Engaging members to re-imagine National Geographic
The National Geographic Society was founded 125 years ago, along the lines of European research societies.
NGS was—and remains—a member-based, non-profit, providing both education and entertainment.
Originally, NGS members pooled resources to fund exploration. Explorers went into the world, collected data, and returned to share their experiences directly with members at NGS meetings in Washington.

Members → funds → Explorers → knowledge
In 1888, the same year NGS was founded, it began publishing a journal to record its research—The National Geographic Magazine.
In 1911, the magazine published a series of photos of Lhasa, Tibet, causing a sensation and selling out.
What began as a happy accident grew into a new type of magazine and then into a publishing empire, changing the relationship between the society and its members.
The brand has deep roots in US culture and has spread around the world.
Now, NGS faces the challenges of “digital convergence”—an existential threat to all traditional media organizations.
Subscriptions and ad revenue are dropping in the core print business, and subscriber median age is rising.
NGS’s cable business is healthy today, but for how long?

% of total media consumption time vs % of advertising spending
(USA 2012)

Internet Ad = $37B
Mobile Ad = $4B

~$20B+ opportunity in USA
What’s more, NGS faces disruptions across all its lines of business.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising</th>
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<tbody>
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Dubberly Design Office · Engaging members to re-imagine National Geographic · 18 June 2013
To its credit, NGS has undertaken several digital initiatives.
But most have been focused on “monetization”—e.g., building a pay wall.
The problem is not simply converting from print to web or selling mobile apps.

In order to survive, NGS must fundamentally re-conceive its business.
NGS must return to its roots, re-imagining itself as a multi-local organization—shifting from “customer transactions” to a new form of “member participation”.

Connecting members to …

... other members  ... explorers  ... research  ... content  ... the diversity of life  ... events  ... the society  ... the future
We helped NGS think through these issues—and we used prototyping to help imagine user experiences.
We then created a video to help NGS share the ideas internally.
... and we created a large-format print booklet to accompany the video.

Engaging Members to Re-imagine National Geographic

Four Stories about the Future

"We're in disruptive times. And if we don't push out ahead and become the disruptors, we will be disrupted."

—Aaron Huey

"There are people in your community that you could collaborate with who would be sort of the distributed network helping each other to make things happen."

—Ariel Waldman

"And you're trying to find people that bring out the best in you. We spend our lives trying to find our tribe."

—Tierney Thys

"I would be loyal to anything that's a consistent, positive source of information, focused on whatever I'm interested in."

—Brian Keefe
Aaron Huey is prototyping new ways to tell stories.

Huey is a National Geographic photographer, lecturer, and Stanford Knight Journalism Fellow. His work has been featured in numerous publications and exhibitions. He is known for his candid and powerful photography, especially those of his Native American subjects. Huey is currently working on a project that explores the intersection of traditional and digital storytelling.

Huey's work is driven by a desire to push the boundaries of what photography can be. He believes in the power of storytelling to connect with people and to change the world. His approach is collaborative, involving communities in the creation of their own stories, and he is always looking for new ways to engage with people and to tell their stories.

Huey is also a bit of an agitator. He wants to stir things up, to explore, to investigate, to ask questions, and prototype answers. His work is not just about making beautiful images, but about engaging with people and the world around them.

One of Huey's recent projects involved working with a community in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. He worked with the community to create a storytelling platform that allowed them to tell their own stories. The result was a series of stories that were published on the National Geographic website, allowing the community to share their stories with the world.

Huey believes that the future of storytelling lies in collaboration and engagement. He wants to see more of this kind of work, where photographers and writers work with communities to create stories that are authentic and meaningful. He believes that this kind of work can help to build bridges between communities and to create a better world.

Huey is also a believer in the power of new technologies. He sees them as tools that can help to expand the reach of storytelling and to reach new audiences. He is constantly experimenting with new ways to tell stories, and he encourages others to do the same.

