OLPC Startup
in 5 Easy Pieces

Bryan W. Berry, OLE Nepal

About OLE Nepal

- A grassroots organization that is implementing OLPC in Nepal in partnership with the Nepali government

- We deployed 200 XO's in 2008 and will deploy ~7000 XO's in 2009

- 23 full-time paid staff and 11 full-time volunteers

- Add ~3-5 staff per month

About Me

- I am the co-founder and CTO of OLE Nepal

- Professional background managing computer help desks

- Esp. Interested in helping kids with learning difficulties

- OLPC in Nepal is not "my project"

Disclaimer

- This presentation is completely non-technical

- It will sound a lot like a Business School Class

- The presentation on "Functional Programming Nirvana with Haskell" is in Room 3013 and it starts in five minutes

5 Easy Steps

- Organize a Small Community

- Build a Product

- Promote the Product

- Build a Professional Organization*

- Organize a Deployment

*This is the hardest part

Things to Avoid

5 Easy Steps

- Organize a Small Community (1-3 mos)

- Build a Product (1-3 mos)

- Promote the Product (1-3 mos)

- Build a Professional Organization* (2-6 mos)

- Organize and Execute a Deployment (3-6 mos)

*This is the hardest part

That's only 15 months of your life! What a breeze!

First, A Cautionary Tale

- OLPC Nepal, grassroots organization started by two university students in May 2006

- They successfully lobbied government to launch an OLPC project and let them implement it

- Received a lot of media attention

- Lucky to have close family relationship with Nepal's then Minister of Education

OLPC Nepal, Cont'd

- Did some good localization work

- 2007-2008, promoted project more but unable to secure any funds

- Started a pilot in March 27th, 2008 with 20 XO's donated by OLPC

They Came, They Gave, and . . .

. . . They Never Went Back

- OLPC Nepal dissolved shortly after laptop distribution do to lack of funds and interest

- No one from OLPC Nepal has visited the pilot school since March 27th, 2008

- The laptops are not used in school

- Children keep the laptops at home, as far as anyone knows

Step 1

- Organize a small community of interested people.

- This should take less than 3 months

- Need educators, teachers, businesspeople, me AND women

- Should be consensus-based and non-hierarchical

- No one <u>owns</u> the OLPC project

Step 1

- Gather collaborators and ideas
- Advertise the group in a low-key manner
- Stay off the front-page of the newspaper
- Have some meetings but not too many

You can talk forever and do nothing.

Lots of groups do this

Key Community Members

- The Business Guy
    - Knows marketing
    - Budgets
    - Logistics/customs
    - Can manage a budget
    - Known for her integrity

Educator

- Knows how public schools work in your area

- Ideally is or was a public school teacher

  - Can relate to teachers

  - Someone focused on primary and/or secondary ed.

- Sees both the promises and perils of OLPC

Government Guy

- Can speak governmentese
- Knows government priorities
- Has connections

Technology Guy(s)

- Knows how open-source communities work

- Familiar with localization issues

- Interested in activities more than hardware or software infrastructure

You don't have to wait until you have all 4 of these people on board

Build a Product (1-3 mos)

- You need a product that you can sell
  - To the government
  - To the general public
  - To the local open-source community
- Working software is worth more than 1 million power point presentations
- Another reason I will explain later

Activity Prototypes

- Help people better visualize how the XO will be used in a classroom. Makes it less abstract.

- Doesn't matter if they suck or are great

- Will help attract good volunteers

- Useful people, geeks and non-geeks, join projects that do stuff not just talk

Know Your Customer

- Find out government's policy priorities for education, where it is having the most trouble
  - Education For All
  - Primary Education
  - Mother Tongue education
  - Specific subjects: Maths, English, Local language
- This info should be easily available

Talk is Cheap

- These concepts will help you implement OLPC but they won't help you sell this project to the government or the general public.

Speak the same language

as your customers

An Example

- E-Paath
  - Focused on Math and English for Classes 2 and 6
  - Large % of students in these classes fail those subjects
- Critical to securing funding and government support

Build a Professional Organization

The people that start a project

aren't necessarily the ones

that can lead it to success

You may have to give up control of OLPC in
order for it to succeed

I did.

