

Pop-Ups and “Citizen-Sourcing”

by

[Scott Pickard](#)

Tom Peters, famous author of *In Search of Excellence*, coined the phrase “fast failures” which simply means corporations using modest amounts of capital to let employees rapidly test out new concepts, versus following a traditional deliberate corporate process to vet new product and service ideas. Fast forwarding to today, the idea of the “pop-up” has steadily been gaining traction in the retail and restaurant sectors as a way to quickly test the market, introduce new products and services, and gain some quick local market awareness.

When you think about it, the pop-up has been around for a long time, we just called it *booth at a tradeshow*. What’s different now is the pop-up can happen anywhere, especially outside where people are walking, browsing, and congregating. In the tradeshow model you had to attract the people to your booth (one of hundreds) in a big event center. In the pop-up model you embed your story where the people are and often you are the only show at that location.

The pop-up is not just for big corporations. Any organization and any individual can pop-up their story on a budget that ranges from a table at a flea market in a mall, to an open-air stand at an art fair in a parking lot, to something more elaborate whether it is indoors or outdoors. The pop-up enables rapid prototyping (and fast failures), market introduction and awareness, brainstorming, customer feedback, crowd sourcing (“citizen-sourcing”), and more. And because it is such a cost-effective technique, we should encourage and enable pop-ups in our communities as much as possible because what we need in our communities is new thinking that leads to new companies and new jobs which can help backfill the substantial job losses we are experiencing by disruption across all sectors.

Just to pick one example, consider libraries which are being disrupted across the United States because of the digital revolution and declining state and municipal budgets. Public libraries across the nation are struggling to figure out how to redefine the mission of their libraries and develop a sustainable financial model.

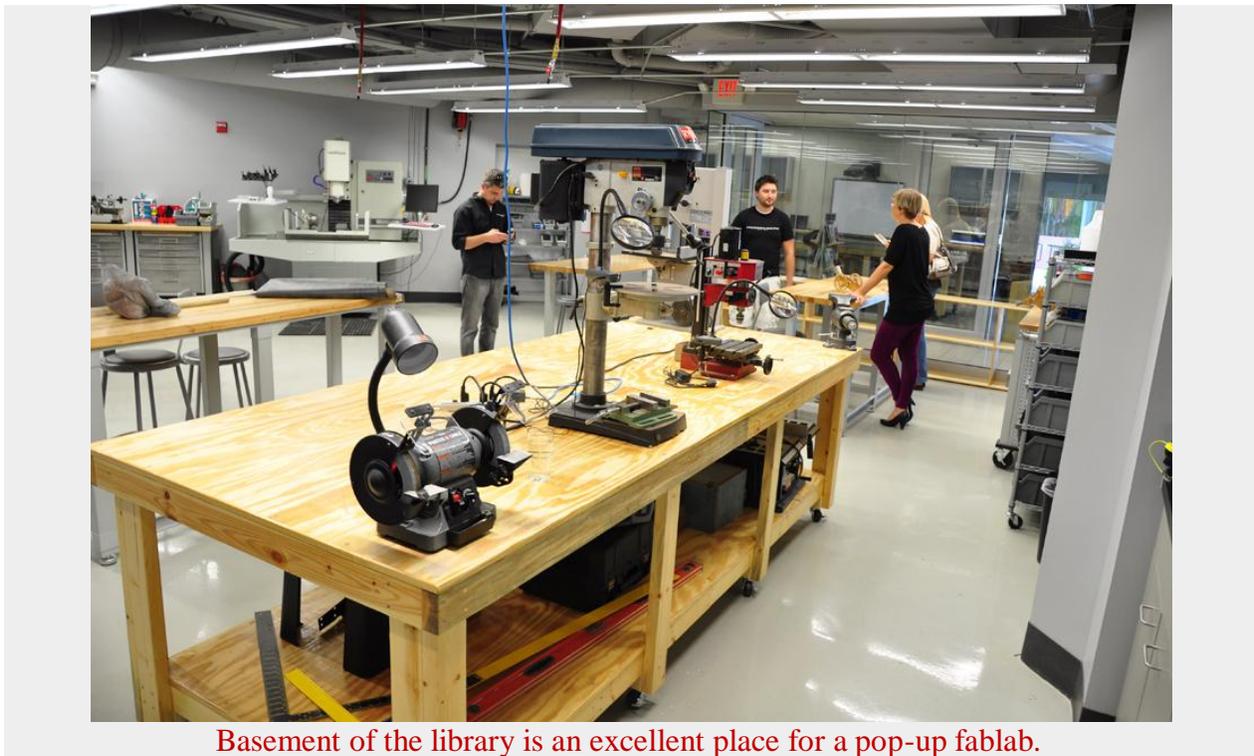
The “elephant in the room” that people are afraid to talk about or step forward on is the question of do we still need to allocate that much space for books-on-shelves? It is such a revered and emotional tradition (some say “right” or “entitlement”) to have books-on-shelves in expansive quiet spaces, that some library directors have already lost their jobs trying to move in a different direction. But it will happen! We don’t need as much space allocated for books-on-shelves as we used to, so we will have to repurpose some amount of that library space and potentially have some of the space generate revenues which will help support the library.

A specific example of this is our own public library that has a 40,000 square-foot basement which is empty. The basement of our public library is nicer than the basement in my 90-year old home: well lit, dry, high ceilings, broadband wireless, plenty of power, smooth concrete floor, plenty of books and coffee and conference rooms and restrooms upstairs, warm in the winter and

cool in the summer. That's a lot of space to be doing nothing when the library has been running a deficit budget for the last five years.

Why not mobilize the power of the crowd (the library patrons and the community at large) by letting them pop-up their ideas in the basement?

- Design lab
- Media lab
- Art studio
- Dance studio
- Co-working area for budding entrepreneurs
- Fablab, makery, hackerspace
- And the list goes on...



Basement of the library is an excellent place for a pop-up fablab.

Give them some of that empty underutilized space, support them however you can, and unleash the creative energy of *citizen-sourcing* in your community because no single library director or board of trustees has the all-knowing crystal ball to build a roadmap to the future for their libraries. I have much more confidence in the power of diverse thinking from citizen-sourcing than I have in a library director either afraid of losing his or her job or stubborn to change; or a politicized board of trustees nervous about community blowback. I was on our library board so I've seen this group-think dynamic from the inside.

The library is only one of many institutions which are being disrupted (big university is another, for example) which we need to address, but we are failing our communities if we don't fully utilize the power of citizen-sourcing.

Pop-ups are a great way to mobilize and tap the creative and problem-solving power in our communities and get on with it!

sp