Huey is a true believer in the power of storytelling. He believes that stories have the power to change the world. He is always looking for new ways to tell stories, and he is always willing to take risks to make it happen.
Imagine a storytelling platform—connecting members to the things they care about.

What National Geographic can do:

Expand authorship at National Geographic:
National Geographic editors, writers, photographers, and members all tell stories.

Redefine story:
Stories can be new blogs, photos of the day, traditional National Geographic magazine stories, story assignments through Your Shot, stories generated by research projects, and personal stories told by members—narrating others.

Create a story stream:
National Geographic hosts a collection of all stories ever published on the site—building on the National Geographic archive. The story stream is real-time, and can be personalized.

Be design access:
All stories are tagged and are navigable through search, filters, and tags.

Provide curation tools:
Readers can create stories as trails or lists, to be followed, shared, and read later.

Enable connections:
Stories connect people, events, channels, projects, and trails. Stories build community by connecting people through ideas to the site and one another.

Stories have different views:
Stories have different views: an index, a timeline, a map, and the tree of life provide views of content.

Stories appear in a continuous stream:
Stories appear in a continuous stream—building on the National Geographic archive. The story stream is rich, real-time, and can be personalized.

Readers find content through topics:
Readers navigate through search, filters, and tags to find topics—like Native Americans.

Stories connect everything:
Stories connect people, projects, events, and media.

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Ariel Waldman is hacking science.

What do hacking and science have in common? Ariel Waldman, for one. Ariel is the founder of spacehack.org, a directory of ways to participate in space exploration. She is also the global instigator of Science Hack Day. She is a citizen scientists.

Ariel was watching the documentary When We Left Earth—about the Apollo missions and the birth of NASA—when she realized she wanted to explore space. In a “geeky, fangirl moment” Ariel sent an email to NASA to secure a job.

Ariel’s job at NASA was life-changing. She became an evangelist for citizen science. Ariel wants to get ordinary people interested in science. She wants that science to be one that can be hacked or explored in a meaningful way. She believes that science can change the way people think about themselves.

Spacehack.org brings together a directory of citizen science projects that people can participate in. Ariel notes that there are a lot of citizen science projects out there, but they just aren’t organized so that people can find them or get involved. It isn’t only about openness—it’s about access.

Galaxy Zoo is one of the projects on spacehack.org. Galaxy Zoo offers a very simple image of a picture of a galaxy and allows ordinary people to classify it using simple questions like “Is it round?” or “Is it spiral.” Through Galaxy Zoo, people discovered a bunch of weird green blobs that turned out to be a new type of galaxy—a type that the galaxies.

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Imagine a citizen science platform—encouraging close attention to the natural world.
Tierney Thys conducts teaching and learning experiments.

My name is Tierney Thys. I am a National Geographic Explorer, a marine biologist, a filmmaker, a mom, a pilot, a scuba diver, but probably most important—a science educator.

Tierney Thys thinks the ocean is the perfect laboratory. The ocean is the place life began and where you can study the deepest connections of the natural world. Her mission is to help teach people about the ocean so that they care about it and conserve it.

She began teaching in traditional forms—creating hour-long documentaries for the National Geographic television channel and acting as a guide on the society’s expeditions. Today she is experimenting with new forms.

One experiment is a successful game on National Geographic’s website. Called Animal Jam, the game has 10 million registered players and every day connects 30,000 kids in 80 countries through conversational game play. Tierney appears in the game in her underwater lab called Tierney’s aquarium. The animals in the world talk to each other—the players talk to each other—they share what they’re learning and their excitement of learning.

She is also a lecturer and educator on TED. On TED-Ed, Tierney shares short animated films narrated by ocean creatures that teachers can weave into their lesson plans. Her TED talk—"The Secret Life of Plankton"—has been watched by 25,000 people.

