

# THE TRANSFORMATIVE PLATFORM



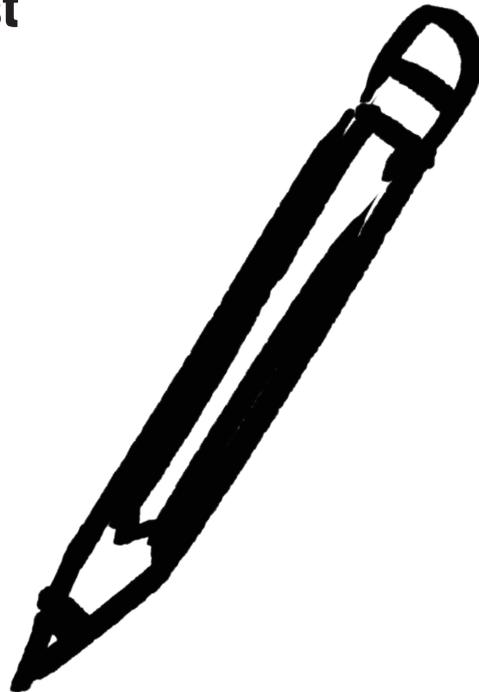
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# THE TRANSFORMATIVE PLATFORM =

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**Give people a blank canvas and you'll  
discover an artist**



“Campaign” and “targeting” illustrates the militaristic command-and-control language of traditional marketing that still dominates most of the media landscape. It clashes with a bottom-up, pluralistic and open media space where people embrace the opportunities of an Internet for them and by them, from citizen journalism to off-the-shelf e-commerce platforms for Average Joe with something to sell.

Transformative organisations communicate differently, moving away from the “We promote” to enabling the individual; “You promote”. I began to observe certain patterns and realised this was not a campaign, but something that in its

own right deserved a name: a transformative platform. It’s structured much like a game, just waiting for people to come and play again and again.

These platforms are re-writing the relationship between brand and people and turning people into their own creator of content. No mass-market content here! The brand is empowering an army of the willing to join on a shared mission! It’s like a Wikipedia of campaigns, where everyone with a passion get to create the content. I discovered eight attributes characteristic of a platform:

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**Def.:  
a transformative  
platform**

**A communication enabler that allows people to create campaigns or initiatives within a shared framework with a shared goal.**



**A transformative  
platform is:**

**Transformative**

set a clear, shared transformative goal or target

**Guided**

make a set of guidelines or directions

**Motivational**

aim for action

**Creative**

make it open for creativity

**Replicable**

create for re-creation

**Common**

make it open for everyone

**Accessible**

make the tools or mechanisms easily available

**Relevant**

make it relevant for your brand



# Transformative

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## - set a clear, shared goal or target

You can view the creative development of a platform like designing a game, where you as a game master set certain rules for how to play the game or in this instance to be part of the platform. As in games, there needs to be something you play to achieve, a mission and the goal has to be transformative for those that take part. Moving people from one state of being to another, from an intent to a self-actualisation, from an old-me to a better-me. Take a platform like the Ice Bucket challenge from 2014. The goal was to raise awareness and money for motor neuron disease, also called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). This is why you as an organisation encourage people to do what they do. But never forget to take people's

perspective – what's their drive to take part? What transformation do they get out of it?

In the cold dip of the Ice Bucket Challenge there is a learning experience, you're challenging yourself, and that's an important element of a platform. There is a change in the status quo. A wished-for outcome, result or state of mind should be realised or encouraged. As a creator you learned something, tried something or had a laugh. There is a transformation happening. You're being rewarded for doing, what you're doing. But the benefit needs to be clear for the organisation as well. In this instance as a creator I show to my friends I dare. For ALS, they get both great exposure and raise funds.

# Guided

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## - make a set of guidelines or rules

There also needs to be a set guideline or rules for how to play. In the Ice Bucket challenge the rules or the how is simply a dare game where you have to document that you expose yourself to cold water or ice and you can pass the challenge on to two friends. If they don't dare, they'll have to donate to ALS, which a lot of people chose to do anyway after the cold dip. The rules or guidelines give people the recipe for how to take part and participate. That said, the rules need to be open enough for the participants to shape their participation, feel enabled, give them a sense of self-determination and "I

promote"-feeling. It's about them creating. We want to build, share and create to feel fulfilled, it's inherent in us, as an organisation you should make it possible. When done right, the guidelines behind a platform unleash people's creativity, passion and capabilities, potentially creating an exponential reach for your organisation – many to many. If you do a quick search for Small Business Saturday, you'll see the ingenuity of the many people, organisations and businesses supporting and writing about it from individuals in the community doing reviews of local places to creating local events.

# Motivational

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## - aim for action

„Start collaborating, boost plastic recycling“, „Shop small“, „#OptOutside“, the rallying cries behind these enabling platforms (respectively Precious Plastic, American Express and REI) are clear and motivational. When your organisation has set a clear transformational goal on people's behalf, the next logic step is to make it happen. The clearer you are, when you want people to act, the higher chance of success. Like a game can have a set time, it's useful to think about when best to motivate people during the year,

during the day or when in a specific state of mind. The Movember platform runs and creates awareness around testicular cancer in November, American Small Business Saturday is always the Saturday after US Thanksgiving and REI always asks people to #OptOutside during Black Friday. Always make sure to make your ask simple and motivational. That doesn't mean you can't offer multiple ways for people to participate – remember it's on their terms, right?

