bonnier R&D, the innovation arm of multi-channel media company Bonnier. Following stints at Toyota and Volvo, where she helped develop environmental concept cars, and a decade of experience in brand consultancy, Sara was recruited in 2008 with a mandate to take publishing into the digital future. Mag+, a tablet-based digi-mag project that predated the launch of the iPad, does just that.

What does innovation mean to you? I think it means re-booting your brain. It's kind of a skill – or an attitude maybe – to constantly question and redesign the truth about the things you know, because with innovation, by definition, you have to leave something behind.

What defines a twenty-first-century entrepreneur? Today, it's not only about *what* you do – it's about *why* you do it. People no longer want to join just because you're a start-up and you *might* become big; they want to start up because they believe in why they're doing it and the end result.

How do you demonstrate innovation on a day-to-day basis? We make sure that we tap into the discussion that's going on because that sparks innovation – almost like fostering coffee shop culture within and outside the company. We also work very cross-functionally with journalists and tech people. They're never separate; we're always on the same team.

Is there a technology, trend or idea that's driving the most exciting innovation in digital media? Data aggregation. Once you're able to track how people move, what people think, how people sleep – all the things they do – that creates a whole new world of media ideas. That information can be used to improve your daily life and improve the world around you. For example, if you know more about the impact your behavior has on the environment, people will change their behavior. It's also a bit scary, so you have to be careful about it.

What does the future hold for you? Within the art of publishing there are some core benefits that will always be valid and that we have to protect. Every honest and democratic society will need journalists that are not paid by advertisers, but instead are working on finding out the truth. But media companies have to redefine the use. They need to curate the conversation, and not just be loudspeakers. ➡

url_bonnier.com

Bright Simons

MPEDIGREE

Bright Simons is the founder of mPedigree, a unique system pioneered in Ghana that allows consumers to check whether the medicine they're about to purchase is counterfeit or safe via a free text message. Through his work at Accra-based think tank IMANI, Simons challenges the systems that stifle development by advocating fundamental institutional reform.

What does innovation mean to you? A lot of innovation is about persuasion; people tend to focus less on the actual invention or solution they are proposing, and more on trying to change the way people perceive it. It's about social binds.



Quantify: Innovation

Nearly half of the world's population is under the age of 25.⁴

How have developments in technology affected your approach to innovation? It allows for resource maximization; how we do more with less. Coming from Africa, that is much more poignant. It's obvious when you look around that you're not going to get all the resources you need. But one of the few ways in which you can maximize resources is via mobile telecoms. In Ghana today, one in two people has access to telecom services. That's a major boost, which only technology can achieve.

How do you demonstrate innovation on a day-to-day basis? By persuading vested interests to change. We do that by going to the pharmaceutical industry and convincing them that instead of keeping fake products confidential, they should make it a public-engagement issue. We advocate for change in institutions, changes in the way we expect outcomes to be delivered, and we are seeing the effects.

Is there a technology, trend or idea that's driving the most exciting innovation in social entrepreneurship? Cloud-based computing is definitely a transforming influence. It allows you to maximize resources, and it also allows you to change institutions. This whole notion of the company as a fortress, where all information is kept away from prying eyes, is changing. Open architecture – open ways of thinking about how we solve our problems – is being driven by a cloud-based mentality.

What does the future hold for you? Mobility and clouds are going to provide the bedrock for change because progressive institutions will use them to make changes in their own companies, changing the social dynamics. It will make things more accessible and that will have a radical impact on every institution and organization in every industry around the world. ➔

url_mpedigree.org



Esra'a Al Shafei

DIGITAL ACTIVIST

Esra'a Al Shafei is the 24-year-old activist behind MideastYouth.com, an online watering hole where dissident voices can find direction, purpose and support. But her work doesn't stop there. FreeKareem.org is the campaign she spearheaded to protest the imprisonment of a young Egyptian blogger; MidEastTunes.com helps political musicians break through the silence; and CrowdVoice.org is a user-powered service that tracks voices of protest around the world. From her home in Bahrain, she works tirelessly every day to lift the veil on prejudice, oppression and censorship.

What does innovation mean to you? For me, innovation is taking what's existing and creating a new and effective use for it.

How has growing up in a digital world affected your approach to innovation? Growing up, I had a lot of different ideas about how to address free speech and human

rights, but I had no idea how to make these projects a reality until I was exposed to the internet. Just a couple of applications have transformed the way that people communicate, and this really allowed me to overcome a lot of my barriers and to realize that what you can achieve on the web is absolutely limitless.

What defines a twenty-first-century entrepreneur? The main thing is courage, creativity and persistence. There are so many ideas out there and the only way to make sure that your message is heard is by being creative and unique in your approach.

How do you demonstrate innovation on a day-to-day basis? Some friends of mine have built innovative tools that have helped bypass censored content on the web. And we focus on new techniques that will help reach young people – like animation. If technology for a project doesn't exist, we create it right away, like we did with CrowdVoice. That kind of crowdsourcing platform didn't exist before in activism, but we were in a position to create it.

Is there a technology, trend or idea that's driving the most exciting innovation in activism? Definitely crowdsourcing, which is a big part of recent activist tools and applications. The most exciting projects in the field are the ones that rely on lots of information and input from the masses, especially those that are visual.

What does the future hold for you? I love not knowing what the future holds for us, because we're always coming up with new plans and new ideas, and these things change on a day-to-day basis. My job every day is to wake up with a refreshed perspective on the projects we deal with and do something different ☺

url_crowdvoice.org