Tierney wants to work with National Geographic to develop new kinds of teaching and learning experiences. Historically, National Geographic has put out millions of words to an audience of 100,000 students from around the world—now imagine teaching up with other educators to develop courses with even greater reach.

She says she wants to see the science being explored and to involve closer together—by making members of the expedition communicate with leaders and sponsor their research projects.

She views National Geographic as a shortcut to find your tribe: “It’s the people who bring out the best in you—the best you can offer to society.”

To save the planet, Tierney believes we must come together as a community and work to make things better. She wants to connect tribes of educators, learners, and doers in new ways to do just that.

Tierney Thys is asking questions:

- How can we bring the ocean back to its productivity and better protect it?
- How can we use different media to communicate scientific ideas?
- How can we spark different parts of the brain to help people learn better?
- How can I share information with kids in ways that helps them relate it to their own experiences and make it their own?
- What will happen when game players become game co-creators?
- How can National Geographic help people find their tribes?
- How can National Geographic put together a dream team of educators and share it with the world?
Imagine a teaching and learning platform—so we can all share what we know.

What National Geographic can do:

- Add new voices. National Geographic editors, writers, photographers, bloggers, and members all tell stories.
- Expand conferences. Building on the National Geographic Live! program, the society can organize national conferences to share research and spread ideas.
- Broadcast research videos. All presentations, workshops, and conference talks can be organized on the website—sharing National Geographic knowledge with the world.
- Offer online courses. Like TED-Ed, National Geographic can offer courses online and provide tools for creating courses. Courses can take advantage of the wide-ranging expertise offered by its fellows, writers, photographers, and explorers. Courses can take different forms—MOOCs, combinations of live and streamed material—many courses offering certificates of completion.
- Design courses for learning. Courseware can be created to fit into multiple curriculums.
- Build teaching teams. Connect explorers with other explorers to create multi-part classes—like How the Planet Works.
- Integrate with third-party learning platforms. ZOZI, creativeLIVE, and other services offer new kinds of teaching opportunities. Provide APIs (open standards) to enable registration across services.
- Build connections. Provide ways for members to follow explorers, research projects, and classes across platforms.

Develop research content
Find ways to apply research content.

Follow research projects
Contact researchers and explore research projects.

Extended learning platform
Focus on developing content for online courses.

Archived lectures
Lectures are archived and become part of online courses.

Knowledge sharing
National Geographic connects teachers to students and students to one another.

Follow research projects
- Researcher provides content for educational research courses.
- Researcher uploads research data and other resources.
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Archived lectures
- Courseware and content for educational research courses.
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Online courses at all levels
Teachers provide courses at all levels—for all types of learners.

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Self-service opportunities high-impact services.

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Brian Keefe is interested in helping people get off their butts and go outside. He believes people can become more interested in outdoor activities if they are given the right tools to do so. Technology can play a role in helping people navigate experiences in the virtual world. However, when he heads outside, Brian leaves technology behind. He spends as much time as he can in the natural world—surfing in the waves and the ocean, backpacking, hiking, and more recently—climbing.

A Meetup (http://www.meetup.com) group in Los Angeles introduced Brian to climbing. In a weekend crash course, he learned everything he needed to get started: how to set up anchors, break down anchors, rappel safely, and lead climbing. The experience was so powerful that he returned home and founded his own Meetup group.

Brian believes National Geographic could play an important role in the lives of outdoor enthusiasts. For example, guidebooks don't publish everything. For climbing trips to be safe and successful, climbers need information that only other climbers know. How do you get to the rock? Where are the good footholds? Are the bolts still there? National Geographic can support a user-created knowledge base of the natural world.

Outdoor enthusiasts want to save and share pictures of their adventures—something Meetup doesn’t provide. Brian even an opportunity to help groups form virtual climbing teams.

When I’m going on a trip back home to see relatives in the Philippines—through my National Geographic membership—I could find other climbers and actually maybe meetup and climb with them. That would be amazing.”