# Creative

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## - make it open for creativity

The Ice Bucket challenge unleashed an unbelievable amount of creativity, passion, fun and commitment from ordinary people to celebrities to make the challenge their own. The tech giant Bill Gates didn't just dump a bucket of ice over his head but built a sophisticated contraption to get the job done. The hip-hop artist Macklemore turned the challenge into an 80-second music video and Amazon's Jeff Bezos did a stand-up routine with an ice-cold ending. Like in a game, a platform opens up for an infinite number of ways to play. Think about

the simple design of the board game Ludo and the infinite ways the game plays out. Always make sure there is plenty of room for creativity. Think about the feeling people have when they have been part of making or creating something like refurbishing an apartment or building an enclosure in the garden. It's important to ask yourself how many possibilities for interaction your platform offers. Make sure people have plenty of creative possibilities and ways to express or challenge themselves.

# Replicable

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## - create for re-creation

A platform is created with an eye for infinite recreation, as was evident with ALS. The thrust behind the initiative is in the hands of people. One example is a Danish Cancer Charity, Kræftens Bekæmpelse, which has launched a tool where everyone can fundraise money to the organisation often centred on a loved one diagnosed with cancer or deceased. Think about the return of investment for a

platform, compared to normal fundraising activities where you run campaign efforts or go door to door to ask one individual to donate. On a platform, you give an individual the possibility to create his or her own fundraiser often generating many times more the return. Hey, after all we trust our friends more than some non-profit or organisation.

# Common

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## - make it open for everyone

Platforms are open for everyone – or at least relevant for everyone that is aligned with the goal. ALS did truly create an exponential reach with a reported \$220 million US worldwide in donations in just eight weeks and public

awareness rose dramatically with the challenge turning into the fifth most popular Google search for all of 2014. The power behind a platform is that you can turn individuals into an army behind your effort.

# Accessible

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## - make the tools or mechanisms easily available

*To make a platform accessible for everyone as an organisation you're often dependent on resources like time or effort, tools or a mechanism in one shape or another but it always needs to be easy or with the lowest barrier possible. It might be a website, an app, a DIY-kit or something most people have readily available, like a bucket and some ice. In a game design this would be e.g. the board, the tokens or the question cards. In Colombia, the Environmental Agency saw an increasing threat to local fish species from the alien dragon fish. Methods to catch the dragon fish were expensive and something most fishermen*

*couldn't afford. So, the Agency turned to a do-it-yourself model, where they devised a number of ways for the fishermen themselves to create tools to catch the dragon fish out of readily available and cheap materials like old soda bottles; the concept of "Priceless Traps" was born, enabling fisherman to take matters into their own hands and potentially saving hundreds of thousands of fish. The model was self-sustaining rather than being dependent on continuous government grants. Always think about how you can keep the barrier for participation as low as possible.*

# Relevant

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## - make it relevant for your brand

Lastly, remember to keep your platform relevant to your brand. Small Business Saturday by American Express is a continuation of the company's earlier societal efforts and it addresses how credit cards can play a positive contribution in society. It was on brand. Think

about how often you see a campaign or an initiative, but you can't remember the brand behind it. Most often, it's a lack of relevance between the issue or the goal of the campaign and the specific brand.

## There is no recipe for success

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### **The eight attributes are no guarantee of success - if only marketing was that simple - but they can serve as a checklist when creating your next platform.**

Look at the most successful platform in recent history, the #MeToo movement. It doesn't have a clear goal and the guidelines, if any, are rather loose, but it's a decentralised platform, where everyone can voice up and turn a broad message of female empowerment into their own rallying cry. It does give women across the world a possibility to use their creativity and voice to make the platform the very loudest it can be!

From my years of experience with campaigning I noticed one interesting thing: how organisations stood in the way of their own progress. The ability to act, the ability to create change was centralised and thus dependent on resources, staff, campaigns

funds etc. When digging deeper I found certain initiatives outperformed others in growth or reach, they had a transformability factor, they were not campaigns, they were platforms that empowered people and made them the change agents unleashing exponential reach. A platform enables everyone to create or take part on their own terms generating a strong-willed army of individuals on a mission. It's one-to-many and many-to-one. It doesn't feel or smell of marketing as it's far from top-down, but rather bottom-up. As an organisation your role is to create a platform that truly enables individuals and ultimately unites them behind a shared transformative goal.

## Platform checklist

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**Transformative - Is there a clear shared goal?**

**Guided - Are there guidelines and directions?**

**Motivational - Is there a cry for action?**

**Creative - Is it open for creation?**

**Replicable - Is the initiative replicable?**

**Common - Can everyone participate?**

**Accessible - Is it easy to participate?**

**Relevant - Is your brand's role relevant?**



# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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1. Do people talk about your product or your point of view as a brand?
2. How much opportunity for engagement does your current campaigns offer?
3. Looking at the 8 characteristics for a platform, how many of them do you recognise from your campaigns?
4. Can you think of any transformative platforms you have observed recently?
5. How can you use a platform approach to unlock growth and reach?



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