

Designing in Real Time for a Participation Economy

By [Alissa Walker](#)



Everyone's (or no one's) favorite redesigned brands, [Tropicana](#) and [Facebook](#) [0], came up [yet again](#) [0] at this weekend's [Y Conference](#) [1] as Liz Danzico, chair of the new [Interaction Design MFA](#) [2] program at the School of Visual Arts, focused on the concept of "designing in real time." She thinks redesign recalls are about to get a lot more common as designers are more likely to launch alpha or beta versions of experiences and then monitor user behavior to get feedback. "How cool is it that this many people can say, 'I hate this?'" Danzico said about Facebook. "It's just a continuous loop of data for them to make it better." This kind of conversation is ideal for a company: "We get stuck in the design phase," she said. "And we should be focusing on the use."

SVA's program, which launches this fall, is one of the only graduate-level programs in the U.S. that's focused on interaction design, now seen by companies as a necessary strategic tool. Or as Danzico puts it: "business success depends on the presence of a well-designed, engaging experience." Danzico highlighted some innovative experiences that prove the power of the people can actually help to build stronger companies in what she calls the "participation economy":



Facebook: This is a framework built for participation, with content developed by users, so even when they're mad, they're helping Facebook [3]'s designers improve it.

Twitter: The ease with which users can post and disseminate ideas actually creates trends and narratives that can be harnessed into great informational resources like the Twitter Election 2008 page or engaging "games" like the popular user-contributed site When Obama Wins [4].

The 9th Ward Field of Dreams: Brian Bordainick built a Web site [5] to solicit funds for a new football field in a neighborhood decimated by Katrina. Currently they've raised money about half the funds in a prime example of harnessing the power of the participation economy for good.



Geni: This family tree generator [6] not only lets you construct your own family tree online, it also has a social networking component that links you to other potential family members, allowing you to link up with relatives you may not know you had. This is a radical new way to connect people.

User Voice: Self-billed as the "fastest way to turn feedback into innovation," User Voice [7] is like

a Digg for customer service that allows users to post new ideas for your company, then vote on those ideas.

Zappos: Another company we've talked about before [7], the online retailer Zappos [8] extends the participation economy to the employees. Their Culture Book [9], written by employees, teaches new staffers about corporate culture through the words of those creating it.

Wikipedia: Of course this is the best example of a participation economy, but Wikipedia [10] is also a really good example of what can happen when users are disenfranchised by their own community. Awhile back, Wikipedia's overlords actually rejected the article on content strategy [11]. Ironic, isn't it?



JetBlue Story Booth: This was a recording booth built by JetBlue [12] that was parked in several locations for their customers to sound off about their flying experiences. Before launching it, designers at Local Projects actually built a full-scale prototype that they lived with in their studio so they could perfect the system and how people would interact with it.

Blurb and Etsy: These two sites made for creatives to showcase and sell their wares--Blurb [13] (print on demand books) and Etsy [14] (handmade goods)--are made even more robust by interfaces designed by Rebecca Hodgson that allow complete customization for sellers to create the best online experiences for their customers, putting even more control in their hands.

Links:

- [1] <http://y-conference.com/y14>
- [2] <http://interactiondesign.sva.edu/>
- [3] <http://www.facebook.com>
- [4] <http://kottke.org/when-obama-wins/>
- [5] <http://www.9thwardfieldofdreams.com/>
- [6] <http://www.geni.com/>
- [7] <http://uservoice.com>
- [8] <http://www.zappos.com>
- [9] <http://www.zappos.com/n/p/dp/42746617/c/1.html>
- [10] <http://www.wikipedia.com>

[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/Content_strategy

[12] http://www.localprojects.net/lpV2/project.php?project_id=125&category=all&pagenum=12

[13] <http://www.blurb.com>

[14] <http://www.etsy.com>