Form a Non-Profit

- Or a For-profit

- Both have advantages and disadvantages

- For-Profits can borrow from banks

- Donors more likely to give $ to non-profits

- Best option is to get an existing NGO to make OLPC part of its mission. This can be hard.

Board of Directors

- Well-respected citizens that are legally responsible for your organization

- They safeguard mission of the organization

- Keeps organization from being dependent on one charismatic person

- They can help out a lot

Executive Director

- Someone personally committed to the project

    - Not just a good resume

- Exceptional leader and manager

- Often not the founder of OLPC community group

OLE Nepal Management

- Chairperson of the Board

Dr. Pratibha Pandey

- Executive Director

Rabi Karmacharya

+ Board of Directors

Founder's Syndrome

When the founder(s) won't give up
organizational control even when
it is obvious that is in the benefit
of the organization/project

*That is What happened
in our Cautionary Tale*

OLPC Nepal

- Founded by

Shankar Pokharel + Ankur Sharma + Bryan Berry

in June 2006

Founder's Syndrome

- 22-year old Nepali engineering students + 1 naive foreigner

- Weak operational skills

  - Running meetings

  - Handling budgets

  - No previous work experience

- We are nice guys and very idealistic

- We had feelings of ownership

  ”This is my project. I started it.”

Going Nowhere Fast

- OLPC Nepal couldn't raise $ because it didn't have a real Board of Directors

- Couldn't attract developers because we had only promoted OLPC, not developed any software

- Ankur and Shankar not willing to yield power to individuals who could run an organization

Formation of OLE Nepal

- Many of most active OLPC Nepal members formed Open Learning Exchange Nepal in June 2007

- Rabi Karmacharya became Executive Director

- Prativa Pandey the Chairperson

- This is a very common phenomenon and has happened in **many** other countries

The Hardest Part

*Is changing from an community organization that is responsible to its **own members** to one that is responsible to the **greater public***

The best way to prevent this: Establish early on that OLPC doesn't belong to anyone person

Community Continues

- The OLPC community can continue to operate even after one or several NGO's form to implement OLPC

The Next hardest

- Getting Start-up Capital

- Donors don't like to fund new NGO's
  - They also only like to pay for "projects" not for staff or for content
  - But the product you developed will help you more than anything else in your pursuit of funding

Donors aren't Rational

- They like "cute and fuzzy" projects that get media attention but aren't necessarily sustainable or even needed

- Private philanthropists like to fund very short-term projects. Can be very short-sighted.

- Big donors force you to do tons of paperwork and wait a long time

Donors aren't Rational

- It is easier to raise $ 1,000,000 than $100,000

- Because it is the same amount of paperwork for the donors

- It's hard to get funding but it is not impossible

It's a Mean, Mean NGO World

- NGO's are cut-throat, extremely competitive, and territorial

- The only difference between an NGO and for-profit is the tax status

- Other NGO's will see you as a threat

Nasty NGO's

- Other NGO's will copy your work, abuse you, and then ignore you

- The government will copy your work, abuse you, and then give the project to a more established NGO

- The only thing that can save you is a "product" that they CANNOT produce more of – like Activities!

Don't Get Distracted

- A lot of organizations will approach you to work on pet causes

- Example: Art education for 1-limbed, dyslexic, colorblind mountain dwellers

- Keep your focus on basic education for the masses. That is where you will see the greatest return and impact.

Step 5 - Deployment

- This is actually the easiest part

- Work closely with the government bureaucracy. It is extremely time-consuming but worth it.

