

Vending 2.0: Facilitating Face-to-Face Interactions Virtually

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Background on the Homeless Neighbors Project

- *Spare Change's* relatively recent online presence
 - New website launched Fall 2009 (www.sparechangenews.net).
 - Facebook page launched Summer 2009.
 - Collaboration with [MIT's Center for Future Civic Media](#) since Spring 2010 for the **Homeless Neighbors Project**.

The Concept

- *Spare Change* vendors—and vendors for other street papers—often have unique relationships with their customers.
- Current project with MIT seeks to transfer and transform this street-level dialogue to online media.
- “The face-to-face relationships that vendors have with their customers are the key *Spare Change* asset.” – Rick Borovoy, PhD, Center for Future Civic Media at MIT

The Process

- The **Homeless Neighbors Project** is announced and described at biweekly vendor meetings, with Dr. Borovoy in attendance.
- Vendors work with Mr. Jefferson on the composition of their biographies and choose a profile photo.
- Mr. Michael Morisy—an HEP board member and SCN tech support volunteer—creates the vendor profile page on the sparechangenews.net website in collaboration with Dr. Borovoy.

The Process²

- Through funding secured by the Center for Future Civic Media from the Knight Foundation, stickers are printed for vendors.
 - Stickers contain vendor's name, the URL to his/her profile page, and the *Spare Change* logo.
- The vendor (or a volunteer) attaches the stickers to each issue that s/he will sell.
- The vendor hits the street, selling *Spare Change* according to his/her normal pitch, while adding a plug for the profile page and encouraging customers to visit site.

The Profiles

- Vendor Homepage: <http://sparechangenews.net/vendors>
- Peaches: <http://sparechangenews.net/peaches>
- Norman: <http://sparechangenews.net/norman>
- Ed: <http://sparechangenews.net/edward>
- Helen: <http://sparechangenews.net/Helen>
- Beatrice: <http://sparechangenews.net/vendors/beatrice-bell>

“Neighborly” Interactions—a Post from Ed’s Page by ‘Kiddo’

“It’s always such a pleasure to see ed selling spare on the way to the station. Well, except for the brutally cold days when his face is beet red, and the very hot days such as today.

Sales is a hard business. Ed is extraordinary in his ability to keep going day-after-day, smiling all the while.

This sticker/web page campaign is helpful in giving us more information about our spare change vendors. I’m even more impressed with ed, based on the health challenges he is facing.

As to the name on this comment, I’m an-almost-age-50 woman with salt-and-pepper hair. And ed calls me ‘kiddo’. Love it!

Advantages of the Homeless Neighbors Project

- Way for vendors to legitimize the business of selling a street paper.
 - Biographies tell vendors’ stories, which can eradicate myths and stigma.
 - Stickers on each issue concretely link vendor to the organization, eliminating the possibility of fraud and vouching for individual.
 - Profile pages list days and hours for when vendors sell; Google Maps widget displays vendor’s precise location.

Advantages of the Homeless Neighbors Project²

- The simple addition of individualized stickers to the newspapers had several positive unforeseen consequences:
 - Stickers helped customers learn vendors’ names.
 - Stickers strengthened & personalized vendors’ relationships to the organization.
 - Stickers enhanced vendors’ pride about selling the paper; they enjoyed seeing their name & face on each copy.

Advantages of the Homeless Neighbors Project³

- Way for vendors to build upon extant street paper platform of empowerment.
 - Supporters can donate money to a project/program for career or personal development that the vendor specifies through ChipIn widget. ([Overview on ChipIn](#))
 - Vendors who write for or otherwise contribute to *Spare Change* can have their work linked from profile page (e.g., [Norman’s Profile](#)).

The Homeless Neighbors Project and HEP’s Mission

- Mission is “To empower the economically disadvantaged in Greater Boston through self-employment, skill development & self-expression. *To create forums, including those of independent media in order to reshape public perception of poverty and homelessness.*”
- The collaboration with MIT’s CFCM establishes a novel forum for dialogue between economically disadvantaged individuals and people who wish to support their transitions away from adversity.

Case Study: Teens & Vendors Unite—the Street & Social Media

- In June 2010, a group of high school students participated in program through IMPACT Boston, BBYO and BIMA at Brandeis University and spent a week volunteering with *Spare Change*.
 - [IMPACT Boston](#)
 - [BBYO](#)
 - [BIMA at Brandeis](#)

Teens & Vendors²

- The result of the teens' experience was manifold:
 - Publication of stories in *Spare Change*
 - Creation of video promoted on *Spare Change's* Facebook page: [SCN Facebook Group Page](#)
 - Fundraising through [jchoice](#), a social networking site for young Jewish giving.
 - In one month, teens have already raised over \$1000 for *Spare Change* through jchoice networking.
 - *Spare Change* now also has a jchoice profile: [http://HEP's jchoice Page](http://HEP's_jchoice_Page)
 - Teens have promoted *Spare Change* on HEP's own social media sites, including Facebook and individual vendor profile pages.

Next Steps

- From the HEP perspective:
 - Continue to enroll vendors in the **Homeless Neighbors Project**; activate more profiles.
 - Facilitate increased interaction between vendors & customers, both virtually and actually.
 - E.g., propose locally-relevant discussion questions.
 - Create clear plan for funds raised through Chipln.
 - Design individualized action plans for each participant in the Neighbors Project.

Next Steps²

- From the NASNA perspective:
 - HEP and MIT's CFCM together encourage the participation of other street newspapers in the **Homeless Neighbors Project**.
 - What we can offer:
 - Instructions & technical support to get started.
 - Profile page launching & hosting capabilities.
 - Guidance for how to approach vendors with the idea.
 - What we cannot offer:
 - Financial support, especially relevant for sticker printing.

Ideas? Thoughts?

Is anyone interested in joining the **Homeless Neighbors Project**?

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