Brian sees a natural connection between his climbing community and the larger National Geographic community. And he is looking for a way to engage: “If I could participate and contribute to National Geographic, then I would feel like I am part of something much bigger.”

Brian Keefe is asking questions:

- How do you take people who have an interest in the outdoor world and get them off their butts and get them outside—something that they want to do?
- In the 1970s—how were they writing about climbing? 1980s—what were they talking about, how did they frame it, and how is it different from today?
- How are we delivering education content to those who want to stay mobile?
- How can I learn more about the environment—Where did that rock come from? What is it like? What's the history of the area?
- Why can’t I share my videos and pictures on Meetup?
- How do I find climbing partners around the world?
- How can I participate and contribute to National Geographic?

Brian Keefe is bringing people together to explore the world.
Imagine a community-building platform—to find each other, share our passions, and change the world.
We also helped NGS build a Member Center …
... and launch a real-time member database—a platform with APIs to support all NGS services.
Late this spring NGS launched “Your Shot”—the first NGS service to take advantage of the new member platform.
The changes at NGS exemplify several connected trends, applicable to many other organizations and industries.
1 People want meaning.

“Millennials don’t just want to buy your brand, they want to be part of it. They’re looking for ways to participate.”
— Barkley EVP Jeff Fromm
People want meaning.

“I envision a 21st century form of business where the everyday consumer is helping shape the social contract … It’s a business world that is moving from value-based transactions to values-based partnerships.”

— Unilver CEO Paul Polman
# 1 People want meaning.

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<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer / user</td>
<td>Member / participant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy stuff</td>
<td>Make meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passively receive goods</td>
<td>Actively co-create experiences</td>
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<td>Atomized transaction</td>
<td>On-going relationships</td>
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<td>Mass broadcast</td>
<td>Personal conversations</td>
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<td>Interruption-driven</td>
<td>Engagement-focused</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seller knows more</td>
<td>Information balance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2 All organizations have stories to tell, and products tell customer stories.

Traditional products

- Merchant makes first version of Product
- Product is used by Customer
- Customer may provide feedback through Sampling Techniques
  - customer support call
  - survey
  - usability study
  - focus group
  - ethnographic study
- Merchant may suggest insights to Product

Web-based services

- Merchant makes first version of Website
- Website is used by Customer
- Customer actions recorded in Website Logs + Analytic Tools
- Website Logs + Analytic Tools may provide hard data for decisions
- Merchant may provide feedback through Sampling Techniques
- Merchant may suggest insights to Website
- Merchant makes next version of Website
3 An organization’s values matter more than ever.

Repeated interaction builds understanding, trust, and loyalty.
4 All organizations are social networks.

Social Network Services enable key activities that build traffic, loyalty, and affinity.

– Defining ourselves (curating identity)
– Collecting and sharing digital artifacts
  Collect in order to remember
  – Remember to re-live
  – Re-live by sharing
  – Share in order to connect
  – Connect to be seen and appreciated
  – Be seen in order to participate
  – Participate to create new possibilities

– Communicating with friends and staying in touch
– Finding others with shared interests
– Following what others are thinking and doing
– Planning events (meeting in the physical world)
– Making common cause (organizing for change)
– Creating shared projects (for fun or profit)
5 CRM is now core—you have to know your customer.

Existing model of CRM

Emerging model of CRM
6 Businesses create value by enabling others to create value.

Traditional producers

Platform providers

Businesses create value by enabling others to create value.

Traditional producers sell goods and services and in return receive compensation.

Platform providers open spaces for others to create value—often by defining rules for connecting hardware and software. Third-party "add-ons" increase the popularity of the platform.

Popular platforms attract "developers."
Special thanks to
Robin Bahr
Michael Gallagher
Paul Pangaro

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Presentation posted at
www.dubberly.com/presentations/AIGA_Re-imagining_NatGeo.pdf