

8-10-2011

Interview with Jessica Beckett, Free Geek, 2011 (audio)

Jessica Beckett

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PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY
SUSTAINABILITY HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW INDEX

INTERVIEWEE: _____ Jessica Beckett _____

Interviewer: _____ Thomas Yarbrough _____

Date: _____ 8-10-2011 _____

Location of Interview: _____ FreeGeek Conference Room _____

Research Assistant: _____ Sam Medina _____

Interview Series: Documenting Sustainable Practices in the Pacific Northwest

Recording Equipment: DIGITAL RECORDER (WINDOWS MEDIA AUDIO FILE) WITH AN
 EXTERNAL, OMNIDIRECTIONAL MICROPHONE

Time Notes

0:27	Q: How long have you lived in PDX? A: Lived in area (lives in Vancouver, WA) – commutes daily
0:46	Q: What brought you to the area? A: Family previously, then other relationships in the area
1:08	Q: What kind of education did you pursue after high school? A: University of Oregon – linguistics -> dropped out Also got education working with campaigns (Kerry, Obama, WA democrats)
2:15	Q: How was the transition from campaigning to Free Geek, how did that happen? A: Always wanted to volunteer for other non-profits besides campaigns, and happened to find FreeGeek on CraigsList
3:25	Q: How do you define sustainability? A: Any system that creates/manages its own input/output – able to self manage consumption and output, hopefully those two are related
4:20	Q: How do you address or gauge sustainability? A: Examine the products of output, primarily. How do these products feed back into the cycle? “Close the loop” piece by piece
6:08	Q: What is your typical day at your position like? A: Thinking about PR and advertising; outreach with business; safety

7:25	<p>Q: Atypical day?</p> <p>A: Networking events; open source conventions; truck driving</p> <p>NO ONE at FreeGeek is dedicated to one area (at least the employees) – still understaffed and underpaid</p>
8:43	<p>Q: What are your proudest achievements?</p> <p>A: Youth mentorship; counteracting sexism in high school debates; working for the Obama campaign – was a national delegate;</p>
10:20	<p>Q: What are your biggest challenges?</p> <p>A: Never got degree, but claims most employers see her skills for face value</p>
11:14	<p>Q: Why aren't there more recycling and reuse programs like FreeGeek?</p> <p>A: Can't really answer that – however, FreeGeek has an “open source” business model where volunteers are waiting in line to volunteer; share the model with another organization then let that organization take off as long as they withhold the recycling standards of the mother ship; maybe FG filled a niche in PDX, being a sustainably minded business; lack of funds and capacity; would like to expand to a national confederation; the non-profit business model that FG uses results in about 25% reuse compared to 3% of most other analogous organizations – due to the amount of volunteers</p>
15:23	<p>Q: What additional organizations or institutions would you like to be in contact with?</p> <p>A: Huge companies – Nike, Adidas, Intel, etc. HOWEVER, this is all dependent on destroying the hard drives in an efficient manner without compromising security</p>
17:40	<p>Q: Is there any other things you do to get contacts?</p> <p>A: Tabling events, conventions, networking events, mostly of these are education based</p>
20:12	<p>Q: How do you see FG impacting the community's ability to be sustainable?</p> <p>A: Hit the “magic point” of input/output as mentioned earlier; also educates and allows access people to properly dispose of their used electronics in addition to building the computers themselves; 4 computers vs 0 computers and bringing them together so its sustainable and equitable</p>
22:29	<p>Q: How can FG expand to make a larger impact on the community?</p>

	A: Only current limit is the physical size of the building of operations; there are many volunteers waiting for classes; maybe reorganization of the space could marginally change the amount of expansion; making contacts with big name companies; granting laptops (this is very difficult);
24:45	Q: Where could FG move to? A: Not working on that now – working on governance structure issues; most likely would stay in SE Portland (industrial)
26:20	Q: How important are other institutions to FG? A: Absolutely necessary, communication with these institutions makes things run a lot smoother once in the warehouse - the stream of these electronics institutions donates is absolutely necessary for the volunteer base (labor) to work on, and thus runs FreeGeek!

Time Notes

28:40	Q: How can electronics manufacturers make your job at FreeGeek easier? A: Proprietary hardware..... (understands that this is an effective business practices); buyback is also challenging the flow of FreeGeek as well, not making it necessarily easier or harder; a 2-3 year lag is typical of electronic products
30:26	Q: Biggest challenges? A: Convincing big donators that their unique ragamuffin business model is worth an investment; Staffing – people have 3-5 year tenures and then move on taking a unique set of skills from their job; <i>Autonomy</i>
33:55	Q: If you could snap your fingers and change one thing, what would it be? A: Increase the capacity of donations; reuse hard drives
34:40	Q: What project plans do you have for the future? A: Sealing a deal with Starbucks; expanding ReUSE PDX – a reuse coalition of several business/nonprofits – specifically getting the national reuse conference in Portland; more tabling/community events; more general events; more classes offered
36:30	Q: Anything you'd like to ask us? Expand on anything? A: No, but I appreciate you guys being a part of this