- Cultivate relations with politicians

- Be careful project is not too closely tied to a specific political party

School Selection

- Choose a school(s) that represents the average or worse-than-average public school
  - Much easier to show an improvement
  - People will take you more seriously (Senegal story)
  - These schools are often focused on very different problems than prestigious schools

This is One Laptop Per Child, Not

*One Laptop Per **C**harter **S**chool **S**tudent*

Managing Volunteers

- Come one, Come all in Cyberspace

- But in physical world, you need to put up barriers-to-entry to filter out those that will waste your time

- Millions of people will want to hang out in your office, visit your deployment, and contribute *nothing*

  Beware the Open-Source Tourist

Managing Volunteers

- For a deployment, recruit technicians and content developers, not researchers

Managing Volunteers

- We have had great success with high school students, but not with university students

- You don't want your team to be all captains and no sailors

- There is a lot of non-technical work to do

- Recruit non-techies and women!

Time Management

- During the First Year
  - 20% Internal Organization
  - 30% Raising $
  - 20% Education/Technology Sugar
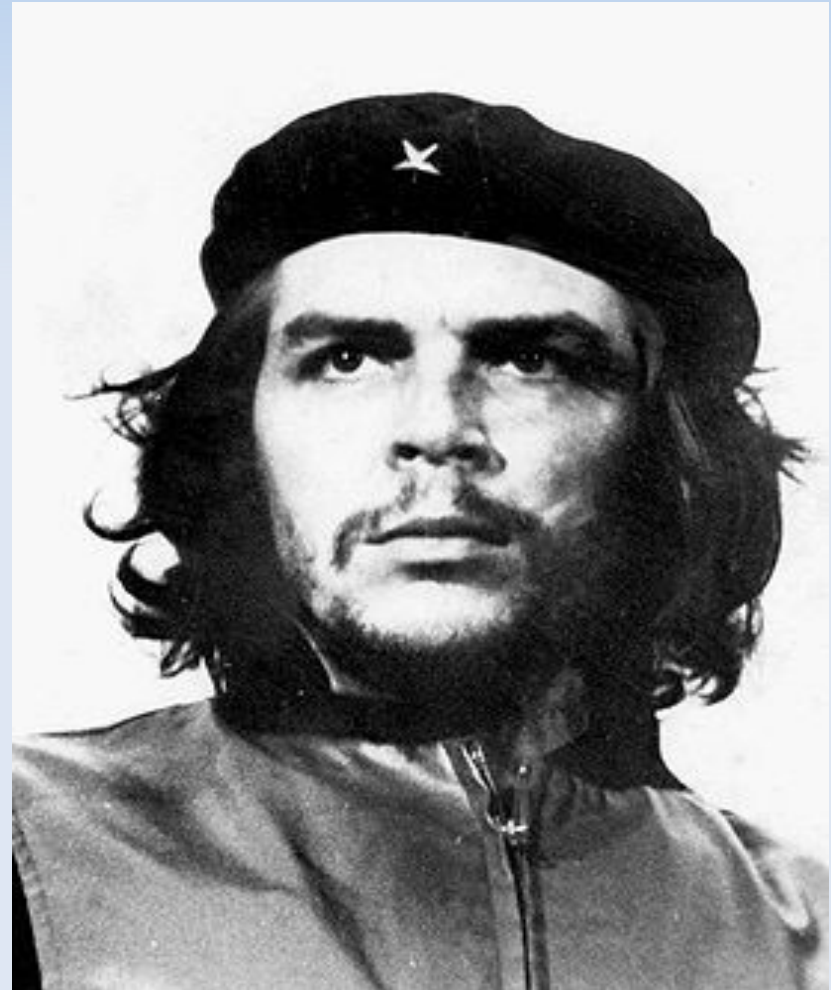 - 30% Liaising with the government

Budgeting

- Pay people competitive salaries
- You want people for the long-term
- You want talented people and they often have children or want children
- Kids are expensive

Is it Worth it?

ABSOLUTELY!

We are Revolutionaries

Wait a second . . .

Real Revolutionaries

- Wear Suits
- Are not Confrontational
- Forge Consensus, not chaos

Stuff to Avoid

- Don't upset the organization that produces school textbooks. It is often politically powerful

- Hierarchy early on

- A lot of press attention early on. It raises expectations that are hard to meet later

- Not paying people what they are worth

Credits

- Thanks to
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